



Dearne Valley College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published March 2007	Provider reference 130529
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Dearne Valley
Type of college:	General further education
Principal:	Sue Ransom
Address of college:	Manvers Park Wath upon Dearne Rotherham, South Yorkshire S63 7EW
Telephone number:	01709 513333
Fax number:	01709 513110
Chair of governors:	Vicky Martin
Unique reference number:	130529
Name of lead inspector:	Josephine Nowacki, HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 January -2 February 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Dearne Valley College is a medium sized general further education (GFE) college serving the former coalfield communities of south east Barnsley, south west Doncaster and north Rotherham. The total Dearne towns' population is around 67,000. Learners come to the college from all 3 boroughs. The college has undergone rapid growth during the past decade and has attracted many learners from across the South Yorkshire area and elsewhere.
2. In 2005/06, the college made provision in 14 of the subject sector areas. The college has concentrated on the provision of vocational training, with progression routes from pre-entry to level 5 in several curriculum areas. The college is developing its apprenticeship provision in response to the identified shortage of training providers in the Dearne and makes provision for the 14-16 age groups from local schools including two Young Apprenticeship programmes. The college has centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) in sport; catering and construction.
3. The college has over 1,200 full-time learners and around 4,000 part-time learners. The 16-18 year old student population currently makes up approximately 85% of the full-time cohort. The gender profile of this cohort shows that 53% of learners on roll were male and 47% female. Almost all of the learners at Dearne Valley College are of white origin and only a very small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
4. The high levels of educational and social disadvantage in the area and ongoing regeneration have informed the college's decision to offer a curriculum which meets the needs of the local community and new businesses. Unemployment in the area has fallen, although it is still above national rates. There are increasing opportunities for low skilled work, which often attracts learners away from further education. The number of young people who leave school with five or more high grade passes at GCSE is well below the national average.
5. The college strives to provide 'an outstanding learning experience' for people from local communities.

Scope of the inspection

6. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good : grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good : grade 2
Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3
Quality of provision	Good : grade 2
Leadership and management	Good : grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

7. This is a good and improving college. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Success rates have improved and most are now at or around the average for similar colleges. Good improvements have been achieved for learners aged 16-18 years old on long level 1 and level 3 courses. For adults on level 1 courses, success rates fell significantly in 2005/06. Overall success rates for apprentices are very poor but have improved since September 2006.
8. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that teaching and learning is good. A clear and well supported focus on teaching and learning is pivotal to the improving success rates. Teaching is well planned and much of it includes a good variety of activities. In satisfactory lessons, there is too little challenge and the pace of learning is slow. The college's computer-based system for learners to assess their own progress and set targets is effective in helping to motivate learners and raise their aspirations.
9. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. A very relevant range of vocational courses is offered. The college's significant entry provision is particularly effective in re-engaging and supporting the progress of learners who have left school too early, or without gaining any qualifications or those learners who have learning disabilities and/or difficulties. Good links with schools, the community and employers further promote inclusion.
10. Guidance and support for learners are good. Tutors provide high quality individual support and this encourages an increasing number of learners to stay at the college to complete their courses. Group tutorials are satisfactory. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of learners are good. The college diner offers a range of healthy options, but for most learners, healthy eating does not have a high enough profile.
11. Leadership and management are good. The principal, senior managers and governors provide well-focused strategic leadership direction. Performance management is increasingly effective. Most curriculum areas are well-managed. Governance is very good. Accommodation is good and some specialist resources are outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

12. The college demonstrates good capacity to improve. The mission and core values of the college are well understood by staff. Governors remain very committed to maintaining the college's strong financial position. Quality assurance arrangements have been effective in securing improvements in

headline success rates, though the rate of improvement has been too slow in a few areas. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and findings are largely accurate. Robust information systems are used to analyse trends in performance and improvement targets are closely monitored by senior managers. The college recognises what needs to be done to bring about further improvements in the quality and standards of provision.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

