

Hillcroft College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 133053

Name of lead inspector: Janet Rodgers HMI

Last day of inspection: 04 November 2010

Type of provider: Specialist designated institute

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Information about the provider

1. Hillcroft College is a charity and a company limited by guarantee, based in Surbiton, South West London. It is a small residential college for women aged over 19. The college provides programmes for women who are educationally or socially disadvantaged to enable them to progress into vocational training, further and higher education and employment. Learners are recruited from across the country, as well as from London. The college offers a range of courses from one-day taster courses and weekends, to four-day residential modules and long full-time courses. It has 50 study bedrooms, a learning resource centre and a nursery. At the time of inspection, the college had 57 learners and was delivering 5 courses. Over the year, the college offers courses in business and management, professional and personal development, access to higher education, information technology (IT) and preparation for life and work, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), numeracy and literacy. The only subject area with enough learners to be graded during the inspection was preparation for life and work. In 2009/10, approximately 55% of the college's courses were externally accredited, either for units or qualifications. The college has a contract with the Skills Funding Agency and draws additional funding for specific projects from sources such as the European Social Fund, lottery funding and European Integration Fund. Its only subcontracting arrangements are with the companies that provide nursery, security and catering services. The college is managed by the principal, supported by a senior management team who report directly to a board of governors.

| Type of provision | Number of learners in 2009/10 |
|--|---|
| <p>Adult learner provision: Learning for qualifications</p> | <p>19 full-time learners 321 part-time learners</p> |
| <p>Learning for social and personal development</p> | <p>177 part-time learners</p> |

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 |

| Learning for qualifications | Grade |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Preparation for life and work | 2 |

Overall effectiveness

- Hillcroft College is a good provider. Learners can choose from a very wide range of courses that are offered over short or long periods of time. Teachers ensure that the courses are very flexible around learners' own circumstances. Staff give very good subject and welfare support to learners which they tailor well to meet their individual needs. Lessons are of a good quality and learners enjoy attending. Teachers use a good range of interesting learning activities. Hillcroft College is a safe place to learn. Learners develop good skills and knowledge which they use well to progress into work or further and higher education. They gain good levels of confidence in their own ability and set themselves challenging goals for the future. Learners who take qualifications have satisfactory or better achievement. However, on a few courses some learners leave before they take their final qualification.
- Hillcroft College is well managed. Managers, staff and learners are very clear about the purpose of the college and work well as a community to ensure its mission is met. Learners enjoy the many benefits of working with women from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. Teachers make good use of this diversity within lessons. Managers listen to learners' views and use these well to make improvements. They know what still needs to be improved and have suitable plans to achieve this. However, middle managers do not always use data sufficiently to set improvement targets or check the progress being made.

Main findings

- Learners' overall success rates on accredited courses are satisfactory. In particular, overall success rates are high on management courses but low on courses for accessing employment, further and higher education. Retention rates are high for learners taking courses that do not have an accredited qualification.
- Learners develop and acquire a good range of new skills. They gain confidence that greatly improves their economic and social well-being. Learners have strong personal aspirational goals and targets, particularly to improve their situations and livelihood, and help their children. The standard of learners' work is good.
- Learners progress well between the short and long courses offered by Hillcroft College and to higher education. Managers have developed suitable progression routes which they promote well with learners. Learners improve their prospects of gaining employment through the good range of volunteering opportunities established by the college with local organisations.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use a good range of stimulating learning activities, resources and computers within lessons. They skilfully ask learners questions that empower them and build their confidence. Learners receive good encouragement and support from their teachers. Not all teachers plan sufficiently varied activities in lessons to extend the more able learners or involve passive learners.
- Hillcroft College offers a good range of courses that is very responsive to the needs of the women who attend. Learners have good choices of flexibly delivered courses, at a variety of levels and with different attendance modes. Managers take great care to arrange the times of courses to fit around learners' childcare requirements.
- Managers maintain highly effective partnerships and links with referral agencies and specialist organisations to recruit learners from their targeted priority groups. They work well with partners to develop suitable courses and ensure the relevance of the curriculum. Current learners are benefiting from some of the more recent partnerships to gain interviews with universities.
- Learners receive good academic and welfare support which is thoroughly discussed with them before they start their programme. They are given very detailed advice and guidance about their studies and the help available. Managers have good links with external specialist organisations that provide support including an on-site counselling service.
- Leaders set a sound strategic direction and mission for the college. They focus strongly on improvement and sustainability in the strategic and annual operating plan. Hillcroft College has successfully re-branded. Learners and staff are very clear about its purpose. Governors very effectively set the college's direction and challenge proposals made by senior managers.
- Managers use data effectively to monitor recruitment, retention rates and the impact of new courses. They do not sufficiently analyse statistics on success

