

Milton Keynes College

Inspection report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Information about the provider

1. Milton Keynes College is a large general further education college on four sites in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. Its mission is to be 'an outstanding college at the heart of the city: nurturing ambition and delivering success'.
2. The city of Milton Keynes has a history of low educational achievement.
3. The college faces significant competition for students at the end of their GCSE courses as a result of post-16 provision in secondary schools across the city. Over 60% of learners in learner-responsive provision at the college are aged 16 to 18. Some 55% of these study courses at advanced level. Their GCSE results on entry to the college are below the national average for students starting at similar colleges. Most students at advanced level are studying on vocational courses. The proportion of learners from black minority ethnic heritage is higher than in the local population.
4. The college works with around 600 employers through a combination of apprenticeships, Train to Gain, professional qualifications and commercial training. In addition, the college provides education and training for offenders in custody and in the community across the south east, east and east Midlands regions. This provision was not within the scope of this inspection. Participation rates in full-time study for higher education in the immediate area are significantly below the average rate for England. The college opened the University Centre Milton Keynes in 2008.
5. The city has areas of severe economic deprivation, included within the 10% most deprived areas in England. The start of the economic downturn saw unemployment rise in Milton Keynes to a rate above that found in south-east England, and the city has been identified as a 'redundancy hotspot'.
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - MK Language Centre (learner-responsive provision English for speakers of other languages)
 - Premier International Ltd (learner-responsive provision: fitness and personal training).

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to 18)</p> <p>Foundation learning, including</p> <p>Entry to Employment</p>	<p>333 part-time learners</p> <p>2,793 full-time learners 285 part-time learners</p> <p>129 full-time learners (E2E) 363 full-time learners (FL)</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p> <p>Foundation learning</p>	<p>845 full-time learners 4,321 part-time learners</p> <p>212 full-time learners 1,154 part-time learners</p>
<p>Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships</p>	<p>1,419 learners 614 apprentices</p>

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	
Uniformed public services	3
Science and mathematics	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Visual arts and media	3
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

7. This is a satisfactory college with satisfactory capacity to improve. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory; they are good for learners aged 14 to 16 and in the hairdressing and beauty therapy subject area. However, in science and mathematics they are inadequate. Learners feel safe in the college and work safely as a result of the good arrangements for safeguarding and the good attention to health and safety.
8. The quality of teaching and learning is variable both across the college and within subject areas. This is an important issue for the college to rectify. Good practice in teaching and learning is shared insufficiently. Assessment too is an area where there is good practice to be shared, so that all teachers provide clear guidance for learners about how to improve at all stages of their programme.

9. The college's partnership working is outstanding, underpinning the significant contribution the college makes to economic and social development in the Milton Keynes area. Partners and employers find the college very responsive and value highly its willingness to tailor provision to meet specific needs. However, inspectors recommend that the college should explore greater collaboration with local school sixth forms and the local authority to develop the range and quality of the college's AS- and A-level provision.
10. The college and governors are ambitious to improve the college and are focused appropriately on improving learners' experience and success. However, the recent restructuring is not yet showing a measurable impact on success; the college needs to increase the rigour, range and consistency of quality assurance processes to drive up the quality of provision.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners in learner-responsive provision are satisfactory, as they were at the last inspection. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 studying at advanced level have been consistently below average as a result of low pass rates on AS-level courses. Timely success rates in Train to Gain provision have shown a trend of improvement that has taken them to above average in 2009/10.
- The prior attainment of learners aged 16 to 18 studying on advanced level courses is below average for similar colleges, and learners make expected progress. However, in BTEC courses, their progress is inconsistent and in a significant number of these courses their progress is weak and below expectations.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The better lessons observed were planned well, with good use of questioning techniques and practical opportunities for learners to demonstrate actively what they had learnt. Planning was inclusive, promoted equality and diversity, took account of individual abilities and enabled learners to develop their skills and understanding.
- In the less effective lessons learners had few opportunities to demonstrate what they had learnt. Too often the use of questioning was superficial and lessons were not adequately planned to match the needs of all learners. Recurrent themes in the less effective lessons, in all subject areas, were the failures to stimulate and challenge learners adequately, and to provide learners with opportunities to use information and learning technologies (ILT) in their learning.
- Assessment is satisfactory overall, with the best practice in marking work and giving feedback in lessons providing clear guidance for improvement. Practice is good in hairdressing and beauty therapy, where learners keep diaries of progress and their progress is tracked very effectively. However, in business and in art, design and media, assessment does not lead to improvement in the quality of learners' work and progress.

