

Accrington and Rossendale College

Inspection report

Provider reference 130734
Published date May 2009

Audience	Post-sixteen
Published date	May 2009
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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

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); 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. Accrington and Rossendale College is a general further education (GFE) college of medium size, located in East Lancashire. It has as its principal catchment area the three boroughs of Hyndburn, Rossendale and the Ribble Valley. Most of the college's provision is taught at the main campus in Accrington, but it currently also has sites in each district and uses a number of other community locations. The construction department was the first in the country to be recognised as a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE). In March 2009 the college was awarded the BECTA General FE award at the Becta Next Generation Learning Awards for innovative use of E-learning. Other awards include the Queens Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education.
2. Hyndburn contains areas of significant deprivation. In 2007 the number of pupils gaining five A* to C passes in GCSE at 48%, compares well with the national average of 46.8%. In Hyndburn 27% of adults have poor literacy skills and 29% have poor numeracy skills compared with a national average of 24% for both skill areas. In Rossendale the figures are 26% for both skill areas.
3. The college provides courses in all of the LSC 15 sector subjects and at all levels from entry to level 4 degree programmes. Provision in science and mathematics, land-based industries and retailing is small. The majority of provision is vocational.
4. In 2008/09, 1,490 full-time students and 2,741 part-time students enrolled at the college. 362 students enrolled on apprenticeship programmes and 1,792 learners on Train to Gain programmes. In addition, over 368 Year 10 and 11 pupils from local schools attended the college for various vocational courses and individual placements. The college works with 15 schools in its 14 to 19 provision. Some 14% of students are of minority ethnic heritage. This is significantly higher than the local population.
5. The college mission is to 'raise access, aspiration and achievement'. It has nine strategic aims which set out the college's priorities in improving standards, promoting equality and diversity, responsiveness and partnership responsiveness and sustainability.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. Accrington and Rossendale is an outstanding college. Success rates are very high and improving at a faster rate than the national average. Overall and timely success rates in work-based learning have improved significantly and are now high. Key skills success rates are very high. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are generally high. The quality of learners' work and their standard of skills development are outstanding in many areas.
7. The majority of teaching and learning is good or better. Teachers have high realisable expectations of their learners and in the best classes the learning experience is creative and exciting. Teaching and learning throughout the college is highly effective and makes a significant contribution to the exceptionally high pass rates. The college knows its provision well through its comprehensive quality assurance system that has a strong focus on improving learning.
8. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. Specialist additional learning support is outstanding. The college recruits a high proportion of its learners from the minority ethnic community and is actively engaging these learners and other minority groups through many innovative projects. The tutorial framework embeds the promotion of equality and diversity. Enrichment activities are inclusive and of particular benefit to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.
9. Guidance and support to help learners achieve are good. Course information and guidance are timely and help learners to enrol on courses appropriate for their needs and ambitions. The tutorial system is flexible and effective. Pastoral support for individual learners is good and learners benefit from the college's good links with external support agencies. However, the quality of targets set for individual learners is inconsistent and improvements are required in some areas.
10. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal, supported by able senior managers and good governance, provides strong and effective leadership and clear strategic direction. Excellent arrangements for quality assurance are successfully improving standards. The college manages its finances well and provides outstanding value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

11. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. The principal has realigned the management structure effectively and expanded and empowered the senior management team. Quality improvement arrangements are well-established and have been highly effective in bringing about improvements. Governors are instrumental in helping to drive improvements and support the vision and

mission for the college. Performance is carefully monitored at all levels. Underperforming courses are closely scrutinised and effective action is taken. The self-assessment report critically evaluates the provision and provides a realistic appraisal of the college's performance. Action plans are thorough and managed well to guide improvements. The accuracy and use of data is good.