13. The college has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement noted in the 2003 inspection. Management information systems are now good and there is thorough reconciliation of data. Reports on standards of learner performance are timely and accessible. The college now centrally collates learner destination data, though does not consistently survey learners who have left. Self-assessment procedures are now comprehensive and robust. Self-assessment reports use appropriate performance data to identify strengths and weaknesses in course standards. The college has made further investments in information learning technology (ILT) and materials for literacy training for adults. Since the last inspection, the college has successfully improved overall retention rates. The college has used a variety of strategies to raise achievement rates for adults at level 1. However, improvement is inconsistent, the overall achievement rate has not risen and the standard remains below the national average.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good improvements in overall long course success rates
- very good development of learners' personal qualities and self-esteem
- good teaching and learning
- good self-assessment and tracking system for learners to monitor progress and raise attainment
- outstanding educational and social inclusion
- strong contribution of the leaders and governors to the strategic direction of the college
- good response to employer and community needs
- very good personal support for learners
- good leadership by the principal
- strong financial position
- high standard of accommodation and some outstanding facilities in vocational areas
- safe and secure learning environment.

Areas for improvement

The college should address

- inconsistencies in some success rates, especially for adults
- success rates for apprentices
- the low profile of healthy eating.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Satisfactory: grade 3

14. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Some aspects are good. There have been sustained improvements in long course success rates in the three years since 2004 and these are now around the average for similar colleges. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 years old on long courses have improved overall, especially at level 1 where the improvement is significant. For adult learners, success rates have improved at level 2 and particularly at level 3. At level 1, success rates for adults have declined significantly and are low. Success rates on short courses are high. Key skills success rates have improved over the last three years for all learners.
15. In work-based learning (WBL), apprenticeship achievement is very poor but improving. Most learners on Invest in Skills programmes complete them successfully. Good success rates were achieved on the Employer Training Pilot (ETP). Learners on Train to Gain programmes achieve satisfactory success rates.
16. There are improving success rates for learners aged 14-16, especially in construction and catering. Most learners with difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Overall success rates for learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have improved, although they under-achieve compared to most other college learners. Success rates for males are higher than those for females. The self-assessment process has identified all areas of concern and has actions in place to address them.
17. Attendance in lessons is satisfactory, despite rigorous arrangements to follow up absences. The standard of learners' work in lessons is generally satisfactory. There are examples of good work which reach professional standards, for example in construction, public services and leisure. In all areas of the curriculum learners really enjoy their work and are well motivated. The development of learners' personal qualities and self-esteem, which is often low because of previous under-achievement, is at the heart of the college's work. Learners become confident and their capacity for social and economic well-being is very good. There is good progression by learners between levels of study, and to higher education.
18. The college provides a safe and secure learning environment. Health and safety issues are identified well to learners and they adopt safe working practices.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

19. The college has well conceived policies and procedures to support effective learning. These emphasise the importance of teachers knowing their learners,

and learning strategies and skills. Teachers receive good support in improving their teaching from learning strategies managers. The learning observation scheme ensures that all academic tutors are observed annually and new staff during the first six weeks. Observers are well trained and observation records are evaluative and focus on the learner experience. The criteria used to inform judgements are not appropriate for all contexts. The profile of lessons observed by inspectors produced lower grades than the summary of grades awarded by the college. However, in lessons where inspectors accompanied observers, their judgements agreed almost entirely with those of observers.

20. Teaching and learning is good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Most teachers plan lessons thoroughly with measurable learning objectives. Assignments and tasks are clearly explained to learners. There is improving use of ILT to enhance learning. Teachers encourage learners to work hard and praise their efforts. Many learners, who struggled previously to learn, speak warmly of their success in the college and the impact this had on their lives and their aspirations. They talk confidently of their learning and learn good vocational and communication skills. Many are beginning to make good progress. A few are not sufficiently challenged by set tasks. Teachers are particularly good at supporting individual learning needs. Classroom management and questioning techniques are good. In a few lessons, learning activities are not always sufficiently varied and the pace of learning is too slow. A few teachers fail to sufficiently involve learners and do not allow time for them to discover their own answers.
21. The teaching of basic and key skills has improved. Specialist tutors work within vocational teams to ensure that learners see key skills as vocationally relevant. This model has not been sufficiently applied to apprenticeship frameworks.
22. A computer-based assessment system encourages full-time learners to self-assess, and with teachers, to track and monitor their targets and progress. This promotes higher standards and better progress to higher levels.
23. Full-time learners benefit from accurate assessment of, and good support for, their additional learning needs. Part-time learners with additional learning needs receive satisfactory support, but not all have an assessment of their literacy or numeracy support needs. There is improving provision for the increased numbers of learners with identified dyslexia tendencies. Learning resource centres are well equipped and starting to be more widely used. Assessment practice is sound, although techniques used in work-based learning are insufficiently varied.
24. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The majority of learners are from a diverse range of educational and social backgrounds. Many have low prior educational attainment and are from deprived areas. Learners benefit from a wide range of courses from entry to level 3. There is higher education provision in five vocational areas. Particularly good learning support is offered