- The college provides a broad curriculum with clear progression routes in all significant areas, although the range of AS- and A-level subjects available is relatively narrow. An excellent enrichment programme promotes strongly citizenship, equality and diversity, staying safe and healthy living.
- Partnership working is strong, extensive and underpins the significant contribution the college makes to local economic and social development. Partners and employers find the college very responsive and value highly its willingness to tailor provision to meet specific needs.
- Care and support for learners are good. The college's welfare and counselling services provide very good personal support. Vulnerable learners, including those from care backgrounds, are well supported and make good progress. Advice and guidance at key points in the learner's journey are satisfactory.
- The quality of group tutorials is inconsistent; individual learning plans and progress reviews are used poorly in most curriculum areas. However, they are exemplary in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Recent changes in initial assessment procedures have weakened the precision and timeliness with which learning support is targeted.
- The college and governors have an ambitious mission, a clear vision, objectives and values focusing strongly on success. The college is prominent in local economic development, developing aspiration in its new technical and higher education centres, and its many successful employability programmes. Provision in the 13 prisons is well managed.
- The recent restructure and performance management framework has increased effectiveness and efficiency, but some monitoring records are insufficiently analytical or focused on improvement. Team targets are relevant, but sometimes insufficiently challenging. Outcomes for learners do not yet reflect the impact of new measures.
- Safeguarding arrangements are particularly effective and learners feel safe. The college shows strong leadership, coordinating all training in the city, to ensure that its learners are protected. Arrangements for health and safety are exceptionally thorough. However, assessors do not reinforce learning sufficiently in work-based reviews.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college has a welcoming and inclusive learning environment and celebrates diversity extensively. Equality and diversity feature prominently in college processes and in tutorial activities. However, in the lessons observed, opportunities were often missed to promote equality and diversity through the curriculum. In work-based reviews the checking and reinforcement of learning are underdeveloped.
- Self-assessment has been effective in identifying many features of the provision, but has not recognised key weaknesses. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and have led to some improvement but they are applied inconsistently. Lesson observation arrangements have not yet raised standards of teaching above satisfactory in all subject areas.

What does Milton Keynes College need to do to improve further?

- Share the good practice in teaching and learning so that all teachers are able to plan for and provide stimulating and challenging activities that match the needs of all learners in the group.
- Provide further encouragement for teachers to extend the potential for learning by greater use of ILT in the classroom and in the development of learners' independence of their teachers.
- Share good practice in assessment so that all teachers provide clear guidance for learners about how to improve at all stages of their programme. Draw on the excellent practice in hairdressing and beauty therapy to improve the quality of individual learning plans and action planning to provide more value to learners and help them to improve specific aspects of their performance.
- Improve procedures to develop learners' understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding during work-based learning reviews and ensure that teachers implement the guidance on promoting equality and diversity in lessons.
- Explore working more collaboratively with local school sixth forms and the local authority to enhance the range and quality of AS- and A-level provision.
- Increase the rigour, range and consistency of quality assurance processes; develop specific and measurable ways to enable the impact on individual learners of advice, guidance and learning support to be evaluated.
- Sharpen the effectiveness of performance monitoring by setting and recording more precise targets and actions for improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- how well their chosen course meets their needs, and how much they enjoy their courses
- feeling safe at the college and being treated like an adult
- the support of approachable tutors
- the excellent range of enrichment run by energetic youth workers, and the range of opportunities for sport
- learning new things and gaining qualifications
- meeting new people and developing their independence
- being given the opportunity to study at the college in spite of not having done very well at school
- how well the college consults with them and uses their views to improve their experience of the college
- how the course has helped them with their job role
- 'hands-on' practical activities.

What learners would like to see improved:

- better and more timely information on next steps into employment or further education or training
- more visible security at lunchtimes
- better enforcement of the smoking zone
- a higher level of challenge in some assignments and lessons
- a better scheduled workload so their assignments are spread more evenly
- consistently high quality feedback on their progress and the quality of their work
- less repetition in answering questions in units in Train to Gain
- more time to complete their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in work-based learning.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- how closely the college meets their training needs
- the range of training available
- good communication and the quality of support
- the standards of learners' work and the levels of progress learners make
- being involved in reviewing learners' progress
- opportunities for learners to do additional courses
- the strong link between on-the-job and off-the-job training
- visiting tutors' support and flexibility to meet work and shift patterns.

What employers would like to see improved:

- to have a regular, formal record of learners' progress
- earlier notification of learners' non attendance.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

11. The college demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. The Principal, senior management and governors have worked well to develop an appropriately focused strategic framework and to ensure this is understood by all staff. The college's financial management is good and it meets community needs exceptionally well. The college uses learners' views well to improve their experience. However, during a period of significant growth in learner numbers, the impact of the college's efforts to improve the quality of provision and rectify areas for improvement from the last inspection has been mixed. The college has been successful in improving apprentices' timely success; it has raised achievements for learners aged 14 to 16, which are now good, and for those learners from black and minority ethnic heritage.
12. Success rates in learner-responsive provision were broadly average at the last inspection and were broadly average in 2009/10. Improvements in these rates have merely kept pace with those in the national average for similar colleges. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 continue to show variation across the range of subject areas and between courses in the same subject areas. However, in-year college data for 2010/11 suggest that the college is rectifying issues around learner retention. Key skills remain a challenge for the college, since at level 2 some 40% of learners aged 16 to 18 were unsuccessful in 2009/10.
13. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and features of weaker lessons are recognisable from the last inspection. The impact of the college's lesson observation scheme has been uneven. Quality assurance systems are well designed but applied inconsistently. Self-assessment is evaluative and has identified many features of the provision, but actions for improvement focus insufficiently on weaknesses. Around one third of the subject areas self-assessed as satisfactory in 2007/08 did not improve their grade in the most recent self-assessment report.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

14. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have been broadly average at foundation and intermediate level since the last inspection, with the exception of 2008/09. But, they have been consistently below average at advanced level for the past three years as a result of poor pass rates in AS-level qualifications. The prior attainment of learners studying at advanced level is below average compared to similar colleges. Learners make adequate progress overall from their starting points, but data show considerable variation in this respect, in particular in BTEC qualifications. Learners in art, design and media produce work of a good standard. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, learners work to a good, commercial standard.

15. Overall success rates in apprenticeships, the larger part of the college's work-based learning provision, were broadly in line with the national average in 2009/10 and these data show a steady improvement trend. In hospitality and catering, overall success rates were high in 2009/10. Timely success has improved significantly since the last inspection and is just above average.
16. Timely success rates in the college's Train to Gain provision have shown a trend of improvement that has taken them to above average in 2009/10. Rates in childcare, hospitality and business were much higher than the national average for these subject areas.
17. The college collates and analyses the performance of different groups to good effect and has not found significant achievement differences between learners from different ethnic groups, or backgrounds.
18. Learners enjoy their courses and college life. The development of their economic and social well-being is good. A high proportion of learners starting at entry and foundation levels go on to achieve higher level qualifications and almost all learners completing advanced level courses move on to positive destinations. Many learners complete additional qualifications which enhance their employability skills. Learners from disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups increase their prospects of employment and many learners not previously in education, employment or training (NEET) are now engaged in developing their potential.
19. Learners feel safe at the college. The checking of their ID cards on entry adds to their sense of security but is less sustained than they would like. Learners demonstrate good health and safety practices and are frequently involved in risk assessing the activities they undertake. Learners display a good awareness of healthier lifestyle choices and almost half of them participate in sports activities. As well as providing their views within the college, they make a positive contribution by regularly organising charitable activities.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

20. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The good or better lessons are well planned, with good use of questioning techniques and practical opportunities for learners to demonstrate actively what they have learnt. In most of these lessons planning takes account of individual abilities, ensuring that all learners can contribute and develop their skills and understanding. In the weaker lessons, few opportunities are provided for learners to demonstrate what they have learnt. Too often the use of questioning is superficial, and does not allow time for all learners to reflect or contribute and, on occasions, allows a few more vocal learners to dominate. Weaker lessons are not adequately planned to match the needs of all learners. A recurrent theme in the less effective lessons is the failure to challenge learners adequately.
21. Although profiles of learners are identifying learning characteristics and the ability of everyone in the group, these are not always used well in lessons, and

tasks are not prepared adequately to match all learners' needs. Equality and diversity are not promoted effectively in many of these lessons and the use of ILT is often limited to the teacher's presentation, rather than the active use by learners.

22. The impact of the college's lesson observation scheme has been uneven. In hair and beauty, uniformed public services and law, teaching and learning are good, with a consistent focus on checking of learning and encouraging learners to raise their aspirations. However, in business and accounting, science and mathematics and art, design and media, teaching and learning are mostly satisfactory. In the joint observations carried out by inspectors and the college's observers, most strengths and areas for development were agreed after discussion, although not all areas for improvement were given sufficient weighting by the college's observers. The recording of observations is not yet consistent in making judgements about how teachers plan for, and provide, adequate checks on learning so that learners may demonstrate that they can apply their skills, knowledge and understanding.
23. Resources for learning are good in most subject areas, with industry-standard facilities, including ILT, in construction and engineering. In hairdressing and beauty therapy the salons provide good opportunities to learn by working with external clients. However in art, design and media, the lack of suitable space restricts learners' ability to produce large-scale work. Teachers are qualified appropriately, and new staff are working towards teaching qualifications. Teachers recruited from industry make a particularly useful contribution to the progress and development of learners' vocational areas.
24. Assessment is satisfactory overall, with the best practice in marking work and giving feedback in lessons providing clear guidance for improvement. Practice is good in hairdressing and beauty therapy, where learners keep diaries of progress and their progress is tracked very effectively. However, in business and in art, design and media, assessment is not leading sufficiently to improvements in the quality of learners' work and progress.
25. Learning support in the classroom is monitored closely where learners have been identified as requiring individual support, and examples of good practice were seen in uniformed public services and hairdressing and beauty therapy. The effectiveness of the new arrangements through which classroom assistants are allocated to whole groups has yet to be evaluated by the college. The lack of initial screening on the apprenticeship programmes makes it difficult to plan effectively to meet individual learning needs in the off-the-job training.
26. The extent to which the college meets the needs and interests of learners is good. It provides a broad curriculum with clear progression pathways from foundation to advanced level and above in almost all areas. Entry level starting points are suitably varied. The number of learners aged 16 to 18 taking vocational qualifications at the college has increased significantly since the last inspection. The range of AS- and A-level subjects available is relatively narrow. Collaborative arrangements with local school sixth forms, which could enhance