rate trends, progression rates and the impact of some improvement initiatives. Curriculum managers do not make sufficiently critical judgements about learners' success rates in course reviews and are vague about success rate targets for their courses.

- Managers place a very high priority on ensuring and improving the health and safety of learners. They carry out sound risk assessments of learning activities, rooms and external visits. Staff, including those of subcontractors, are suitably checked with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Learners feel very safe.
- Hillcroft College is very socially inclusive. Managers and staff take extensive action to ensure potential barriers to learning are removed. Learners' individual needs are thoroughly discussed and met particularly well. Teachers promote equality and diversity well within lessons and through their use of learning resources. Learners enjoy the opportunity to learn and work as part of a very culturally diverse group.
- Managers take very good action to improve the curriculum, facilities and support services. They make good use of learners' and staff views about improvement. Managers very effectively use the results of their observations of lessons to identify suitable staff development and share best practice. Learner satisfaction rates are very high, but questionnaire results are not sufficiently analysed for trends.

What does Hillcroft College need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the use of data in analysing trends in progression, success and learner satisfaction rates and the impact of all quality improvement initiatives.
- Improve overall success rates on some accredited courses through setting and monitoring targets with curriculum managers.
- More fully use all the contextual information that teachers collect about learners to better plan for the needs of individuals during lessons, particularly learners who are more able or less confident.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the support offered and given by their teachers and the staff in the learning resource centre
- the fair and equal treatment that they receive from staff
- the learning environment, enabling them to focus on their studies without distractions
- the full range of facilities on site, including childcare, residential accommodation and catering
- the mix of learners, including those from different minority ethnic groups
- being able to work with other women from similar backgrounds
- the bursaries provided by Hillcroft College that enable them to study.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the quality of the accommodation, heating and availability of hot water in the residential accommodation
- the range of healthier food options in the dining room
- the organisation of the timetable and teachers at an earlier stage in the year for the Access course.

Summary of the views of partners as confirmed by inspectors

What partners like:

- the way that Hillcroft College recruits learners from across the country, targeting specific groups and working with relevant partners
- the specialist residential nature of the provision for women
- the good levels of collaboration, helping them to access new funding and providing them with Hillcroft College tutors for jointly delivered courses
- the bursaries that help women to return to learning
- the progression opportunities that Hillcroft College offers that build on the partners' provision.

What partners would like to see improved:

- greater reassurance from Hillcroft College about the sustainability of the partnerships for the future.

Main inspection findings

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

4. Leaders assiduously promote continuous improvement and set a strong direction for the college. They thoroughly and regularly monitor progress towards achieving key objectives and the college's mission. Significant investment has been made in developing staff and learning resources, including technology. The quality of lessons is consistently good. Where teachers are observed, observers make good use of the results to identify best practice and plan staff development. Managers use learners' and staff views well in working towards improvement. Since the last inspection, key strengths have been maintained and most areas for improvement addressed. The inspection grades are similar to the last inspection. However, this is set in the context of funding constraints, to which senior managers are responding well by diversifying their income sources and strengthening the college's sustainability. Managers are good at recognising suitable strengths and areas for improvement in self-assessment, but do not always reflect a true picture of the satisfactory overall success rates on accredited courses. They do not make sufficient use of data to analyse trends or the impact of some improvement initiatives.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

