

Woking College

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	130831
Name of lead inspector:	Nigel Fletcher HMI
Last day of inspection:	25 November 2010
Type of provider:	Sixth form college
Address:	Rydens Way Woking Surrey GU22 9DL
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Information about the provider

1. Woking College is a small sixth form college serving the Borough of Woking and surrounding areas of Surrey. It also provides community education for learners who are speakers of languages other than English. Woking College is the only college in the borough although two sixth form colleges, two school sixth forms and two general further education colleges are located within 15 miles. Unemployment in Surrey in 2009/10 was 4.8%, compared with 7.9% nationally, although Woking includes an area of relative deprivation from which the college draws a significant proportion of students.

2. The college offers courses in 12 of the 15 subject areas, funded mostly by the Young Peoples' Learning Agency. The largest subject areas in the college are: science and mathematics; visual and performing arts and media; languages; preparation for life and work; and, business, administration and law. The college has recently begun a diploma programme for a small number of students aged 14 to 16.

3. The proportion of students at the college from minority ethnic groups is around 28%, compared with around 9% in Woking and 16% in the borough. The largest group represented is of students of Asian Pakistani heritage. Educational attainment in the local authority in 2008/09 was above the national average with 59% of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English at GCSE. The college's mission is 'to enable students to succeed by providing high quality learning and teaching with effective support that meets students' individual needs and interests'.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to 18)	911 full-time learners 23 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	26 full-time learners 380 part-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	
Science and mathematics	2
Performing arts	1

Overall effectiveness

4. Woking is a good college and shows good capacity to improve further. Students achieve good outcomes overall and enjoy their learning, although in a very small minority of courses achievements are poor. The standard of students' work is good. Most students make good progress on their courses and a high proportion progress to higher education or employment. Attendance is high and students highlight the atmosphere of mutual respect with all staff. Students feel very safe, reflecting the excellent promotion of health and safety and the college's good arrangements for safeguarding students.
5. Teaching and learning are good. The majority of lessons offer students a wide range of activities which challenge and motivate them. Well-qualified and experienced teachers plan and teach lessons well and students make good progress. However, in a few instances, lessons are uninteresting and teachers pay insufficient attention to motivating and challenging students. Students benefit from a wide range of courses and enrichment activities in most subject areas, and the college works well with partners to provide this. However, many students do not yet have an opportunity to undertake relevant work experience. Care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Initial advice and

guidance, diagnostic assessment, and subsequent pastoral and additional learning support are of particularly high quality.

6. The college is well led and managed. Quality assurance arrangements are sound, and its self-assessment of its own strengths and weaknesses is accurate. The college is particularly good at gathering and acting on students' views to continuously improve their experience at the college, although governors do not receive reports of the very few complaints. Equality of opportunity is well integrated into college life and many, but not all, teachers promote this and cultural diversity well in lessons. The college provides good value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes are good and have improved for students at all levels in 2009/10 and since the last inspection. Success rates have improved in almost all subject areas. Students' standards of work are good. Students make good progress in lessons and develop good skills for their future economic well-being.
- Students make good progress compared with their starting points in most subject areas, although in a minority of courses the grades that students achieve are still lower than expected from their prior attainment. Attendance at lessons has improved and is now high. Retention rates for students have increased and are also high.
- Students enjoy coming to college. Working relationships between staff and students are good. The college's promotion of an awareness of health and safety amongst students is excellent. Students feel very safe and understand the importance of adopting safe working practices and healthy lifestyles. Many students take advantage of the wide variety of opportunities in sports.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are well planned and provide a good variety of activities. Students gain good knowledge and skills, and enjoy their work. Standards of written work are good or better in most subject areas. In the fewer less effective lessons, teachers dominate and provide insufficient challenge to students. A minority of lessons do not develop fully the skills of the more able students.
- The college's lesson observation scheme is thorough and accurate. Judgements on the quality of lessons are moderated appropriately and actions for improvement from lessons are generally tackled well. However, progress against actions arising from observations of good or better lessons is not monitored sufficiently.
- The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. It offers a broad range of GCE AS- and A-level subjects and an increasing number of vocational qualifications at intermediate and advanced levels. Good opportunities for adults, particularly to meet their literacy and numeracy needs, are offered in a variety of community locations which enhance access and participation.
- The college works effectively with a wide range of partners to enhance opportunity, participation, aspiration and achievement for its own students and

for the wider community. However, despite good progress being made since the last inspection, insufficient links with employers mean that not all students benefit from work experience opportunities.

- Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Very effective advice ensures that students choose programmes which provide good progression routes. Initial assessment provides timely and incisive identification of learning support needs, which are addressed promptly and very effectively. Students value highly the excellent academic and pastoral support they receive from their teachers and tutors.
- Senior managers and governors promote clear values and objectives which inform the work of the college and reflect an ethos of aspiration for learners, many of whom start with below average qualifications for their courses.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Promotion of these themes within lessons has increased, although opportunities to do this are often missed. Students feel that the college is a safe environment where everyone is treated with respect. The college ensures that students are safe and that young people and vulnerable adults are protected.
- The college provides good opportunities for students, parents and carers and partner organisations to contribute their views. The college listens carefully and has made a number of changes in response to the views expressed.
- The college assures the quality of its courses well, and this has led to improvements in students' achievements. The college's self-assessment process is central to its management of provision and provides a good basis for further actions. However, quality assurance processes are not yet implemented to a consistently high standard in all departments.

What does name of Woking College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all lessons provide stretch and challenge to the more able students to enable them to achieve higher grades and reach their full potential.
- Ensure that lessons in underperforming courses interest and motivate students so that they make better progress compared with their prior attainment and achieve at least their expected outcomes.
- Work closely with departments and subject teachers to ensure that the promotion of equality and diversity is embedded consistently in teaching and learning.
- Develop further contacts with employers to enhance the college's employer engagement strategy and the comprehensive provision of work experience opportunities for students.
- Ensure that a record of complaints is formally reported to the corporation in order that governors can monitor actions to remedy any complaints.
- Ensure that all quality assurance processes in departments are implemented to a consistently high standard to promote continued improvement in the quality of provision.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the excellent support and help that they receive from teachers and support staff at any time
- the good access to computers and the resources on the college's intranet that help them catch up or develop their understanding
- the very good choice of enrichment activities and opportunities to go on trips and visits and take part in charity events
- being valued as an individual and being able to influence what happens in college
- the very enthusiastic teachers and tutors who are always willing to help
- being encouraged to take responsibility for their learning outside lessons
- being part of a safe, inclusive and caring community in which everyone is valued equally
- some very good lessons.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the standard of teaching in a very small number of lessons
- access to a social area in the second part of the afternoon.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. Governors and senior managers set a strong ethos of high standards and aspiration for students. Managers have ensured that weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been tackled successfully. Quality assurance arrangements have been revised and have led to improved outcomes for students. The self-assessment report is accurate and managers and staff know what needs to be done to improve further. Managers have good access to data and generally use them well to monitor progress against targets. Although the success rates for almost all subject areas have improved, some inconsistencies in the quality of provision between subjects remain. The college manages its finances well and makes effective use of its available budgets to provide good learning resources.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Improvements in retention and achievement have resulted in increased success rates since the last inspection. College data show that these improvements have been sustained in 2009/2010. Success rates across nearly all subject areas improved in 2009/10, and significantly for a few since the previous inspection, to at or above 2008/09 national averages. However, success rates in business studies and social sciences remain low.
9. Success rates on advanced level courses increased since the previous inspection and are high, particularly for the few adults on the programmes. Rates for A-level courses are above the high national averages for 2008/09, but those for AS courses are around average. Achievement of high grades at GCSE improved significantly in 2009/10 and are now above the most recent averages.
10. The average attainment of students on entry to the college is low. However, the proportion of high grades at advanced level has improved and is at the 2008/09 national average; for the small number of adults, it is well above average. Most students make better progress at A level than would be predicted from their prior attainment. In a few subjects, and in BTEC National Award and Certificate programmes, they make very good progress. However, students' progress is still low in a small minority of subjects at A and AS level.
11. Although male students do not achieve as well as female students, the difference has reduced and is comparable with the difference nationally. Until 2008/09 there was little difference in the success rates of students from different ethnic groups. The college has taken appropriate actions to remedy a decline in success rates of students from one minority ethnic group in 2009/10. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make significantly better progress compared with their prior attainment.

