

# Bishop Auckland College

Inspection report

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

#### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

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

## Description of the provider

1. Bishop Auckland College has grown recently to a medium sized general further education (GFE) college. In 2006/07, the college enrolled around 1,300 16 to 18 year olds and 2,100 adult full-time equivalent learners. It serves the local urban and wider rural areas of South West Durham with a population of 180,000 spread across three local districts. The area has nine 11 to 16 and six 11 to 18 secondary schools. The college offers a broad vocational curriculum on its main campus covering entry level to foundation degree level. Part-time courses are offered in a number of community venues. The college's business training services facility is based in Newton Aycliffe and provides training opportunities for local and regional employers on a full cost recovery basis and through the college's Train to Gain contract.
2. The cohort of students at the college is significantly different than at the last inspection. Recruitment of full-time students aged 16 to 18 has increased in the past two years and has presented the college with significant challenges. Approximately 75% of students aged 16 to 18 are studying on programmes at level 2 or below. An increased number of learners have complex emotional and behavioural issues requiring far greater additional learning support. Initial assessment indicates that many full-time students require support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills to level 2.
3. The college has Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in childcare and adult social care. The college has an ambitious accommodation strategy, a new building was opened in May 2007 and provides outstanding facilities for catering, care, sport and leisure, and hair and beauty. Phase two is planned to start in 2008.
4. The area of South West Durham has a high incidence of socio-economic deprivation. Wear Valley where the college's main site is located ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> nationally in terms of overall deprivation (out of 354 English local authorities). Both Wear Valley and Sedgefield Borough have high numbers of incapacity benefit claimants, and many families with generational unemployment. Levels of mental illness are higher than in other parts of the north east. Levels of literacy and numeracy amongst the adult population are low.
5. The college's mission is 'to promote social inclusion, fulfil aspirations and develop the potential of individuals, communities and employers through excellence in teaching, learning and skills'.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: Contributory Grade 2</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

6. Effectiveness of provision is good. Success rates have increased since the last inspection, especially in 2006/07, and are mostly at or above the national average. Success rates show an improving trend particularly in key skills and work-based learning including Train to Gain. Learners' vocational skills are of a high standard.
7. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good and have improved significantly since the last inspection. The college's lesson observation process is rigorous and there has been a strong focus on improvement. The new observation process links outcomes to staff training and with additional changes in curriculum management, now give the college a clear view of the quality of teaching and learning. The college has significantly changed the curriculum offer to meet the needs of its current learners and the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) priorities.
8. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The college provides a safe welcoming environment for learners many of whom come from very deprived areas. A broad range of courses is offered to meet the needs of under-represented groups, both in the college and its outreach centres. Provision at level 1 and level 2 is substantial. Provision for students aged 14 to 16 is growing and effectively widening participation for this group. Employers' and communities' needs are swiftly and effectively met. Many learners have multiple barriers to learning and are effectively supported by the college. The college demonstrates a very strong commitment to inclusion and Every Child Matters themes.
9. Leadership and management are good. The governors and senior managers have a clear vision for the college. The new curriculum management structure is particularly effective. Management information data, including performance targets for staff, are used well throughout the college. Staff and management development is extensive.
10. A substantial new building was completed on time and within budget and provides outstanding new facilities. Self-assessment is inclusive and accurate. Management and promotion of equality and diversity is good. Every Child Matters themes are well embedded in the college.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

11. The college's capacity to improve is good. The governors, principal and managers set a clear direction for the college. The transition to a substantial new building has been well managed. Resources in many areas are now outstanding. Staff are well aware of the changing composition of their students and have introduced strategies to meet the different learner profile. The college has a good development plan that includes effective initiatives for improving

equality and diversity. This plan is also consistent with many of the LSC objectives. Several new strategies have been introduced to improve retention and success rates particularly for 16 to 18 learners.

12. There is a robust quality assurance system which results in an accurate self-assessment report and quality improvement plan.

