



ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Berkshire College
Date of visit: 24 April 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

What is the college doing to raise success rates at level 1?

- At the last inspection success rates were satisfactory at levels 2 and 3 but below the national rate for learners of all ages at level 1. The college has reviewed the management of level 1 courses and these courses are now the responsibility of individual curriculum team leaders rather than being managed as a discrete group of level 1 programmes. This has strengthened the focus on the quality of the level 1 courses within the curriculum areas. Currently the college is on target to be at or above national rates for level 1 courses for 2006/07.

What is the college doing to raise achievement in the sports curriculum area?

- At the last inspection the achievement of learners on sports courses was unsatisfactory and this curriculum area will be reinspected at the next AAV. Although it is too soon to see an impact on success rates, the college has taken appropriate action to improve this aspect of provision. Provision is better organised, with a more consistent focus on learners' achievement, than before. Learners appreciate the good encouragement and support they have received to improve their performance and that several now have target grades that are higher than those predicted on entry to the college. Many are planning to go on to further or higher education as a result.

How has the college improved the health and safety practices in animal care practicals?

- At the last inspection it was noted that there was insufficient attention paid to health and safety in animal care practicals. Since then the college has introduced improved health and safety practices within this curriculum area. These have been reinforced by a set of written procedures sent to all learners. Lack of compliance with these procedures now leads to disciplinary action. The wearing of protective overalls during small animal practicals has been welcomed by the learners.

What progress has the college made in the use of value added data? Are learners set individual targets for final overall grade achievement based on their starting point?

- All learners are now set an initial target grade based on their GCSE (general certificate of secondary education) grade. This is monitored and reviewed during tutorials. The college has been part of a local value added project for the last three years. Data from this project shows that the college has been in the top 25% of participating providers in terms of value added.

Has there been any new action to continue to improve key skills success rates?

- Key skills were a key area for improvement at the last inspection and remain an area for development at the college. There is inconsistent practice in the use of key skills diagnostic tests with some curriculum areas not using them. Vocational teachers are required to embed the key skills within their teaching and there are no discrete key skills sessions. Not all vocational teachers are confident to do this and poor key skills success rates was an area for improvement at the previous inspection in two of the four curriculum areas graded. The college has not yet had its direct claim status for key skills restored although this was a target for March 2007. No member of staff currently has responsibility for key skills at the college.

Quality of education and training

What is the college doing to reduce the amount of unsatisfactory teaching? How is the college increasing the amount of good or better teaching?

- At the last inspection too much teaching was unsatisfactory. The profile of observations of teaching and learning so far in 2006/07 shows significant improvement in the proportion of good or better teaching and a reduction in unsatisfactory teaching. The college is currently revising the paperwork used to record observations of teaching and learning to ensure that it focuses sufficiently on the quality of learning. There has been further development of a strategy to raise the standard of teaching and learning across the college. The college's programme of continuous professional development is linked to themes identified through observations of lessons. The college recognises the need to focus strongly on developing its strategies for supporting teachers to raise the quality of their teaching beyond satisfactory and to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to further develop teaching skills. As yet there has been no analysis of the results of teaching observations to identify any possible links between weak teaching and low success rates.

What specific action has been taken to improve teaching in sport – in particular the linking of theory and practical teaching?

- The college has supported sport staff well, and offered them training, coaching and mentoring to help improve the quality of teaching. Regular, weekly team meetings are used effectively to exchange information and ideas on teaching and learning. Learners enjoy their theory and practical lessons. They report that theory is now well linked with practical work, and that their assignments are more relevant than before. A good range of teaching and learning strategies is now used in theory lessons. However, schemes of work and lesson plans do not always reflect this variety, and they do not include enough information on strategies to meet the needs of individual learners. Training on this aspect of provision is planned.

What action has been taken to improve the monitoring of attendance? What are current attendance rates?

- Attendance is monitored rigorously and is good. All teachers have access to the electronic monitoring system and attendance rates are reviewed and reported every six weeks as part of the college's key performance indicators. Since the previous inspection the college has revised the "log on" screen of its management information system to show the ten most frequently used reports and facilitate the use of data by staff. The sports team leader has reorganised the timetable for sport to make it easier for learners to attend and be punctual, and has helped staff to take a more rigorous and consistent approach to attendance and punctuality. Learners know exactly what is expected of them, and appreciate this greater clarity and consistency.

How is the monitoring of learners' progress and the setting of targets in tutorials (particularly for sport's learners) being improved?

- Teachers and managers monitor learners' progress more thoroughly than before, and take action if a learner gives cause for concern. Learners who do particularly well are also given good encouragement to maintain, or improve, their performance. Learners' awareness of the targets they have been set is good, and they are well supported in working towards those targets. However, tutorial records are not always detailed enough. They do not always give short term targets for learners, or enough information on what they must do to improve.

Leadership and management

The LLSC are ceasing to contract with the college for the provision of WBL. How effectively is the college managing the transition for existing work based learners?

- Work based learning was judged to be inadequate at the last two inspections and when reinspected. The LLSC has now decided not to continue to fund this provision at the college. As yet transition arrangements for work based learners have not been finalised. However,

the college has focused on supporting the 50 or so work based learners who remain on programme. Strong efforts have been made to re-engage employers. The college plans to maintain this impetus through its Action For Business status and further develop its bespoke courses for employers.

How effectively is the college improving the promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum?

- A start has been made to tackle this area for improvement. The college has begun to develop a flexible programme of activities to promote equality and diversity for use in tutorials (group seminars). It plans to introduce these in September 2007. It is also in the process of collating, preparing, sharing and disseminating resources to help staff develop equality and diversity awareness in lessons. A cross-college event – an anti-bullying day – is planned to take place shortly and will involve learners and staff in a range of activities designed to promote awareness of this aspect of equality and diversity.

What action has been taken to strengthen compliance with race equality legislation?

- The college is preparing equality and diversity impact measures to monitor its compliance with race equality legislation. Its planned anti-bullying day includes activities such as a speaker on racial harassment, to promote good race relations.

What progress has the college made in implementing its post inspection action plan?

- The college's quality improvement plan was up-dated in January following inspection. However, in some curriculum areas there is insufficient understanding of how the results of inspection are being used to improve quality at the college. Communication is not always clear enough to ensure that all staff in all curriculum areas have a good understanding of what should be improved at the college or how it will progress from a satisfactory to a good college.

In particular how effectively has the college begun to improve the quality of provision in sport?

- The college has prepared, and made good progress in implementing, a sound action plan to raise achievement in sport. Teamwork and consistency among staff has improved. They use a wider range of teaching strategies than before, and link theory and practice more effectively, especially in learners' assessment. Attendance and punctuality have improved. Learners report that provision is better than before and are they are motivated and enthusiastic about their studies. Teaching, based on internal lesson observations and support for learners appears to be much improved.

What has been done to improve guidance and support for new teaching staff?

- All new staff have a mentor to support them during the first two months and an induction programme. Curriculum team leaders and colleagues provide good support for inexperienced teachers. The college is in the process of introducing a system of peer observations. The college has identified that high staff turnover has impacted on its capacity to improve. It plans to implement strategies to improve staff retention and to implement more robust monitoring of key areas of its work including the effectiveness of its human resource policies and procedures.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

None

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

None