

Doncaster College

Partial reinspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Bev Barlow HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: The Hub
Chappell Drive
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN1 2RF

Telephone number: 01302 553599

Introduction

The college's last full inspection was in November 2008. Achievement and standards were judged to be inadequate and all other aspects, including overall effectiveness, were judged to be satisfactory. Provision in the subject areas inspected was judged to be good in hairdressing and beauty therapy, satisfactory in five areas and inadequate in sport, leisure and tourism. The monitoring visit in September 2009 judged that reasonable progress was being made in most identified areas for improvement. The partial reinspection has looked at how effectively the college has improved outcomes for learners and the quality of the provision in sport, leisure and tourism.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Aspect of the common inspection framework	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Outcomes for learners	4	3
Subject area		
Sport, leisure and tourism	4	3

Context

Doncaster College offers a broad range of programmes from foundation to postgraduate level. It is the main provider of post-compulsory education in one of the most deprived local authorities in England. The GCSE results of school leavers are well below the national average. Most schools have a sixth form. In 2008/09 the college enrolled 4,080 learners aged 16 to 18 and 14,442 adults; most adults are part time. In the same year 341 apprentices, 2,888 Train to Gain learners, 2,341 higher education (HE) students and 125 school pupils aged 14 to 16 were enrolled. The college delivered courses to 888 learners under its offender learning and skills service (OLASS) contract. Its mission is 'meeting learner needs and aspiring to excellence'.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

Since the last full inspection successful management action has increased the overall success rate considerably and it is now close to the national average for similar colleges. In 2008/09 the strategies to improve retention were effective and retention rates have increased further this year. Adults and learners aged 16 to 18 achieve well on foundation and intermediate level courses. However, the rate of improvement in success rates on advanced level courses is much slower and these remain below average.

Learners' progress is satisfactory, although too few students achieve high grades. The college recognises that there is too much variability in the achievement of learners in different subject areas and has taken successful action to investigate and

begin to eliminate these differences. Pupils aged 14 to 16 achieve well and most progress to a college course on leaving school. Success rates on apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes are satisfactory; many complete within the planned time and current learners are making good progress. Despite recent improvements in the delivery and pass rates on short courses and key skills the success rates remain low. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. Learners' progression to employment or higher education is satisfactory although too few students progress to a higher level course in the college.

The college provides a safe and secure learning environment. Health and safety are given a high priority and tutors effectively promote safe working practices. Students report that they feel safe and know who to report to if they have any concerns. Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place. Reporting to governors on safeguarding is good. The health and well-being programme is successful in providing advice and support on a broad range of issues to encourage students to adopt a healthy lifestyle. However, too few students take part in the wide variety of sporting activities offered. Support for looked after young people is very good.

Students are increasingly involved in making decisions in college and participate in activities in the local community that contribute to their economic and social well-being. For example, the student parliament involves students from all areas of the college including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most learners enjoy college life, gain in confidence and develop an understanding of broader issues such as sustainability that will support them in their future lives. They develop good employability skills through vocational training and a wide range of enterprise activities. A group of students are running the college's project to gain the healthy college award.

What does Doncaster College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on advanced level courses and eliminate the variability in learners' achievement in different subject areas so that all students achieve their potential and make good progress.
- Provide more systematic monitoring and improve the quality of teaching and support in key skills to develop learners' literacy and numeracy and increase key skills success rates.
- Review the curriculum and ensure that learners are enrolled on appropriate additional qualifications and that the teaching on these short courses is good so that learners succeed.
- Further develop enrichment opportunities and encourage more students to participate and be involved in the life of the college.

Subject area

Sport, leisure and tourism

Grade 3

Context

The college offers a broad range of programmes from foundation to degree level and short industry specific courses. The majority of full-time learners are aged 16 to 18 with 318 on travel and tourism courses and 228 on sport related courses. Courses for employers are offered in airline and airport operations.

Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are satisfactory. Overall success rates in leisure, travel and tourism have improved significantly and are now broadly in line with the national average for similar colleges. Success rates are high on the national diploma in travel and tourism and the first certificate in sport. However, success rates on a minority of courses remain below the national average. Learners in employment studying the certificate in airport passenger services achieve very well.
- Students' progress and the standard of their written work are satisfactory. Students demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. However, in travel and tourism courses, insufficient attention is given to high professional standards and the use of correct spelling and punctuation. Key skills success rates are low.
- Many learners gain additional industry-relevant qualifications that enhance their employment opportunities. Additional qualifications include cabin crew, resort representatives and fitness instructor courses. Pass rates on these courses are high.
- Teaching and learning have improved and are satisfactory. In the better lessons good classroom management and a range of stimulating activities engage students well. Group work is used effectively to develop students' knowledge, although opportunities to challenge more able learners are sometimes missed.
- Inspectors agreed with learners that, in a few lessons, they spend too much time listening to teachers; they lose interest and occasionally talk while the teacher is giving instructions. Where teaching needs to improve further, teachers do not use questioning techniques effectively to check that all students understand and make the progress they are capable of.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in sport is good. Assessment tasks and lesson plans include equality and diversity as a key theme. Activities and discussions in class explore aspects relating to discrimination, gender, age and disability. Students' work demonstrates a good understanding of key issues related to equality.