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

13. The college has made good progress since the last inspection. The areas for improvement identified in the last inspection have been addressed. The new building has overcome most of the weaknesses identified in resources. Staff development and training has effectively improved the quality of teaching and learning so that it can no longer be described as dull and uninspiring. Tutorial support for part-time learners has improved as have key skills pass rates. The quality and use of the virtual learning environment has increased and is now satisfactory. Retention rates, whilst still below the national average, are no longer in decline.

### Key strengths

- effectively implemented strategy to improve teaching and learning
- good range of flexible provision and progression routes
- strong partnerships
- highly effective and responsive support for students
- good strategic and operational management
- outstanding new facilities
- accurate and inclusive self-assessment
- good management and promotion of equality and diversity
- strong commitment to inclusion and Every Child Matters themes.

### Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- low retention rates
- low success rates at level 3 for 16 to 18 year olds
- the lack of improvement in success rates for most groups of learners
- insufficient challenge for more able learners
- consistency in the quality assurance of tutorials.

## Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Satisfactory: Grade 3*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Learners aged 14 to 16*

*Good: Grade 2*

14. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. This agrees with the college's self-assessment. Key skills success rates for 16 to 18 year olds have improved by 27% over the past two years. The improvements have been across all of the key skills areas. Work-based learning success rates have significantly improved in 2006/07, especially in Train to Gain provision. More generally, however, learners' success rates in 2006/07 remain similar to those in 2005/06.
15. The personal development of learners is good as is their development of vocational skills. Learners are encouraged to set challenging targets for progression to employment. Internal progression on college and community provision is good with 62% of learners progressing upwards to level 2 and 42% from level 2 to a level 3 course. Of the students aged 14 to 16, 60% who attend a vocational course at the college progress to further education. Learners are well motivated. Attendance has improved in the past two years and is now around the national average. Learners produce practical and written work of a satisfactory standard given their very low entry levels.
16. The overall success rate for learners aged 16 to 18 for 2005/06 is at the national average. Success rates for learners at levels 1 and 2 are at the national average. However, the long success rate for 16 to 18 learners at level 3 is significantly below the national average. This represents 6% of all learners. College data for 2006/07 show an improvement for these level 3 learners from 55% in 2005/06 to 58% in 2006/07. On level 1 and 2 courses in 2006/07 success rates remain unchanged.
17. Success rates for adult learners on level 1 courses were significantly below the national average in 2005/06. College data for 2006/07 show improvement but outcomes are still expected to be just below the projected national average. Level 2 and level 3 2005/06 success rates for adult learners are at the national average.
18. Retention for all learners in 2005/06 was below the national average but particularly for students aged 16 to 18. This reflects the increasing numbers of level 1 and level 2 learners with complex emotional and behavioural problems that the college is now enrolling. Several new strategies have been put into place to improve this position but it is too soon to judge the impact.



Quality of provision Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Learners aged 14 to 16*