the range and quality of AS- and A-level provision, are underdeveloped. A good range of foundation degrees are made available through the university centre. The college is highly responsive to specific needs of local employers, who are extremely positive about the provision available. The college's flexibility is evident in the extent to which adjustments are made to enable disadvantaged learners to continue on their course and the provision of courses to meet employers' shift patterns. The college makes a significant contribution to education within prisons. A holistic and very effective enrichment programme which encompasses tutorials, curriculum enhancement and cross-college events and activities, promotes strongly citizenship, equality and diversity, staying safe and healthy living. Insufficient attention is given to learners' prior learning and attainment in the planning of courses and lessons. There are insufficient work experience opportunities in most curriculum areas.

27. The college has developed an outstanding range of partnerships. In partnership with schools, the college provides a good range of vocational opportunities for learners aged 13 to 16 and gave strong leadership in the development of specialist diplomas. Strong and diverse partnerships with the local authority, community groups, employers, other public services and higher education, underpin the college's significant contribution to local economic and social development. The impact is particularly evident in the successful initiatives to improve the employability of disadvantaged groups, including offenders, young people who are NEET and in the highly innovative developments taking place at the university centre. Partners are highly complimentary about the college's responsiveness and flexibility. The college is inclusive and makes a good contribution to central and local government priorities. Links with external health and welfare agencies enhance support services for learners. Good external links are used well to support enrichment activities.
28. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. The college's welfare and counselling services support learners with personal issues extremely well. Vulnerable learners, including those from care backgrounds, are appropriately supported and monitored closely. They make good progress and their success rates are at least as good as for other learners. Strengthened monitoring and follow up of absences have helped to improve learners' attendance. Good learning support is provided to learners with specific identified support needs. Initial advice and guidance, careers and next step advice and guidance are satisfactory. The college intends to involve course teachers more in the interview process, to provide further assurance that learners' expectations of their courses are realistic.
29. Tutorials provide a good programme of activities supported well by materials made available to personal tutors on Moodle, the college's virtual learning environment (VLE), but there remains too much variability in how well topics are presented. Target setting in progress reviews for apprentices is good, but mid-year reviews of progress with Train to Gain learners are insufficiently thorough. Recent changes in initial assessment procedures have reduced the

extent to which full-time learners are screened for learning support needs. This has weakened the precision and timeliness with which learning support is targeted.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

30. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has an ambitious mission, a clear vision and values which focus strongly on improving learners' experience and success. All staff understand the clear objectives in the streamlined strategic framework. This is used effectively to monitor performance at every level. The college is a prominent partner in the city's plans for economic development. It uses local information effectively to plan and monitor this work. Provision in the 13 prisons is well managed and most achieved good grades in their inspections.
31. The recent restructure has given managers a sharper focus on efficiency. Regular and productive performance monitoring reinforces this effectively. Managers set clear and relevant targets for each team and monitor them rigorously. Teams prepare well for these meetings and have good access to data. However, a few targets are insufficiently challenging; a significant number of records of performance monitoring meetings are insufficiently analytical and lack a sharp focus on improvement. The structure is generally effective, and staff have very good access to training and development. However it is new, as are many of the staff, and is not yet showing measurable impact on success rates. Curriculum management is inconsistent across the range of subject areas, in some it lacks specialist focus on subjects.
32. Governance is good. Governors have been instrumental in simplifying processes and focusing the college on improvement. A recent change to reduce committee work has increased the visibility of quality improvement activity and enabled governors to monitor performance more actively and effectively, although this is not yet evident in success rates.
33. Safeguarding arrangements are particularly effective. The college takes a very strong lead on safeguarding in Milton Keynes, coordinating all training in the city. It works extensively with local agencies and public bodies to ensure that everyone in the city who works with children, young people or vulnerable adults has appropriate knowledge and expertise to protect them from harm. Procedures and processes are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are up to date. All staff in the college have been vetted appropriately, including governors, volunteers and those in non-teaching roles; the college takes suitable action when issues are found. Managers use learners' input well to ensure that safeguarding training at the college deals appropriately with their concerns. Health and safety arrangements are very thorough and wide ranging. Many staff have taken qualifications to raise the standard and profile of risk assessment, which is rigorous and well managed. Many learners in the college show a good knowledge of safeguarding and, in some subjects, are encouraged to risk assess their own activities. However, assessors do not sufficiently probe

or develop apprentices' knowledge of safeguarding or health and safety during progress reviews.

34. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college presents a welcoming and inclusive learning environment and celebrates diversity through many events during the year. The college works hard to ensure it is accessible. The thorough single equality strategy is supported by clear targets against each stream, which managers monitor regularly. An increased focus on equality and diversity is evident in all college processes. Staff training is comprehensive and frequently reinforced. Equality and diversity are promoted well in tutorial activities and through enrichment such as the work with Islamic Arts and Heritage, which won an award. Incidents of harassment or bullying are dealt with promptly, with a good range of effective approaches to resolve them. Learners feel able to complain and their concerns are handled well. The college uses local data effectively to target employability programmes in areas of deprivation, and responds very flexibly to provide programmes to meet their needs. Many subject areas have made good progress in challenging stereotypes. Managers have produced useful guidance on promoting equality and diversity in lessons. However, this is not always evident in practice. Staff miss opportunities to develop and reinforce learners' understanding, particularly in work-based learning reviews.
35. The college listens to its users and acts on their views. Learners have a wide range of opportunities to contribute to improving their college, including involvement in recruiting the new principal. An active learners' council represents them well. Student governors participate fully in forming college policy and strategy. The college responds particularly flexibly to employers and to local partners.
36. Self-assessment is evaluative and has identified many features of the provision, but actions for improvement focus insufficiently on weaknesses. Quality assurance systems are well designed but inconsistently applied. Managers and staff have good access to data but do not always use these effectively to monitor performance. Specialist expertise in functional skills has been shared productively in developing new curricula in some subject areas, but others do not share good practice sufficiently between teams.
37. The college's financial management is good and it meets community needs exceptionally well. Resources for learning are improving. The new technical centre with state-of-the-art equipment will open shortly, providing excellent resources for vocational subjects. Value for money is good, despite satisfactory outcomes for learners.

Subject areas

Uniformed public services

Grade 3

Context

38. Around 230 full-time learners are enrolled on courses in uniformed public services. Just under 200 learners are studying at advanced level with the remainder at intermediate level. All learners are full time and mostly aged between 16 and 19. Some 70% of the learners are male. This subject area has seen a 47% increase in full-time learner numbers over a period of three years.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Pass rates on all courses are high. However, retention rates have been consistently around the national average at intermediate level and consistently low at advanced level. The college has rightly identified retention as an area for improvement with a high priority.
- Current learners are making good progress. They enjoy their lessons. Attendance and punctuality have improved and are now good. Learners work productively with their tutors and with each other. They participate and communicate well in most lessons. They are confident to share their ideas and opinions and take a pride in their work. They have adequate opportunities to take part in charitable or community activities.
- Learners feel safe. Health and safety are integral to their programmes, and learners develop a good understanding of their responsibilities in developing a safe environment. Detailed risk assessments, understood and in some cases compiled by learners, are in place for all activities undertaken by the public services learners.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Staff have very good subject knowledge and draw on their extensive experience in the public services to interest and engage learners and to link theory to professional practice. Learners work very productively with teachers and with each other, completing the work set to the best of their ability.
- Lessons are planned well. Teachers are successful in using a wide range of interactive teaching and learning strategies to meet the individual needs of learners. Staff know their learners well and they use individual learner profiles directly and well to inform teaching and learning. Teachers make effective use of the interactive whiteboards, but learners make too little use of computers in lessons.
- Feedback on written work is comprehensive, detailed and constructive, providing learners with clear guidance for improvement. However, where staff are monitoring individual performance in lessons and providing formative and interim feedback to learners, time-bound targets are not routinely set and recorded, so that opportunities to develop learners' progress further are lost.

- The range of provision is satisfactory. The programmes offered provide a good preparation for entry to the public services and to higher education. Opportunities are limited for learners to gain additional qualifications to enhance their learning.
- Learners benefit from a wide range of partnerships with the armed forces and the emergency services. Presentations by service personnel, visits to public service and other civic settings enhance learning. Learners report the positive impact of these activities in informing their career choices. The uniform code at college, however, is not strictly enforced across the area.
- Care and support for learners are good. The personal and learning support provided through the tutorial system and the wider support services are good and are valued highly by learners. Additional learning support is provided effectively and sensitively in lessons.
- The written pre-course information and guidance for learners are accurate and clear. However, learners are not interviewed routinely prior to enrolment and have limited opportunity to discuss their learning programme prior to the beginning of their course, a factor that is contributing to the retention of learners.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The subject team's commitment to improving the quality of provision is strong; the team has introduced robust measures to support this, including the electronic recording and close monitoring of learners' progress. The setting and monitoring of targets for improvement take place routinely, but staff do not always use performance data effectively in self-assessment and related documents to drive up the quality of provision and success rates.
- Personal and professional safeguarding practices and issues of equality and diversity are promoted very well through the curriculum. The importance of safe practices has a high priority in all activities delivered. Equality and diversity are integral to the curriculum and promoted throughout the provision.

What does Milton Keynes College need to do to improve further?

- Introduce further opportunities for learners to discuss their learning programme prior to enrolment, to support them better in making informed career choices.
- Monitor and review regularly the strategies introduced to support the improved retention rates of learners, particularly at advanced level. Ensure that actions to resolve areas of concern identified in team meetings are implemented fully.
- Develop further learners' involvement in charitable and other activities in the community; introduce additional related qualifications to enhance and enrich the programme.
- Increase the use of ILT in teaching and learning, and particularly the use of the college VLE, to match teaching and learning more closely to individual learners' needs.
- Ensure the agreement and enforcement of a dress code on the uniformed public services programmes, to reinforce a public services ethos.

