

# Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

Inspection report

---

Provider reference 130637  
Published date March 2009

---

Audience	Post-sixteen
Published date	March 2009
Provider reference	130637

## Contents

---

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	8

## 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. Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College was established in 1979. It occupies a single site to the north of Barrow-in-Furness. The college draws learners from South Cumbria. Learners are mostly recruited from six 11–16 partner schools in Barrow-in-Furness and the immediate area. GCSE pass rates in Barrow are variable and many learners join the college with low or average prior attainment.
2. The college provides programmes in 11 of the 15 sector subject areas. There is a small National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programme and a Train to Gain programme which commenced in 2006. Approximately 150 pupils aged 14 to 16 study at the college.
3. The college's core business is full-time courses for learners aged 16 to 18. The number of these enrolments has increased from 772 at the time of the last inspection to 888 in October 2008. Over 90% of 16 to 18 year olds are enrolled on advanced level courses. The college offers 34 A level subjects and one level 3 national certificate. The college offers eight GCSE subjects and four level 2 national certificates.
4. Barrow has the highest level of deprivation in Cumbria. Unemployment is above the national and county averages. Manufacturing in the area has declined although it still accounts for 25% of all jobs in the area.
5. The college's mission statement is 'to provide education which is of a high quality and sensitive to the needs of the community and the aspirations of individual learners'.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
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. Overall effectiveness is good. Achievement and standards are good. Learners' progress on GCE AS and A level courses has improved consistently and is very good, although in a small number of subjects learners make less than satisfactory progress. Overall success rates at level 3 are slightly below the national rate for sixth form colleges. Progression into higher education is good. Overall success rates on level 2 provision declined in 2007/2008, mainly due to retention issues on a particular programme which have been addressed. Overall success rates on the small Train to Gain programme are good. Attendance is good and improving.
7. The quality of provision is outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The systems in place to ensure improvements to teaching and learning are rigorous and effective. However not enough use is made of the outcomes of observations to inform cross-college staff development. Outstanding use is made of information learning technology (ILT) and the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support teaching and learning. Resources to support teaching and learning are outstanding. There is a broad curriculum which meets the needs of learners and employers exceptionally well. Partnership working is outstanding and supports the delivery in Furness of all five 14–16 diplomas. Learners participate in a wide range of enrichment activities. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college is much more inclusive than many sixth form colleges; learners from a wide variety of social backgrounds are attracted to the college; they work well together and are very supportive of each other. Support for learners is outstanding. There are excellent arrangements for transition from school to college; initial advice and guidance and academic and pastoral support. Tutorial support is well planned and the progress of learners is effectively tracked and monitored. Additional support is particularly good.
8. Leadership and management are good. Leadership is particularly good, with a strong focus on quality improvement and improving success rates. The culture is open and supportive; teamwork is good and staff are highly motivated. Arrangements for quality improvement and assessment are effective. The self-assessment process is rigorous and the self-assessment is mainly accurate. Information systems are used effectively to closely monitor learners' progress. The college is strong financially and provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. The college demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve. The self-assessment report is thorough, evaluative and mainly accurate. Self-assessment, improvement planning and quality assurance arrangements are rigorous and lead to improvement. Managers and staff are clearly committed to quality improvement and raising success rates. The college plans well to meet business objectives and local and national priorities. Progress against plans is

monitored effectively. The organisation structure is appropriate; staff have clear roles and responsibilities. Staff are well-qualified, motivated and enthusiastic; they have a clear understanding of the college's mission and objectives. Target setting is effective at all levels within the organisation and has been used effectively to bring about improvements.

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

10. The college has made excellent progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teaching and learning, student action planning, the sharing of good practice, arrangements for quality assurance and the accuracy and use of management information have all improved and are now good. The use of ILT in teaching and learning was an area for improvement at the last inspection and is now outstanding and a key strength.

### Key strengths

- very good progress made by learners on GCE AS and A level courses
- outstanding use of ILT and VLE in teaching and learning
- outstanding employer engagement and partnerships
- outstanding transitional, personal and learning support
- highly effective information advice and guidance
- supportive and empowering culture
- very good leadership with a focus on improving success rates.

### Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- learners' progress in a small number of subjects
- success rates on long level 2 courses
- insufficient use of the outcomes of observations to inform cross-college staff development.

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. In line with the college's own self-assessment, achievement and standards are good. The college is more inclusive than many sixth form colleges. Many learners enter the college with low or average prior attainment levels. Overall success rates are around the national average for sixth form colleges. Learners' progress on General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS level and A level courses is very good. Learners achieve better grades than might have been predicted from their GCSE results. Overall the progress which learners make has improved consistently since the last inspection. The percentage of GCE A level high grades has improved consistently over the last three years. The pass rate for GCE A level courses has also improved and was 98% in 2007/2008 with 23 subjects achieving a pass rate of 100%. Progression into higher education is good.
12. However, there is some variation in performance across subjects and in a small number of subjects learners make less than satisfactory progress. Good action plans and monitoring arrangements are in place to address this.
13. Overall success rates on level 2 courses declined by 6% in 2007/2008; this was mainly due to problems on a particular programme which have been addressed. Success rates on GCSE courses for 2007/2008 are slightly below the national rate.
14. The retention of learners receiving additional learning support is better than those not receiving support, but success rates are slightly lower. Attendance levels are good and improving. Learners are enthusiastic about the college and their studies and their behaviour is excellent. Standards of learners' work seen in sessions are good. The small number of learners aged 19 and over on long courses achieve satisfactory success rates.
15. Success rates in key skills are above the national rate. The college started offering Train to Gain programmes in 2006, overall success rates are good. Timely success rates are satisfactory.

### Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

16. The quality of provision is outstanding which reflects the college's self-assessment. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Outstanding use is made of ILT and the VLE in teaching and learning. Teachers identify learners' needs and monitor their progress thoroughly. Initial assessment is thorough and teachers make good use of learners' prior attainment to plan lessons and support learners with different start points. Teachers check learners' knowledge and understanding well in lessons. Assessment practices are good and provide learners with good feedback on the progress they are making and how they can improve their work. Learners work well with others from diverse backgrounds, treat peers with respect and value others' views, needs and differences. They



work together effectively to support and help each other in tackling new learning, evaluating their own and others' progress informally.

17. The college is committed to continuously improving the quality of teaching and learning. Good use is made of teaching and learning and assessment groups and peer observations, to improve teaching and learning. The observation of the teaching and learning process is appreciated by all staff and teachers receive detailed and useful feedback on their performance. Insufficient use is made of the outcomes of the observation process to inform the staff development programme. The promotion of equality and diversity in the classroom is outstanding in many lessons; however, this is not consistent across the college. Opportunities are missed in the observation of teaching and learning to ensure that equality of opportunity (EO) is actively promoted in all lessons.
18. Arrangements to meet learner and local community needs are outstanding. The college offers a responsive and flexible curriculum including a wide range of learning opportunities for learners aged 14 to 16. Outstanding partnership working with the local General Further Education (GFE) College, high schools and employers is effectively supporting the delivery of all five Diploma lines. Managers and staff at all levels have excellent links with local employers and industries including Sure Start, health professionals, and BAE Systems. Particularly good enrichment opportunities provide learners with a broad range of learning experiences, effectively meeting their different needs and interests. Outstanding support is provided to ensure all learners can access this programme.
19. Overall support for learners, including initial advice and guidance, is outstanding. Highly effective transition arrangements, through link and group tutors, enable learners to settle quickly into the college. Diagnostic assessments are timely and comprehensive and follow up support is responsive and effective. A very broad range of strategies are in place to provide or refer learners for specialist support. Additional support in the classrooms and in workshops is particularly good and learners speak highly of the support received. An extensive range of pastoral, learning and welfare support are readily available to all learners. Tutorial support is well planned and the electronic tutor communication system is highly effective in ensuring all learners are tracked and monitored. Tutorial sessions effectively promote the safety and health of all learners. The college actively promotes health initiatives such as chlamydia screening and cervical cancer immunisation. The college listens carefully to the views of learners and responds effectively to bring about improvements.

## Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grade:**Equality of opportunity**Good: grade 2*

20. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment report, that leadership and management are good. The Principal provides excellent leadership both in the college and the wider educational community, chairing the very successful Furness 14–19 Partnership which has won approval to deliver all the first five 14–19 Diplomas. The Principal is supported by an effective management team, there is a clear focus on improving the quality of provision and success rates. There is an open and supportive management culture, staff and learners are valued and respected. Senior managers are accessible, supportive and listen to staff feedback. Communication, both between staff and between staff and learners is excellent. Teamwork is good and staff are highly motivated and enthusiastic. The organisation structure is appropriate and curriculum management is good. Governors are committed to the work of the college, well informed about college performance and monitor and challenge performance.
21. Arrangements for quality assurance have improved significantly since the last inspection. There is a strong commitment to quality improvement throughout the college. The self-assessment process is effective; staff understand and contribute to the process through the production of good course reviews. It effectively identifies areas for improvement and informs appropriate plans which are well monitored and lead to improvements. The self-assessment report is evaluative and clearly identifies key strengths and areas for improvement. Targets are used well at all levels within the organisation to challenge staff and to drive up standards. There are good strategies in place at subject level to improve performance. The management information system provides staff at all levels with accurate, timely and accessible information which they understand and use.
22. Equality of opportunity is good. The college meets the statutory requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA). Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that all staff have enhanced CRB checks. Arrangements for staff training covering the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults are insufficiently systematic. Equality and diversity and Every Child Matters themes are embedded in the tutorial and General Studies GCE AS level course, which is undertaken by all learners. Policies are appropriate although the work of the equality and diversity group lacks rigour in the monitoring of equality of opportunity.
23. Financial management is good. Accommodation is satisfactory although the increase in the number of learners has led to some pressure on accommodation, managers have managed this well. Outstanding teaching resources, including the excellent VLE are used effectively to support learning. Teachers are well qualified and continuously update their skills and knowledge.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	05/06	13	85	71	14	16	88	57	31
	06/07	15	87	73	14	17	82	64	18
	07/08*	2	50	N/A		2	50	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06								
	06/07								
NVQs	05/06								
	06/07								
Other	05/06	13	85	71	14	16	88	57	31
	06/07	15	87	72	15	17	82	64	18
	07/08*	2	50	N/A		2	50	N/A	

\* college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	05/06	321	81	78	3	84	65	65	0
	06/07	399	82	82	0	77	79	65	14
	07/08*	376	76	N/A		47	64	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	300	81	82	-1	34	50	67	-17
	06/07	364	82	83	-1	17	65	68	-3
	07/08*	286	81	N/A		18	56	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	21	81	77	4	1	0		
	06/07	35	80	78	2	1	100		
	07/08*	65	55	N/A		3	0	N/A	
NVQs	05/06					37	81	69	12
	06/07					27	93	71	22
	07/08*			N/A		17	82	N/A	
Other	05/06					12	67	62	5
	06/07					32	75	62	13
	07/08*	25	64	N/A		9	67	N/A	

\* college

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	05/06	2815	85	84	1	85	71	65	6
	06/07	2958	83	85	-2	78	63	69	-6
	07/08*	3024	84	N/A		54	63	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	885	95	93	2	34	85	78	7
	06/07	1038	93	93	0	29	79	80	-1
	07/08*	1013	94	N/A		19	89	N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	1843	81	79	2	45	56	58	-2
	06/07	1902	78	81	-3	38	55	61	-6
	07/08*	1984	78	N/A		20	30	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	75	87	77	10				
	06/07	3	67	65	2				
	07/08*	13	77	N/A		3	0	N/A	
NVQs	05/06								
	06/07					8	50	72	-22
	07/08*			N/A		12	92	N/A	
Other	05/06	12	92	79	13	6	100	62	38
	06/07	15	87	80	7	3	33	66	-33
	07/08*	14	93	N/A				N/A	

\* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the provider/college 2006 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVO rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall		
		timely		
	2007/08	overall	22	77%
		timely	25	60%
	2008/09	overall	38	95%
		timely	75	41%

Note: 2008-09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 3 months or greater of the LSC contract year

- \* 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/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'
- \*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'