



Aylesbury College

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published May 2008	Provider reference 130607
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Introduction

Aylesbury College was inspected in February 2006. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in sport, travel and tourism which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The less than satisfactory curriculum area was re-inspected on 26–27 March 2008. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Sport, travel and tourism	4	3

Context

The college offers a range of courses in sport, travel and tourism with clear progression routes for students from level 2 to level 3. Courses include full-time provision at intermediate and advanced levels. There are 46 full-time students taking travel courses, and 86 taking sport. Of these 15 are adults. About a fifth of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Strengths

- Staff have good vocational experience
- Good opportunities for, and high participation in, course enrichment activities
- High quality indoor sports facilities
- Good course tutorial support.

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on most full-time courses in 2006/07
- Poor provision of information and learning technology, and industry related software, in travel and tourism
- Insufficient industry specific courses in sport, and travel and tourism
- Insufficient challenge in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Success rates for most courses in 2006/07 were below national averages, due mainly to low retention rates. However, in 2007/08 good use of academic targets, and effective monitoring of students' progress, have improved

attendance and retention markedly. In-year retention is currently running at around 20 percentage points above that for the same time in 2006/07. The standards of students' written and practical work are satisfactory. Students enjoy their lessons and attendance, currently at 87%, has improved in 2007/08.

Quality of provision

The quality of provision is satisfactory. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Many students work well in lessons, but students of different abilities are not always challenged to develop their own ideas. In some lessons assessment is checked by repetitive activities. Students are confident in the use of ILT but a lack of IT resources and specialist software hinder some learning opportunities. Learning needs are assessed accurately at enrolment, and students have good access to learning and language support. Tutorial support is good. The curriculum is satisfactory, but lacks additional industry-related courses. Sports facilities are good and a newly-appointed commercial manager is promoting more community use, and developing college sports teams.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear focus on raising standards through comprehensive course review procedures, and effective quality improvement plans. Quality assurance of teaching and learning is effective and self-assessment is generally accurate. Staff have recent commercial experience, and new staff are supported well. Both sport and travel and tourism have been restructured for 2007/08 with new curriculum managers and teaching staff. Improvements in student performance can already be seen.

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Aylesbury College
 Date of visit: 26 – 27 March 2008

Context

This re-inspection monitoring visit follows the previous full inspection in February 2006. At that inspection overall effectiveness was judged satisfactory, as were achievement and standards, quality of provision, and leadership and management. Capacity to improve was judged to be good. All sector subject areas inspected were found to be satisfactory or better except sport, leisure and tourism, which was less than satisfactory.

Aylesbury College is a medium-sized further education (FE) college in Aylesbury town centre. The college has recently benefited from a complete rebuild of its accommodation. It offers programmes in all sector subject areas. In 2007/08, the college enrolled approximately 1,760 students aged 16-18 and 2,480 learners aged 19 or over, including around 400 work-based learners. In addition, there are 258 students who are under 16 years old. Competition for students in this area is strong, with five other FE colleges nearby, and all the local maintained schools have sixth forms. Whilst most of Buckinghamshire is affluent, three areas in Aylesbury fall within the most deprived areas of England.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success at all levels?	Reasonable progress
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College data for 2006/07 show that the overall success rate for long courses has risen since the last inspection, and is around the national average. The college has made good progress in improving success rates for learners on long courses at level 1, which are now above the national average for both age groups. There have also been good improvements at level 2, but this varies across programme and age group. Success rates for 16–18 year old students at level 3 have changed little since the last inspection and remain below the national average, particular for GCE AS courses. However, rates for adult learners on level 3 courses continue to improve and are around average. Success rates for short courses over 5 weeks remain close to the average. However, those for key skills programmes have improved considerably since the last inspection, and are now high.

Retention rates have improved well since the last inspection, particularly on long courses at levels 1 and 2, although less so in 2006/07 compared with the previous year. Although they are still below average overall, they are above average for long level 1 courses. Achievement rates on long courses improved in most cases in line with the national rate, and remain about average. The college is aware of what needs to be done to improve learners' performance, and has appropriate strategies in place. These have already begun to show a positive impact on retention rates.