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

12. The college has taken very effective steps to improve provision since the last inspection. Overall success rates have improved significantly since the last inspection and have remained very high. Key weaknesses have been resolved and much of the college has been rebuilt to provide an excellent learning environment. Staff development has kept pace with changes in the sector and along with careful investment in new technologies, has helped teachers to continue to improve their teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- strong and effective leadership with outstanding impact on raising standards
- high success rates at all levels for both age groups
- very high pass rates
- exceptionally high standard of learners' work and skills development
- highly effective teaching and learning
- very good use of information learning technology (ILT) to contribute to teaching and develop independent learning
- outstanding educational and social inclusion
- excellent employer engagement and external partnerships
- outstanding additional learning support
- excellent college estate with outstanding resources in many areas.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- retention at level 3 for 16 to 18 year olds
- target setting for learners
- learner progression between levels.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grades:

WBL

Good : grade 2

Train to Gain

Good : grade 2

Learners aged 14 to 16

Good : grade 2

13. Achievement and standards are outstanding. The college sets itself challenging targets for student achievement and meets them consistently.
14. Success rates are high and improving. The overall success rate for students on long courses has improved consistently since the last inspection and in 2008 is significantly above the previous year's national rate for similar colleges. The success rate for 2007 placed the college in the top 10% of similar colleges nationally. On courses for adults, the majority of the college's learners, success rates are very high placing the college in the top 10% for similar colleges nationally at all levels. For 16 to 18 year olds the success rate at level 1 is well above the national rate and in the top 10% of similar colleges nationally. At levels 2 and 3 success rates are significantly above the national rates and in the top quartile of similar colleges nationally. For learners aged 14 to 16 success rates are high on most courses. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes have improved significantly and are high. Key skills success rates have improved considerably and are exceptionally high. Attendance overall is high at 91%.
15. Retention rates for 16 to 18 year olds and for adults have improved steadily since the last inspection and have been consistently at or around the national average. The retention rate for 16 to 18 year olds at level 3, a long standing area for improvement, has improved significantly in 2008 but remains marginally below the national rate. In-year retention has improved significantly and is currently very high. Pass rates have improved since the last inspection and are consistently and exceptionally high at all levels and for both age groups.
16. Students make good progress given their previous levels of attainment. Forty two per cent of all learners are from disadvantaged areas and around 45% of learners have been identified as needing some sort of additional support. Only 10% of learners enrolling at the college have GCSE A* to C in English Language and mathematics.
17. There are no discernible differences in success rates between learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and their white counterparts. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and those receiving additional support for literacy and numeracy achieve at the same high levels as other learners.

18. The standard of work and level of skills development of learners is outstanding in many sector subject areas. The college supports regional, national and international skills competitions with large student entries and has a strong record of success at all these levels. Learners in most areas develop good personal, collaboration and group work skills and often develop practical and occupational skills at a very high level. Many learners produce practical work of a commercially acceptable standard. For example, learners in catering and hospitality operate a popular and successful commercial restaurant in Accrington. Learners from hairdressing and beauty therapy provide a valuable and valued commercial service from the college salons and beauty suites. Many learners leave the college with additional qualifications that enhance their employment prospects or career development potential. Learners enjoy their studies and their time spent at the college.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

19. Inspectors agreed with the college's own self-assessment that teaching and learning are outstanding. The college knows its provision very well. An increasingly high number of lessons are accurately graded by the college as good or better, contributing to the college's convincing evidence base to support its self-assessment judgement. College observations have accurately identified that in the best lessons, teachers use a variety of techniques to promote and support learning. In these classes oral feedback to learners is developmental, encouraging and aspirational. Teachers have high, realisable expectations of their learners and learners have responsibility for their own learning. The learning experience is creative and exciting and learners have a safe environment in which to explore their ideas and thoughts. Independent learning skills are very well developed. The college has also accurately identified that in a few classes, activities do not allow sufficient scope for learners to participate fully and to use the knowledge and skills they have.
20. The college operates an effective, comprehensive system of quality assurance of teaching and learning through its observations, peer observations, use of partnership work and in-house training. Its observations focus very strongly on learning and are moderated effectively to ensure consistency and accuracy. A full programme of relevant training is in place to support both teachers and observers. Teachers improve their practice through work with mentors and advanced practitioners as well as through generic and specific staff training.
21. There is exceptionally good use of excellent resources to promote and support learning. Teachers are generally well-qualified and many are working towards higher qualifications to increase their vocational and pedagogical skills. The college has developed very powerful interactive resources on its virtual learning environment (VLE) and this is increasingly well used by both staff and learners. Its excellent purpose-built facilities give industrial-standard working spaces, many of which operate commercially for the benefit of learners and the wider community.
22. The college's approach to identifying and providing for additional learning needs is outstanding. Additional learning needs are identified promptly and provided