*Good: Grade 2*

19. Inspectors agree with the college's own judgement that teaching and learning are good. There are good initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Teaching and learning 'champions' work across the college with curriculum leaders and teachers. Teaching and learning mentors are allocated to all new staff. Subject learning coaches work with staff in their curriculum area. There is an informative teaching and learning newsletter which is published regularly and valued by staff.
20. Teachers are well qualified and have a good knowledge of their subject area. Most learners enjoy their lessons. Resources for teaching and learning are very good. The specialist resources in care, catering, hair and beauty, and independent living skills are outstanding. Teaching rooms are well designed and resourced. The majority of lessons are well planned with clear objectives; they include a good range of activities. An expanding virtual learning environment is used well in the majority of curriculum areas, many teachers use information learning technology well in their lessons. Less successful lessons include insufficient challenge for the more able learners.
21. There is a rigorous system of internal lesson observation with internal and external moderation of grades awarded. Staff are well trained to observe teaching and learning. Joint observations carried out by inspectors and internal observers showed close agreement. There is detailed analysis of the outcomes of observation. The analysis informs an overall action plan for each curriculum area and themes for staff development. Good practice is identified and shared. Teachers benefit from detailed feedback, however, there is some lack of structure in the individual action planning following observations.
22. Procedures for initial assessment are robust and comprehensive. Learners' progress is monitored satisfactorily. Assessment is fair, accurate and reliable. Feedback to learners is satisfactory. There are appropriate procedures and arrangements for internal verification.
23. The college offers a broad range of courses delivered in a variety of settings including outreach centres and employers' premises. Some courses are closely tailored to learners' and employers' needs, for example, the women returners' programme which provides a good range of qualifications and employability skills. Learners' employment prospects are enhanced by access to a good range of relevant additional qualifications. A wide range of progression routes is offered from pre-entry level to foundation degrees in a range of curriculum areas. An alternative vocational pathway is available at level 3. Learners develop appropriate employability skills in the college before starting apprenticeships to make them more marketable to employers. There is a good range of enrichment activities.

24. Partnership working to meet learners' and employers' needs is good. The college works closely with external partners to rationalise progression routes in the locality and reduce wasteful competition. The college responds very quickly and flexibly to meet employers' needs. Links with Sure Start help develop parents' skills.
25. Links with schools are good and provision for pupils aged 14 to 16 is growing and effectively widening participation. The increased flexibility programme provides opportunities for pupils from 12 schools to participate in a wide range of vocational areas. College staff successfully ensure pupils' transition to college is well managed. Support for all learners including community and work-based learners are good. Information, advice and guidance are very good. All learners and potential learners benefit from immediate access to information, advice and guidance in the college and the community. Information on higher education and for those with disabilities is easily accessible. All learners, including work-based learners benefit from careers guidance sessions. Careers guidance in tutorials is well structured.
26. Welfare and pastoral support is highly effective and responsive in removing barriers to learning. A wide range of services, including free transport and counselling, is effectively used. Learners have access to crèche provision in the college and the community. The college works with the primary care trust to provide a broad range of health promotion activities. Support for students with physical disabilities is good. A range of adaptive technology is available in the college and community centres. Learners report that support boosts their confidence and independence.
27. Support for learners with learning needs and difficulties is good. During the past two years the college has introduced innovative strategies to address low retention and meet the needs of its changing student population. For example, the behaviour unit has been developed to help disruptive students acquire study skills and minimise their negative impact on other learners. Where support is targeted and applied intensively, retention has improved and is now good. Since the last inspection mentors have been successfully introduced to support outreach learners. Staff have identified that the support needs of recent cohorts have changed; support arrangements for these difficult to retain learners are being strengthened as a consequence.
28. The monitoring of progress is satisfactory. However, some individual learning plan targets are not focused and some are repeated several times with learners making apparently little progress. Standards and criteria for the quality assurance of induction, review and individual learning plans are not always standardised across all provision. Poor behaviour is challenged appropriately and dealt with effectively.

## Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grades:**Equality of opportunity**Good: Grade 2*