Science and mathematics

Grade 4

Context

39. The college offers A levels in biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and psychology. At the time of the inspection, around 100 learners were studying one or more of these subjects at AS level and a further 46 at A level. Some 39 learners are studying GCSE science and/or mathematics. In addition, 22 learners were studying for a BTEC National Award in Applied Sciences (forensic science). Most learners are aged 16 to 18 and almost all are in full-time study.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate and show a decline over the last three years. Although success rates in A levels are broadly average over the period, learners' outcomes in the larger AS provision are unsatisfactory; pass rates at AS level for biology, chemistry, mathematics and psychology were all low in 2009/10. Pass rates at A* to C in the GCSE provision are above the national average.
- Learners' results are in line with predictions from their GCSE results. In many cases learners are starting from a low level of prior attainment and are not making the progress necessary to succeed on their chosen course. In previous years, the entry requirements have been set too low for AS science courses, resulting in too many learners being recruited onto programmes they were unlikely to pass.
- Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. The college has comprehensive policies in place and is making good use of its electronic register system to monitor attendance.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers make a variety of effective checks on learning, including directed questioning which develops learners' thinking and makes links to previous learning. In these lessons, more able learners experience appropriate challenge, and the less able benefited from opportunities to consolidate their learning. However, in a significant minority of lessons, learners are passive and questioning is insufficiently challenging.
- Teachers use ILT in lessons as a presentation tool with varying degrees of effectiveness, but there is little evidence of learners using computers in the classroom to enhance their learning.
- Assessment is good. Teachers set homework regularly and return it promptly. Feedback is of variable quality, but in the better cases it includes specific advice for improvement.
- Entry requirements have been raised and managers plan to raise them further. Learners are set targets based on their prior attainment, which are regularly monitored, with appropriate action taken. However, it is too early to assess the effect of these changes on pass rates at AS level.

- All learners on AS-level qualifications have a timetabled workshop session, where they can complete work outstanding. However, these workshops are not subject specific and are not staffed by a subject specialist. As a result, they provide limited support to learners.
- Links with school sixth forms for teachers to share good practice are underdeveloped, except in psychology, where they are having an impact on teaching and learning.
- Classroom accommodation is good, with all classrooms being equipped with interactive whiteboards. The three science laboratories are purpose built and of a good standard for practical work. Health and safety practice within the area is good.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Self-assessment is self-critical, but is over generous in its analysis of teaching and learning. Managers have identified the poor success rates in AS sciences, but the implementation of strategies to improve learners' outcomes has been slow.

What does Milton Keynes College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners are recruited onto the course which best suits their needs and abilities, by revising the entry criteria for AS-level study. Ensure that all learners have an opportunity to discuss their proposed courses with a subject specialist before being enrolled.
- Prioritise the provision of more effective timetabled support for learners with subject-specific workshops staffed by subject specialists.
- Provide more opportunities for learners to use ILT in lessons and outside the classroom so as to make their learning more personalised and independent of their teachers.
- Build upon existing links with local school sixth forms to enable the sharing of good practice for subject teachers, as currently enjoyed by the college's psychology teachers.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

40. Currently 1,172 learners take a range of courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy, complementary therapies and barbering from foundation to advanced level. The majority of these learners are aged 16 to 18. The college offers courses for school pupils aged 13 to 16 and 96 apprentices in hairdressing and barbering.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. On all courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, learners are developing a good standard of skills that equip them well for the workplace. The standard of learners' work is good. Learners demonstrate good, practical hairdressing skills when completing highlights and styling hair, particularly at advanced level. In beauty therapy, learners are confident and are working to a good, commercial standard.
- Retention and success rates have improved over the last three years and are around the national average. The college has rightly identified that retention remains a key priority for improvement. Success rates are above average in hairdressing at foundation level and at advanced level in beauty therapy and complementary therapies. Learners' progression from foundation to intermediate level is good.
- Learners' confidence and communication skills are highly developed. For example, in one lesson learners were able to discuss with confidence a range of issues when dealing with beauty therapy clients in practical lessons. Basic and functional skills are applied well to the subject area, and this is having a beneficial effect on learners' development, especially at foundation level.
- Teaching and learning are good. All teaching staff plan their lessons well with stimulating activities that focus sharply on what learners should learn from them. However, in the few weaker lessons teachers did not always allow learners to work with sufficient independence to develop their learning before intervening, and they did not always allow them sufficient time to complete tasks.
- In many lessons teachers use questioning well to check and develop learning. However, in the weaker lessons teachers do not direct questions to particular learners, allowing the more vocal learners to dominate and leaving other class members' learning insufficiently checked. Teachers' use of interactive whiteboards is mostly limited to displaying presentations.
- Assessment is good. Teachers and learners make good use of learners' diaries to record and monitor their progress in both hairdressing and beauty therapy practical lessons. A good variety of different clients supports learners and apprentices in hairdressing to complete assessments.