- Resources are satisfactory. Cabin crew learners develop their skills in a mock-up aircraft fuselage and the sports students improve their fitness levels and skills in the new sports hall and gym. Some open-plan classrooms are too noisy. Most full-time tutors have a teaching qualification; all have relevant qualifications and vocational experience which is used well in their teaching. However, a few staff have not undertaken any recent updating within the industry.
- A good range of full-time programmes is available in sport, travel and tourism. However, progression between levels remains relatively low. With the exception of college sports teams, the participation of learners on enrichment activities is low. Links with employers are satisfactory and are used to develop students' practical skills. Travel and tourism students are voluntary tour guides and sports students coach pupils in local schools and participate in fund raising charity events.
- Information, advice and guidance have improved; students are now placed on the most appropriate courses and retention has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Learners value the academic and personal support they receive from their tutors. Staff know their learners well and help build their confidence and self-esteem. Students meet their tutor regularly at one-to-one reviews to discuss attendance, punctuality and progress. Learners are aware of their targets and their progress is now monitored more closely. Initial assessment identifies students' literacy and numeracy abilities and it is used satisfactorily to inform teaching and learning. Where in-class support is provided, it is effective.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new management structure has led to a more focused approach to improve outcomes for students and address the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Communication has improved and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Managers have set a realistic agenda for improvement and have quickly implemented effective interventions; this has led to improved success rates on most courses.
- The self-assessment reports are insufficiently detailed. The evidence to support judgements is not always complete and does not give enough information, particularly on the quality of teaching and learning. Targets in the quality improvement plan and the actions required to achieve them are too general and it is difficult to assess their impact.

What does Doncaster College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on the courses where they are below the national average by reviewing the completion of assignments and developing further the use of targets to monitor student performance.
- Embed the delivery and assessment of key skills in the vocational courses, provide sufficient support in literacy and numeracy and pay greater attention to the correction of spelling and punctuation of students' written work to improve key skills success rates.

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In particular improve teachers' use of questioning techniques so that learners of all abilities can demonstrate their understanding, are challenged appropriately and make good progress.
- Develop the accuracy and detail of the self-assessment report and clarity of action plans so that there is a sharp focus upon quality improvement.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this partial reinspection.

What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the last inspection?	Reasonable Progress
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Since the last inspection the self-assessment process is more inclusive and focused on improving outcomes for learners. Success rates have improved considerably; inspectors agreed with the college that outcomes for learners and the provision in sport, leisure and tourism are now satisfactory. The college agreed with inspectors that some aspects of the self-assessment report are over-optimistic and place too much emphasis on the college's recent improvements. Data are now used more effectively to set targets for managers, staff and students although a minority of these are insufficiently ambitious. Progress against targets is reviewed regularly at all levels and for different groups of learners. The use of learners' views has improved but remains an area for further development.

Quality improvement is given a high priority in the revised structure. A new quality manager, supported by staff with responsibility to improve the quality of teaching and learning, are currently reviewing processes to provide a sharper focus. Outcomes from lesson observations are increasingly used to inform staff development and provide support to teachers to improve their lessons. Good practice is identified more consistently and teachers are beginning to share ideas across subject areas. Existing quality improvement plans are insufficiently detailed so it is not possible to monitor their full impact.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of key skills provision?	Reasonable Progress
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Success rates on key skills have doubled since the last inspection although they remain too low. A new key skills manager has been appointed recently. A new strategy has been developed and a central team established to monitor learners' progress in passing tests and completing portfolios. Priority has been given to improving apprentices' key skills success rates; college data for this year indicate further improvements. Subject area self-assessments review the success of their learners in achieving key skills qualifications. Initial assessments have helped to

ensure learners are placed on the appropriate level of course. All subject areas have an action plan to improve key skills delivery which is supported by a bank of resources and staff development. It is too soon to judge the full impact of these actions.

What progress has been made to improve leadership and management? Reasonable Progress

The interim principal quickly assessed the college's position and briefed the staff on the extent of its financial problems. In consultation with staff, a new strategic plan, based on seven key priorities, has been communicated clearly and is understood well by staff. The first stage of the college's recovery plan has been implemented with considerable cost savings and a significant reduction in the budget deficit. Financial management has improved. The quality of reporting to governors has improved significantly and a new clerk to the governors provides them with good support to carry out their roles effectively. A comprehensive assessment of risk continues to be updated to manage the recovery plan and keep the college on track.

The restructure has been managed effectively by the interim principal and his senior management team; during this turbulent time student outcomes have improved. The new organisational structure is simpler and communication is good. Staff are now clear about their roles and responsibilities. Staff development is now primarily focused on improving teaching and learning. Functional skills provision has been reorganised and strengthened. The plans for higher education provision in the college are more realistic. Actions have been implemented to ensure that the college's subsidiary companies are more focused and purposeful and, above all, cost effective. Management overheads have been reduced significantly.

What progress has been made to improve the promotion of equality and diversity? Reasonable Progress

Since the last inspection visit, the profile of equality and diversity has been raised across the college. Data are now used more effectively to analyse the performance of different groups of learners. Student outcomes are reviewed and monitored regularly through performance management meetings. Action plans are in place to rectify underperformance and to increase the participation of learners from minority ethnic groups in enrichment activities. It is too soon to measure the full impact of these actions.

The promotion of equality and diversity in the classroom is improving. Staff training has increased their awareness of how to identify opportunities to promote equality and diversity in lessons, training and learner reviews. The tutorial programme includes sessions to promote learners' appreciation of cultural diversity and increase their racial awareness. However, the college is aware that this remains an area for further improvement. Support to meet the needs of specific groups of learners, for example, young people in care and students whose first language is not English, is very good.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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