for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their needs are identified early and support enables significant numbers to stay on programmes and to make good progress.

25. The range of enterprise activities is growing at a good rate. Enrichment activities and additional qualifications enhance learners social and employability skills further. Opportunities for most learners to gain experience of industrial and commercial practices are good.
26. Partnerships with schools are strong and provision for learners aged 14-16 covers a growing range of vocational options. Support for 14-16 learners is effective and many progress into further education at the age of 16. The college, in collaboration with its three local authorities, is developing strategies to re-engage young people who are not in education, employment or training and for vulnerable groups such as young offenders.
27. The college responds very well to the needs of local employers and the community. It offers bespoke courses and Train to Gain provision for many local companies. The college's three Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) provide high quality training to large numbers of company employees. The college's self-assessment report has recognised the need to improve some aspects of communication with employers.
28. Support and guidance for learners are good. Initial guidance enables full-time learners to make informed choices about their vocational options. Learners value highly the individual support they get from their personal tutors. However, there is insufficient monitoring of group tutorials to ensure that all learners receive essential information on matters including health, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual health. Tutorial arrangements for part-time learners are satisfactory. Vulnerable learners receive excellent counselling support and where appropriate, are referred to other agencies.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

29. Leadership and management of the college are good. The clear strategic direction as a vocational and community college is understood by all staff. The principal provides good leadership, and managers are consistent in their commitment to the improvement of learners' experiences. Good progress has been made in addressing most weaknesses in the previous inspection report. Since the last inspection, most college success rates have steadily risen each year, with a more substantial increase in 2005/06. A culture aimed at raising learners' aspirations is evident in all areas of the college.
30. Governance is very good. Members of the governing body have a broad range of expertise they use to good effect in discharging their responsibilities. Governors maintain a keen oversight of the college's educational performance and give encouraging support through their presence at college events. The

college has maintained a consistently strong financial position for several years and financial management is outstanding.

31. Partnership and collaborative working is strong. It is particularly effective through initiatives with three local education authorities and partner schools to promote opportunities for learners aged 14-19.
32. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and there is an increasing emphasis on management accountability. Inspectors judged the self-assessment report to be accurate. Robust validation of curriculum reports has ensured clear evidence and succinct judgements about the quality of provision. Internal mock inspections of curriculum areas and the outcomes of lesson observations have been well used to inform self-assessment and identify where improvement is needed. Senior managers set appropriate college targets for improvement and they monitor progress carefully. Performance monitoring is supported by accurate, timely and accessible management information. A weekly report shows the current position relating to enrolment, attendance, retention and finances and identifies shortfalls in performance. Within the curriculum, there is insufficient rigour in the monitoring of some areas. The approach to target setting in order to raise success varies across courses. In a few cases, where standards are low, the rate of improvement has been too slow.
33. Staff are highly committed to the success of the college. Teamwork is effective, good practice is shared and staff receive good professional development. Most permanent teachers are appropriately qualified, a significantly improved position since the last inspection. However, the proportion of part-time teachers who hold a teaching qualification remains low.
34. The college's response to equality of opportunity and diversity is good. Clear analysis and monitoring of learner trends has resulted in improved provision; for example, the recruitment of young Pakistani Muslim learners into construction, an increase in success rates of young male learners and good progression for learners with autism. Learner admissions and staff recruitment procedures are inclusive and represent good practice. The college responds well to raising awareness relating to health and safety. It meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) and meets requirements relating to health and safety. The college has an appropriate child protection policy and it complies with the Criminal Records Bureau Code of Practice. Staff and governors have received training relating to young people and vulnerable adults.
35. Accommodation and facilities are of a high standard. The college has invested well to improve and adapt the accommodation to meet the recent growth. In several curriculum areas, the specialist facilities are outstanding. Learning and guidance centres are welcoming and well resourced. With effective financial