for appropriately. Support is very well structured to ensure that learners can access it at any point in their programmes. Teachers have very effective training to identify and address support needs and specialist staff and resources are readily available. The impact of additional learning support is monitored by the college. Adaptive technology is widely available and is used well to promote independent learning.

23. Learners' assignments are marked well against clear criteria, and developmental feedback is given to help learners to improve. Assessments are often developmental and very useful to learners, but ensuing target setting is not always sufficiently clear, manageable and achievable.
24. The extent to which programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college meets the needs of employers exceptionally well, working in consortia both regionally and nationally to deliver Train to Gain and work-based learning across a range of curriculum areas. A number of projects are successfully engaging non-traditional learners in the community and those not in employment, education or training (NEET). Other innovative projects are engaging the homeless, those in drug rehabilitation and those from minority ethnic groups. These projects are supported by strong partnership arrangements with community organisations. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. Equality is promoted extensively throughout the college. The college's response to its statutory equality duty is outstanding. A single equality scheme has been produced and the college conducts thorough impact assessments of its policies and processes. An extensive range of enrichment is in place. The work in promoting safe and healthy lifestyles to all learners is outstanding. This work is also carefully targeted to vulnerable groups. There is a wide range of courses with clear progression routes for learners post 16. However, progression rates between levels are satisfactory. The college works well in partnership with the local authority and schools for provision for 14 to 16 year olds. This partnership provides a range of courses offered at all the partner locations and the number of 14 to 16 year olds accessing the college has increased.
25. Support for learners is good. Course information and guidance are of good quality and accessible for both full-time and part-time learners. An 'e-guidance' service via the college website provides information and advice to remote prospective learners. Interview and selection processes are thorough and are effective in ensuring that learners are enrolled onto the right course for them. Induction helps learners settle well into the college. Additional learning support is outstanding and drives achievement. There are very effective structures in place to provide timely, targeted support. Information technology (IT) is used well to support learners and there is good staff training to help identify learner needs. There are effective, external multi-agency support structures around the most vulnerable learners which link to the college's safeguarding procedures. A flexible framework for the delivery of tutorial is in place across the college. Group tutorials are innovatively delivered using a range of good resources which are adapted by tutors so that they are relevant to curriculum areas. Learners benefit from good pastoral support and the wide range of welfare services. Attendance is good and closely monitored.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grades:**Equality of opportunity**Outstanding: grade 1**WBL**Good : grade 2**Train to Gain**Good : grade 2*

26. Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the principal is highly effective and consultative, supported by an excellent and very able senior management team. Since the last inspection their impact on raising standards has been outstanding. Staff at all levels are enthusiastic, confident and well-informed. They have a clear determination to raise the aspirations of learners and help them to succeed. Strategic planning is highly developed and detailed with a clear emphasis on learner success shared across the college. Curriculum management is outstanding in most areas. The management of work-based learning and Train to Gain is good.
27. The college is exceptionally responsive to the needs of employers and local and national priorities in developing its curriculum. It has excellent relationships with a wide range of regional and local partners and makes a significant and valuable contribution to sharing good practice across the region.
28. The promotion of equal opportunities and arrangements to eliminate discrimination are outstanding. Internal structures and working groups are highly effective in influencing the strategy, management and day-to-day activities of the college to keep equality and diversity at the forefront of the college's operations. There is a strong ethos of respect for diversity and difference. Marketing is targeted effectively to attract learners from groups often under-represented in further education. In 2007/08 the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups was much larger than that of the local community. The college has a high profile in the local communities and serves and leads on many local initiatives to widen participation and reach disadvantaged or disaffected sections of the community. The proportion of staff identifying themselves as belonging to minority ethnic groups has increased and is in line with local community data. The college has made a good response to the statutory requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, The Children's Act 2004 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.
29. The arrangements for quality improvement are highly effective. Since the last inspection, success rates and teaching and learning have improved significantly. As noted in the college's self-assessment report there is a rigorous process of target setting underpinned by an innovative performance review which have made a significant contribution in the raising of standards. Data are accurate and easily accessible and now used by managers and teachers with confidence. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and in the main, accurate. Governance is good. Governors play an active role in moderating the self-