29. Leadership and management are good. The governors and senior managers have a clear vision for the college. The priorities set in the development plan reflect many of the priorities of the local LSC. There are strong links with the community. Overall, accommodation and resources are very good. The move to the new building, which was completed on time and to budget, was well managed. It provides outstanding facilities, particularly in catering, care, and hair and beauty. Governance is good. Governors have had a considerable influence over the new build programme. Financial management is satisfactory. Staff utilisation is good, the new building has led to savings in maintenance and running costs, the majority of success rates are at the national average although retention rates are low. Value for money is satisfactory.
30. Curriculum management is very effective. There is a strong team spirit and great pride in the new facilities. Management information data, including performance targets for staff, are used well throughout the college. Staff and management development is extensive. Teaching and learning, which was described in the last inspection as being uninspiring, has improved and is now good.
31. The self-assessment process is inclusive and is clearly linked to the LSC annual business cycle. The process leads to a thorough quality improvement plan which has addressed all areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the college's main strengths and areas for improvement. However, although tutorials are quality assured there are some inconsistencies in the procedures.
32. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There has been much training on the five Every Child Matters themes, which are very firmly embedded in the college. The college is compliant with the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. Governors and staff have received appropriate training on their responsibilities for child protection. The college maintains a central record of required checks on staff suitability.
33. Retention rates, which were identified as an area of improvement in the last inspection, remain below the national average. Several strategies have recently been introduced to improve retention; these have started to take effect with retention rates improving to 80% in 2006/07. Success rates have improved in line with the national average but for 16 to 18 learners on level 3 courses, success rates remain low. The success rates of work-based learners, including key skills, have improved significantly since the last inspection. Although college data for 2006/07 show significant improvements since 2005/06, in general, the

progress made in improving the performance of students for the previous two years was slow.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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
1Long	04-05	670	57	65	-8	1391	59	62	-3
	05-06	700	69	69	0	1433	58	65	-7
	06-07	603	69			1288	62		
GNVQs	04-05	11	9	68	-59	...	...	...	...
	05-06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06-07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04-05	65	68			4	100		
	05-06	159	74	72	2	22	59	74	-15
	06-07	91	67			62	81		
Other	04-05	594	57	64	-7	1387	58	62	-4
	05-06	541	68	69	-1	1411	58	65	-7
	06-07	512	68			1226	61		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	04-05	563	53	61	-8	1662	65	60	5
	05-06	635	65	66	-1	1752	64	66	-2
	06-07	425	65			1705	63		
GCSEs	04-05	115	50	64	-14	202	49	63	-14
	05-06	66	56	68	-12	147	69	67	2
	06-07	22	73			80	68		
GNVQs	04-05	11	82	67	15	...	...	...	...
	05-06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06-07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04-05	142	59	57	2	309	64	60	4
	05-06	159	62	65	-3	369	67	67	0
	06-07	158	61			550	65		
Other	04-05	295	51	61	-10	1151	68	59	9
	05-06	410	67	66	1	1236	62	65	-3
	06-07	243	63			1074	62		-

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	04-05	370	58	68	-10	706	59	58	1
	05-06	377	55	70	-15	889	64	63	1
	06-07	310	58			917	62		
A/A2 levels	04-05	25	100	86	14	31	58	69	-11
	05-06	18	61	87	-26	22	55	72	-17
	06-07	1	100			19	79		
AS Levels	04-05	76	55	66	-11	63	43	52	-9
	05-06	50	32	67	-35	91	51	55	-4
	06-07	29	62			62	68		
GNVQs	04-05	17	29	61	-32	6	33	54	-21
	05-06	6	33	66	-33	4	25	57	-32
	06-07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04-05	43	72	63	9	169	72	56	16
	05-06	40	80	71	9	231	73	63	10
	06-07	65	55			230	59		
Other	04-05	209	54	60	-6	437	57	59	-2
	05-06	263	56	65	-9	541	63	64	-1
	06-07	215	57			549	63		

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes managed by the college 2005 to 2007.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	10	50	48	30	34
		timely	15	46	31	33	21
	05-06	overall	21	55	54	50	44
		timely	17	18	34	18	27
	06-07***	overall	24	58	64	54	56
		timely	19	47	45	47	34
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	116	49	50	39	38
		timely	115	17	29	13	22
	05-06	overall	116	59	58	49	53
		timely	104	17	38	15	33
	06-07***	overall	136	70	65	66	60
		timely	113	30	45	26	42

\* 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'

\*\*\* LSC data for 2006-07 has yet to be validated

Table 5

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the college 2006 to 2007.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVO rate**
Train to Gain ***	05/06	overall		
		timely		
	06/07	overall	372	85
		timely	359	85

\* 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'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVO provision, but not 'Skills for Life'