What progress has been made in improving success rates for apprentices?	Insufficient progress
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Overall framework success rates for work-based learners increased markedly in 2005/06 to above the national average at level 2, but were still below at level 3. In 2006/07 a further improvement for advanced apprentices was still insufficient for the success rate to reach the national average. At level 2 a small decline took the success rate back to below average. Timely success rates have increased each year since 2004/05 but are still below average. The monitoring of apprentices' progress has improved and the college has strategies in place to improve success. However, it is too early to see their impact.

Quality of provision

What progress is being made on the use of value-added data for setting targets and measuring progress for learners on level 3 programmes?	Reasonable progress
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Students' prior attainment is used well to set challenging targets for students on level 3 courses. Minimum expected grades are initially determined, as well as 'stretch' grades, which are then discussed with the students to agree aspirational targets. Progress is monitored regularly through one-to-one tutorials, and reviewed formally with the students twice during the year, when targets may be adjusted as appropriate. If students' performance drops below minimum targets, appropriate intervention is put into place. Students are fully aware of their targets and appreciate their use in helping to raise their achievement. They speak highly of the good support they receive from tutors and are given appropriate feedback in assessments and review sessions on how they can raise their performance and improve their grades. The college is working to extend the system to courses at other levels.

How effective are the college's improvement strategies in raising the proportion of good or better	Reasonable progress
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lessons?	
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The college's internal monitoring of the quality of teaching indicates that the proportion of good or better lessons is improving year on year. In 2006/07 two thirds of lessons observed were judged good or better, and very few were unsatisfactory. Findings from these observations inform the college's staff development plans and help identify priorities for future training and development needs. Managers analyse aspects of good practice and areas for improvement by curriculum area. Some curriculum leaders make good use of this information in self-assessment and quality improvement plans, but this is not yet consistent in all areas. The recently appointed advanced practitioners work across college and make a positive contribution to staff development to improve teaching and learning further.

What progress is being made on ensuring the quality and consistency of tutorials?	Reasonable progress
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The college has revised its tutorial policy and practice in response to findings from internal observations. Managers have developed a cross-college outline scheme of work and provided training sessions focused on tutorial practice. The scheme of work identifies key themes and college events, and allows tutors sufficient flexibility to tailor tutorial themes and topics to meet the needs of different groups of students. Tutors speak positively about opportunities to share ideas and resources to support group tutorials, although students are not always clear about the content and purpose of these sessions.

A new system of formal review weeks has been introduced this academic year, in which teachers and tutors review progress with students in one-to-one meetings. This provides clear feedback to students on how they are progressing and what to do to improve. Targets are set, and reviewed regularly, although not all targets are yet sufficiently precise or measurable to fully support improvement.

Leadership and management

How well do managers use accurate and timely data to evaluate course performance?	Reasonable progress
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The accuracy of college data has improved and staff are now more confident about the reliability and usefulness of the data provided. Teachers and managers can access relevant data easily, for example, on attendance and student retention. They use these data regularly to monitor student performance and to take prompt action where improvements are needed. Data are provided centrally to curriculum leaders to inform the self-

assessment process, and performance trends are included in self-assessment reports.

The college has improved its analysis of student destinations in 2006/07 through collating data centrally for the first time. They are analysed by gender, ethnicity, disability, and for different levels of courses, providing managers with a much better understanding of student destinations. However, there is still work to do to ensure that data is collected for a higher proportion of students; for 2006/07, the destinations of over 40% of students were not known.

What progress is being made in reducing the high staff turnover, and providing effective induction for new and part time staff?	Reasonable progress
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A direct comparison of staff turnover cannot be made due to a college 're-engineering' in the last 12 months resulting in a significant additional number of staff leaving the college. However, improvements made by the college since the last inspection, particularly to accommodation, facilities, and better communications, are appreciated by staff at all levels. There is a comprehensive induction programme for all new and part time staff, with ongoing effective mentor support throughout their nine month probation period. Training needs are identified early and professional development is provided where appropriate. Staff speak positively about the good support that enables them to settle quickly into the college. The college has recently introduced mandatory exit interviews to understand better the reasons behind staff leaving.

What progress is being made in improving the provision in sport, travel and tourism?	Reasonable progress
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In year retention for 2007/08 has shown a marked improvement for travel and tourism courses, from 62% last year to 89% currently, and for sport at 83% compared with 67% in 2006/07. Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory, but teachers do not always challenge learners of different abilities to develop independent learning. Information and communication technologies are now used confidently by students for research, but the provision of specialist software is still insufficient. Assessment practice is now good in travel and tourism.