assessment report and have a wide range of relevant skills enabling them to monitor effectively all aspects of the college's performance.

30. The estate has improved significantly since the last inspection with the conclusion of a major rebuilding programme. Old buildings have now been replaced and most provision has been transferred on to the one campus. The new and refurbished buildings now provide an excellent learning environment. Learning resources are generally very good and many are outstanding. Teachers are well-qualified and the systems to appraise the performance of all staff to identify and meet their training needs are comprehensive and effective. There is an excellent competence-based induction scheme for teachers and assessors ensuring that college objectives are met.
31. The college manages its finances well and provides outstanding value for money.

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	1041	75	69	6	2275	75	65	10
	06/07	982	84	74	10	1272	81	70	11
	07/08*	739	84	N/A	N/A	919	80	N/A	N/A
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	18	39	73	-34	-	-	-	-
	06/07	15	67	72	-5	1	100	65	35
	07/08*	10	80	N/A	N/A	5	100	N/A	N/A
NVQs	05/06	176	79	72	7	495	78	74	4
	06/07	157	86	75	11	269	84	75	9
	07/08*	45	84	N/A	N/A	137	82	N/A	N/A
Other	05/06	847	75	69	6	1780	74	65	9
	06/07	810	84	74	10	1002	80	70	10
	07/08*	738	84	N/A	N/A	74	80	N/A	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	813	68	66	2	1739	71	66	5
	06/07	719	72	70	2	1494	80	69	11
	07/08*	564	76	N/A	N/A	1322	77	N/A	N/A
GCSEs	05/06	106	58	68	-10	136	69	67	2
	06/07	189	75	71	4	174	72	70	2
	07/08*	55	69	N/A	N/A	122	71	N/A	N/A
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	13	100	69	31	2	100	68	32
	06/07	5	80	73	7	-	-	-	
	07/08*	-	-	N/A	N/A	-	-	N/A	N/A
NVQs	05/06	167	70	65	5	874	76	68	8
	06/07	122	49	68	-19	867	80	69	11
	07/08*	105	78	N/A	N/A	789	77	N/A	N/A
Other	05/06	527	69	66	3	727	65	65	0
	06/07	403	77	70	7	453	83	69	14
	07/08*	404	76	N/A	N/A	411	78	N/A	N/A

* college data

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	545	72	71	1	907	71	64	7
	06/07	398	74	73	1	560	74	68	6
	07/08*	230	78	N/A	N/A	509	75	N/A	N/A
A/A2 Levels	05/06	8	75	87	-12	3	100	72	28
	06/07	28	89	87	2	1	100	76	24
	07/08*	21	57	N/A	N/A	3	100	N/A	N/A
AS Levels	05/06	57	67	67	0	24	67	55	12
	06/07	26	73	69	4	18	72	59	13
	07/08*	24	75	N/A	N/A	7	43	N/A	N/A
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	2	50	66	-16	8	88	57	31
	06/07	-	-	-		-	-	-	
	07/08*	-	-	N/A	N/A	-	-	N/A	N/A
NVQs	05/06	73	67	71	-4	341	76	63	13
	06/07	33	74	74	-10	207	83	69	14
	07/08*	27	78	N/A	N/A	239	84	N/A	N/A
Other	05/06	405	74	65	9	531	68	64	4
	06/07	281	74	70	4	334	69	69	0
	07/08*	158	82	N/A	N/A	258	67	N/A	N/A

* college data