- The wide range of provision meets learners' needs well, with hairdressing and beauty therapy available from foundation to advanced level; the range is complemented with courses in barbering and complementary therapies.
- Extensive partnerships in hairdressing and beauty therapy with employers, local schools and hairdressing and beauty therapy companies have been established to support learners well. Learners all attend work experience, and many employers from the local community visit the college to give talks on their business, including a local solicitor giving learners an insight into the legal aspects of running a business.
- Learners benefit from regular individual and group tutorials. Literacy and numeracy support is good. The identification of learners' needs is timely and thorough, and learners enjoy good support both in and outside the classroom.
- Leadership and management are good. The focus on learners' attendance and the monitoring of learners' performance is having a positive effect on retention rates. Regular team meetings result in clear actions for improvement. Self-assessment is largely accurate. However there is some over grading of lessons.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. All learners treat each other with respect and behaviour is good. However, in lessons there are some inconsistencies in how teachers promote the consideration of diversity issues that may arise when dealing with clients. Learners are sometimes more confident than teaching staff when discussing such topics.
- Resources are good. Hairdressing and beauty therapy salons are of a good, commercial standard at Parkside. These include well-resourced reception areas that are monitored fully by staff and include computerised client record systems. Learners gain valuable experience with a good variety of clients. However, there are two older salons in a separate building which are in need of refurbishment.

What does Milton Keynes College need to do to improve further?

- Implement fully plans to review the length of full-time programmes of more than one year's duration, to keep learners more focused and to improve retention and success rates.
- Ensure a consistently high level of challenge for learners by spreading good practice in teachers' use of directed questioning and the planning of lesson activities that focus sharply on learning.
- Improve further teachers' understanding of equality and diversity issues and how teachers may plan consistently well for these in lessons.
- Improve the level of challenge for learners by the development of interactive learning resources that can be used on the interactive whiteboard.

Visual arts and media

Grade 3

Context

41. At the time of the inspection approximately 500 learners were studying full time on art and design, and media courses at the college at intermediate and advanced level. Most learners are aged 16 to 18; around 75% are on art and design courses with the remainder on media courses. The offer includes a variety of national diplomas, a foundation diploma in art and design, provision for young apprentices aged 14 to 16 in cooperation with local schools, and some part-time classes in art and media.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Data show inconsistencies in performance trends over the past three years. Success rates on intermediate courses fell to at or below average in 2009/10. Improvements in success rates on the national diploma courses are not consistent and in two of these courses success rates fell in 2009/10 to around the national average.
- Learners' success on the foundation course has declined over the past three years and was below average in 2009/10 as a result of falling retention. High pass rates for advanced courses are mainly at, or below, the high national averages. Learners generally make the progress expected from their previous attainment.
- The standard of learners' work is good, especially in media and photography, where independent research and enquiry are more evident, and in graphic design where professional standards of presentation and completion are standard on the course.
- Sketchbook work is strong where personal expression and contextual recording are emphasised, for instance in foundation diploma and graphic design. However, visual expression, especially drawing, is weak. Written critiques are often included in visuals layout; these are confusing and inhibit the development of critical enquiry.
- Teaching and learning and assessment are satisfactory. Schemes of work do not always relate directly to lesson plans and dissimilar formats do not help cross referencing for revision and review, or the sharing of good practice. In the better lessons, teachers skilfully introduced exercises, linking technical or specialised terminology and sources of information to practical tasks, making learning more relevant to future careers.
- However, many learners were not sufficiently extended by tasks that did not take into account prior achievement or individual preferences. Teachers make limited checks on learning, and these do not confirm learners' understanding or develop their learning. In a significant minority of classes, teachers talk too much, so that learners are passive and rarely initiate discussion, or their own enquiry and exploration.

- Assignments are often planned well as introductions to learning with contextual references to other cultures, artists and online sources. Equality and diversity are introduced in contextualising cultural study and featured as prompts and reminders in lesson planning formats. Opportunities for extending further equality and diversity in art, design and media contexts are not developed sufficiently, so that learners' opportunities for these challenging areas of study and personal development are not used fully.
- Assignments on some courses are community based or work related, but there are too few of these. This prevents learners who do not wish to progress immediately to higher education from developing a realistic view of employment routes.
- Most assessment work does not represent the impact of formative assessments on developing learners' progress. Internal verification is not sufficiently rigorous. It places too much emphasis upon the supportive nature of feedback, and insufficient importance on the appropriateness of assignments and the usefulness and accuracy of the feedback. This results in some over grading and feedback that inhibits learners taking responsibility for their own learning.
- With good reason, learners speak highly of the care and support they receive from their teachers and how, as a consequence, their confidence as artists and designers is improving. Individual tutorials are held regularly, focusing learners on targets for improvement and how they can take best advantage of resources. However, individual learning plans are insufficiently linked to assessment and the formative development of learners' progress.
- The range of provision and opportunities for progression within the department and to higher education are good. The wide range of courses, especially national diplomas, offers choice and variety of direction towards art, craft, design and new media. The majority of learners on advanced level courses progress to higher education.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Strategies to improve the quality of provision have had an impact on some overall course performance, the participation and performance of minority groups and internal lesson observation teaching and learning grades. However, improvements across the department are inconsistent and success rates have declined in 2009/10 in a significant number of courses.
- Self-assessment records actions taken, which in most cases are recent, and are not yet established as robust tools for improving the provision. Course review is focused often upon descriptive recording of events. It is insufficiently self-critical and not focused enough upon realistic targets for improvement.
- Some accommodation for practical activities restricts movement, access to whiteboards and projectors, and does not support easily the safe overview of machinery and the use of specialised facilities. This inhibits the acquisition of learners' independent learning skills, the range and structure of teaching, and the achievement of appropriate vocational standards of work.