12. Students progress well within the college and to higher education or employment. Students confirm that everyone in the college is treated with respect. They enjoy college life and their studies and develop strong economic and social skills. The standard of their work in lessons is good. Attendance has improved and is good. Students are able to make informed decisions about their health and well-being and many participate in sporting activities. The promotion by the college of an awareness of health and safety with students is excellent. Students feel safe around the college and in their work. Students make a good contribution to the community and many are involved in charitable fundraising.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. Students enjoy their lessons and speak highly of their enthusiastic and supportive teachers. In most lessons, a variety of activities interest and motivate students well and enable them to make good progress. However, a few lessons are too teacher dominated and lose students' interest. Not all lessons ensure that activities and course materials provide sufficient stretch and challenge, particularly for more able students.
14. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Resources to support learning are good. The provision of information and learning technology (ILT) has improved since the previous inspection and is used well by staff and students. More staff use it to enhance their lessons and students use the virtual learning environment (VLE) to catch up on missed work or to find extra resources to support their learning.
15. Assignments and homework are set regularly. Diagnostic marking is used well by all staff to ensure that students' progress is reviewed at least monthly and detailed academic targets are set for the next assignment. Students are fully aware of their short-term and overall course targets.
16. The college's lesson observation scheme is thorough and accurate. Observations lead to detailed action plans, particularly for staff whose lessons are judged less than good. However, actions from lessons judged good or better are not monitored. Common themes identified for improvement form the basis of effective staff development activities.
17. The college offers a broad range of AS- and A-level subjects and an increasing number of vocational qualifications at intermediate and advanced levels. Effective literacy and numeracy courses are provided in community locations for speakers of English as a second language and for socially isolated adults.
18. Students participate well in a broad enrichment programme within their subjects and across college. Additional qualifications in many subject areas provide extra challenge to students and enhance their progression opportunities into higher education and employment. However, work experience for all students is not yet sufficiently embedded across the college.

19. The college has strong and effective working relationships with local schools, educational consortia, the local authority and universities. It makes a significant contribution to raising aspirations and promoting social inclusion in the community. It works well with other colleges to raise the quality of provision and to enhance students' experience and success. The college continues to develop its links with employers, but despite good progress since the last inspection, it has yet to fully realise its aims.
20. Very effective induction arrangements enable students to settle into the college quickly. Students place very high value on the excellent academic and pastoral support they receive, formally and informally, from their teachers and tutors. Initial assessment of students' needs is thorough and used effectively to provide outstanding additional support within, and outside, lessons. Students speak highly of the regular opportunities they have to discuss academic progress and agree meaningful improvement targets with their tutors.
21. Support and guidance arrangements for progression into higher education and beyond are good. In particular, the college's innovations within the Aim Higher programme have raised the aspirations of students from family backgrounds without a history of participation in higher education, with a high proportion of such students progressing to university.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

22. The principal and vice principal provide energetic leadership and work closely with governors and managers to provide strategic direction, promote high standards and continuous improvement and raise aspirations. The college's strategic objectives form the basis of clear operational and action plans. Governors and senior managers monitor progress effectively against objectives and targets. Senior managers foster a culture of direct communication between themselves and staff and students which works well and contributes towards the open and friendly atmosphere of the college. The college is very active in local partnerships which directly benefit young people. Staff, students and partner organisations hold the college in high regard.
23. Governors use their extensive professional skills well to provide good direction, challenge and support. They have contributed to the development of the college's ethos and values, particularly in encouraging high aspirations. Governors play a significant role in strategic planning and the process of self-assessment, as well as in the oversight of students' achievements and financial and resource matters. However, they do not receive a formal report on the few complaints made to the college.
24. The promotion of safeguarding is good. Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding vulnerable adults are appropriate and well managed. All staff have been trained to a suitable standard and relevant managers have received higher-level training. The college works closely with partner agencies to support students who require protection and safeguarding. Students feel very safe in the college. Health and safety aspects are very well managed.

25. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college has developed a single equality scheme and meets its duties in relation to race, gender, disability and other protected groups. It has introduced intermediate and vocational courses to encourage students with lower entry qualifications to enrol, and provides adult learning in the community. Training has improved the understanding of equality and diversity among staff and governors. Managers analyse students' outcomes effectively by different groupings. The college places a strong emphasis on personalised learning which has improved achievement. It is also monitoring closely the progress of one ethnic group identified as underachieving in 2009/10. Equality and diversity are celebrated well through special events and displays. Teachers have increased the promotion of this theme within lessons, although opportunities to do this are often missed. Students with specific learning difficulties receive outstanding support.
26. The college's self-assessment of its strengths and areas for improvement is accurate. Arrangements for quality assurance are good, but are not yet implemented fully in all subject areas. Managers monitor carefully actions taken to improve weaker areas of provision. Senior staff from partner colleges provide rigorous validation of the self-assessment report. The internal lesson observation scheme is robust. Resulting actions for improvement have led to improved teaching and learning through effective staff development and sharing of good practice, both within the college and with partners. Good access to data enables middle managers and tutors to monitor closely students' attendance and performance.
27. Students have good opportunities to express their views, which are listened to, through representation on various college fora. As well as formal surveys, students on each course provide feedback to teachers which is recorded and acted upon. At every stage of students' contact with the college, parents and carers are encouraged to communicate with tutors, teachers or managers directly and many do so.
28. The college provides good value for money. Financial management is strong and the college's financial health is good. The college provides a pleasant learning environment and uses available budgets effectively to provide good learning resources and staff development. It provides a strong focus on sustainability, for example in the use of energy and purchase of supplies. The college uses its relatively small accommodation well with a much-increased number of students, and provides good access for disabled people.

Subject areas

Science and mathematics

Grade 2

Context

29. The area offers numeracy, mathematics and science qualifications at intermediate level. At advanced level, AS- and A-level qualifications include chemistry, physics, mathematics, further mathematics and biology. A BTEC National Diploma course was introduced in 2009. Of the 719 students enrolled, 92% are 16 to 18 years old, 49% are female and 26% are from ethnic minority groups of which the largest is students of Pakistani heritage.

Key findings

- Students' outcomes are satisfactory. Improvements have been made since the previous inspection and the overall success rate is around the 2008/09 national average. Students achieve well in all A-level subjects, with significant improvements to the success rates of high grades which are now above average, as are the rates for high grades in GCSEs in mathematics and science. Retention is high and improving.
- Students' progress compared with their prior attainment is very good in mathematics and good in AS- and A-level biology and AS physics. However, success rates for the small number of students in AS chemistry are poor, with students performing well below expectation. In 2009/10, pass rates for AS mathematics declined compared with the previous year.
- Students feel safe and enjoy their work. Much attention is paid to health and safety, and risk assessments are carried out thoroughly for practical work. Many students contribute positively to the community through voluntary work both in and externally to the college. A new mentoring scheme where second-year students support AS students is appreciated and having a beneficial effect on all concerned.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and college observations demonstrate that it has improved over the last year. In most lessons, a range of imaginative activities are used which motivate and interest the students. Lessons are planned well to address students' learning needs and teachers check learning effectively. However, a small minority of lessons judged less than good lack variation and students were insufficiently challenged or motivated.
- ILT is now used well by teachers and students in the classroom and remotely to access a broad range of high-quality resources. The review of students' progress is rigorous. Homework is set regularly and detailed and constructive comments help students to improve. Half-termly diagnostic assessments in each subject lead to effective targets which are reviewed regularly.
- The needs of students are met well. The broad, flexible provision provides good progression routes to higher education. The recent introduction of the national diploma in forensic science provides an effective vocational alternative to A

levels. Collaboration with the local primary and secondary schools, and the university is good and results in many benefits to students and school pupils.

- Students benefit from the broad range of subject-based and extra-curricular enrichment activities, including visits, guest speakers and sports, which enhance their experience and enjoyment. Students participate in mathematics challenge competitions, both regionally and nationally, with good success. However, despite the college's efforts, opportunities for relevant work experience are not yet available to vocational students.
- Students value the good support for learning. The department now takes a more rigorous approach to identifying and supporting students at risk of not achieving their goals. Weekly workshop sessions in all subjects are now mandatory for students for whom a need has been identified through the rigorous personal and academic tutorial process.
- Initial advice and guidance have improved and are good. However, they have not been sufficiently effective in chemistry to ensure that students can best achieve their potential. The recent implementation of an advanced vocational course now allows better flexibility for guiding students onto a more appropriate programme, although it is too early to see the full impact of this.
- Overall leadership and management are good. The highly supportive managers promote and encourage continual improvement. Strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained and almost all areas for improvement rectified. Self-assessment is good, but managers do not use available data sufficiently to set challenging and attainable targets for improvement in all courses.
- Equality and diversity are promoted effectively with students from minority ethnic groups performing at least as well as those of White British heritage. Promotion of equalities and cultural diversity is well embedded in schemes of work and lessons and students feel they are treated fairly. Staff value highly the views of the students and take their comments seriously and tackle any issues raised.
- Resources are satisfactory. Both students and staff consider that they are adequate. They are well managed by three part-time technicians. Some laboratory accommodation is in need of improvement and upgrading to meet current standards and requirements.