management and improving success rates, the college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	458	59	59	0	501	63	59	+4
	04/05	533	50	62	-12	688	53	61	-8
	05/06	490	68	*		248	49	*	
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	n/a	n/a	64	n/a			52	n/a
	04/05	n/a	n/a	63	n/a			*	n/a
	05/06	n/a	n/a	*				*	n/a
NVQs	03/04	67	72	61	+11	9	78	66	+12
	04/05	54	57	66	-9	139	51	70	-19
	05/06	92	62	*		41	44		
Other	03/04	391	57	59	-2	492	62	58	+4
	04/05	479	50	61	-11	549	54	61	-7
	05/06	398	70	*		207	50	*	

* 2005/06 national averages not yet published

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	792	50	56	-6	501	44	54	-10
	04/05	628	57	60	-3	441	63	59	+4
	05/06	664	61	*		452	64	*	
GCSEs	03/04	135	55	64	-9	73	43	58	-15
	04/05	154	59	65	-6	59	48	63	-15
	05/06	104	63	*		69	58	*	
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	32	78	60	+18	n/a	n/a	56	n/a
	04/05	22	82	66	+16	2	100	63	+37
	05/06	28	82	*		3	100	*	
NVQs	03/04	66	47	50	-3	66	47	54	-7
	04/05	69	65	56	+9	72	82	62	+20
	05/06	126	49	*		62	60	*	
Other	03/04	559	47	53	-6	362	43	53	-10
	04/05	383	54	58	-4	308	61	57	+4
	05/06	406	62	*		318	66	*	

* 2005/06 national averages not yet published

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	373	47	61	-14	518	48	53	-5
	04/05	415	54	65	-11	441	52	56	-4
	05/06	394	61	*		255	59	*	
A/A2 Levels	03/04	16	81	85	-4	13	100	71	+29
	04/05	39	67	85	-18	13	62	74	-12
	05/06	29	79	*		1	100	*	
AS Levels	03/04	84	50	60	-10	56	46	50	-4
	04/05	79	46	63	-17	30	60	53	+7
	05/06	54	44	*		12	42	*	
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	247	45	50	-5	23	57	43	+14
	04/05	62	57	59	-2	1	0	53	-53
	05/06	65	60	*		2	50	*	
NVQs	03/04	11	36	50	-14	94	28	48	-20
	04/05	9	22	53	-31	28	32	54	-22
	05/06	1	100	*		32	41	*	
Other	03/04	15	40	51	-11	332	52	54	-2
	04/05	226	55	56	-1	369	52	56	-4
	05/06	245	63	*		208	63	*	

* 2005/06 national averages not yet published

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2003/04 to 2005/06

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	1	0%	No data	0%	No data
	Advanced	4	50%	No data	50%	No data
2004/05	Apprenticeship	18	0	No data	11%	No data
	Advanced	12	0	No data	17%	No data
2005/06	Apprenticeship	46	2%	52%	20%	58%
	Advanced	n/a	n/a	44%	n/a	53%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	1	0%	30%	0%	12%
	Advanced	4	50%	32%	50%	14%
2004/05	Apprenticeship	18	0%	40%	11%	11%
	Advanced	12	0%	38%	17%	14%
2005/06	Apprenticeship	46	2%	53%	20%	59%
	Advanced	n/a	n/a	53%	n/a	62%

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

1. Outcomes on ETP managed by the college 2003/04 to 2005/06

Year	Number of starts in year	Achieved Objectives *	Progression **	Still in learning
2003/04	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2004/05	20	11	1	0
2005/06	172	86	23	78

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an ETP programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period