What does Milton Keynes College need to do to improve further?

- Prioritise the improvement of teachers' use of questioning techniques and critical challenge in lessons to enable learners to become more analytical and evaluative of their own learning.
- Focus assessment processes more upon the critical narrative and the quality of feedback, so that learners have a clearer focus on their immediate and longer-term learning goals.
- Improve learners' access to industry-standard resources, especially in practical workshop areas.
- Ensure the sharing of good practice amongst teachers to improve the planning and interrelation of lessons and schemes of work.
- Improve the quality and use of targets for improvement in course review and self-assessment.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

42. Currently 474 learners aged 16 to 18 are studying on full-time programmes at foundation to advanced level. Just under 100 learners are taking AS and A levels. The majority are studying on vocational courses including introductory, first and national diplomas in business. Some 565 adults are studying on part-time courses, of whom nearly 400 are studying accounting.

Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates are slightly below the national average overall with adults performing better than learners aged 16 to 18. All learners in A-level law passed in each of the last three years and many achieved high grades.
- Success rates on most of the accounting courses are at the national average, but only just over half of the learners on the full-time intermediate accounting course were successful. Success rates for learners in vocational business at advanced level are line with national averages, but too few achieve a high grade pass.
- The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Learners on A-level law courses demonstrate a good understanding of case law and are able to articulate arguments well. Much of the work of business learners is of a satisfactory level, and some learners are successful in their involvement in marketing projects and competitions requiring them to pitch ideas to representatives from the business community.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but with insufficient good teaching. The well-planned lessons feature a variety of engaging activities within which learners are encouraged effectively to think and develop arguments. In contrast, weaker lessons provide insufficient challenge and include too much teacher input with learners being inactive for too long.
- The use of ILT to support learning has improved and learners value online resources available to them and the email support provided by teachers. However, learners comment on the slow and unreliable internet access.
- Assessment of learning is satisfactory. Learners on A and AS courses in law, business and accounting are set clear and challenging targets for achievement and these are systematically monitored. However, target setting is not as successful on the national business course where the monitoring of progress fails to ensure that enough learners achieve higher grades, as demonstrated by very low value-added scores.
- The broad curriculum offer that includes A-level, vocational and work-based routes meets the needs of the area well. There is a particularly wide range of accounting courses accredited by the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT).

- Good partnerships within the community provide a variety of guest speakers and opportunities for learners to become involved in marketing projects with companies. Visits enhance work-related learning, and assignments have realistic vocational settings. Although some learners on the first and national business courses have part-time jobs, too few have the opportunity to do work experience in order to enhance their employability and develop work-related skills.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Many initiatives have been undertaken to improve the provision, although procedures and the impact are not consistent between the A-level and vocational teams, such as in target setting and progress tracking. Strategies to improve attendance are effective and are monitored carefully by managers. Employer links have improved, resulting in a more enriched curriculum.
- A significant number of judgements in the self-assessment are generous in relation to those judgements reached by inspectors, including the judgement on teaching and learning. A key strength in the self-assessment in relation to learners making excellent progress is not supported by available evidence due to low value-added scores on some courses, indicating that these learners are making insufficient progress.

What does Milton Keynes College need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen arrangements to share the good practice in teaching and learning to encourage the wider use of challenging activities.
- Introduce work experience within first and national business courses to enable learners to develop further their work-related skills and to experience a commercial environment.
- Improve target setting and progress monitoring in the national business courses to support more learners in reaching their potential.
- Improve the rigour of self-assessment and action planning in order to drive up the quality of provision.

Information about the inspection

43. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's director of quality, 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 bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
44. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning lessons, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Milton Keynes 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	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection					
Full-time learners	3,417		2,514	903	
Part-time learners	4,081	271	246	2,743	821
Overall effectiveness	3	2	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3				
A. Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	3
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	3				
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2				
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2				
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
B. Quality of provision	3	2	3	3	2
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
B3. How effectively does the provider use partnerships to develop its provision to meet learners' needs?	1				
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to attain their learning goals?	2				
C. Leadership and management	3	2	3	3	2
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
C2. <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2				
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2				
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
C7. 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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