What does Woking College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there is a sufficient range of activities in all lessons to motivate students, maintain their interest and provide challenge to the more able.
- Improve initial advice, guidance and entry criteria for chemistry courses to ensure that students are directed onto the most appropriate programme to suit their needs and abilities.
- Ensure that managers use data on progress and outcomes better to evaluate and remedy underperformance at a subject level.
- Ensure that students on vocational courses are able to participate in relevant work experience to improve their employability skills and their understanding of the science industry.

Performing arts

Grade 1

Context

30. The area offers AS and A levels in dance, drama, music, music technology and performance studies. Some 216 students are enrolled on courses this year. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18. In 2010, 10% were of minority ethnic heritage. Equal numbers of male and female students study in this area.

Key findings

- Success rates are very high. The majority of pass rates have been at 100% since 2007. The proportion of students who achieve high grades is higher than that seen nationally, particularly in A-level music, music technology and performance studies. Students' achievements exceed what could be expected from their prior attainment. Attendance is high. Students work safely and are aware of safe working practices.
- Students use appropriate specialist vocabulary confidently, and make coherent links between theoretical and practical work. They demonstrate confident performance work underpinned by very good practical skills. All students show enthusiasm and enjoyment in their work and many use their skills in the community. For example, students teach dance to boys in a local feeder school, promoting their interest in the subject.
- All lessons are very good or outstanding. Teachers plan very well to provide a range of lively activities that extend students' learning. Resources are used creatively. Questioning is used very effectively to test and develop students' knowledge. However, in a few lessons, teachers' questioning does not sufficiently probe students to answer in appropriate depth.
- Assessment is very effective in helping students to make progress. Diagnostic marking gives students very clear information how to proceed to the next stage in their work, both written and practical. Teachers use effective strategies to personalise tasks. For example, on entering the room for a lesson, students were given envelopes with roles and instructions, organised to take into account students' individual learning needs.
- The college responds very well to the needs and interests of students in performing arts. Students benefit from a broad range of advanced courses to assist them in progressing into higher levels of their chosen vocation. However, managers have not explored sufficiently the benefits of offering courses at intermediate level.
- Students take part in an outstanding range of enrichment courses that develop their skills and which they use to gain additional qualifications. For example, music students are offered the opportunity to take music theory exams to extend their knowledge. Performance students take part in a performing group that enters their work in national competitions and have won many awards.

- Initial advice and guidance and diagnostic assessment of students needs are of a very high standard. Staff use information about risks that could affect students' performance very effectively to target help where it is needed.
- Support for students is outstanding. Students regularly attend subject-specific workshops that provide focused support for areas of difficulty. Excellent learning materials are available to support their work. Staff use the academic tutorial system well to discuss progress with individual students and to set challenging tasks and targets with clear deadlines.
- Managers have excellent strategies in place that are driving up standards and improving the achievement of high grades. Staff participate actively in the quality assurance and improvement procedures. They are committed to developing their skills and speak positively about the lesson observation programme and its impact on improvements in teaching and learning.
- Staff work relentlessly to encourage participation of students from ethnic minority heritage into performing arts through a broad range of enrichment activities in the community. For example, 'Bollywood' dancers performed in Woking's Got Talent. Teachers take appropriate opportunities to explore with students issues related to equality and diversity in lessons and in the range of texts studied.

What does Woking College need to do to improve further?

- Fully assess the viability of introducing courses at intermediate level in order to improve progression routes for students through the college.
- Improve questioning techniques, so that in all lessons questions are more probing and students are expected to articulate their answers in more depth.

Information about the inspection

31. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the college's vice principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
32. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of students and local partners. They also looked at questionnaires students had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Woking College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	990	970	20
Part-time learners	277	10	253
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2		
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2		
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	2 2		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2		
How safe do learners feel?	1		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2		
Quality of provision	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1		
Leadership and management	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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