5. Overall success rates on accredited courses are satisfactory, and are high on management courses and the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualification. In 2009/10, overall success rates were similar for learners with a disability and the various age and ethnic groups. Retention rates on non-accredited short courses are very high. Current learners have suitable targets to measure achievement on non-accredited courses, but this is a very recent initiative that started in 2010/11. The standard of learners' work is good.
6. Learners develop and acquire a good range of new skills and increase their confidence and self esteem. They make good progress. Learners set themselves strong aspirational goals to improve their economic and social well-being, and that of their children. Learners progress well between short and long courses offered by Hillcroft College and to higher education.
7. Learners feel very safe at Hillcroft College. Managers listen to their views about safety and security and respond to these well. They place a strong emphasis on ensuring learners' security and provide security guards throughout the night.
8. Learners enjoy their studies and many make a positive contribution to the local community including school initiatives. They participate in a good variety of volunteering opportunities. Learners also take on responsibility for, and make a valuable contribution towards, improving the college community. Learners on ESOL courses develop awareness of healthy diets through attending nutrition modules. Hillcroft College's catering subcontractor works productively with learners to ensure they cater well for different diets and ethnic cuisine.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

9. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use stimulating learning activities to maximise learner involvement and give learners on numeracy and ESOL programmes many opportunities to practise and improve their skills. They promote equality and diversity well within lessons and through their use of learning resources. Teachers use skilful questions to build learners' confidence and self esteem. Teachers introduce good external speakers to enliven and bring relevance to subjects. They use information learning technology well in lessons and encourage learners to access the newly established virtual learning environment. Learners receive good in-class support from their teachers and additional learning support staff. When asked to give feedback, learners articulate extremely well what they have learnt. Learners have good opportunities to study independently in the learning resource centre, which is open 24 hours a day, and through study skills support which is provided in a quiet area. In a minority of classes, teachers rely too heavily on handwritten or photocopied handouts, some of which are of poor quality.
10. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are suitably initially assessed. Teachers do not sufficiently use the results of initial assessment, and other information collected from learners, to plan for the needs of individuals in lessons. In some classes with a wide range of ability levels, teachers do not plan sufficient strategies to challenge the more able learners who complete their work early or involve the less confident learners in whole group discussions.
11. Hillcroft College offers a good range of provision that is highly responsive to the needs of women with varied prior educational experience. Learners have good choices of flexibly delivered courses, at a range of different levels and with varied attendance modes. Managers very effectively tailor courses to suit learners' needs, including those with childcare requirements. They have developed suitable progression routes which they promote well with learners. The college has made good progress in increasing the number of accredited courses, although take up is low by learners studying numeracy and ESOL. Learners value the opportunity that the college presents to focus on their studies away from home in a tranquil setting and without distractions. They have a suitable range of enrichment activities that enhances their learning experience.
12. Hillcroft College has highly effective partnerships to develop the curriculum and attract new learners. A recently recruited outreach team is very successfully promoting the college in different parts of the country and offering taster courses. They work well with specialist organisations that support mental health issues, single parents and offenders to further develop the college's provision to meet the needs of these groups. Current learners are benefiting from some of the more recent partnerships to gain interviews with universities.
13. Learners receive good welfare, financial and academic help for their varied and complex needs. All learners receive particularly detailed and very informative advice and guidance about their potential studies and available support. They

receive good pastoral and personal support, including the on-site counselling service. Learners with dyslexia receive very effective help in developing study skills strategies.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

14. Leaders set a strong strategic direction that is being successfully followed through the annual operating plan and rebranding of the college's mission. Managers, staff and learners are clear about Hillcroft College's purpose and strive to create a successful community. Managers work very productively with partners to attract learners from the college's identified target group and to attract funding to ensure its sustainability. Leaders have set challenging targets for improving success rates in the annual operating plan, but not all curriculum managers are aware of these.
15. Hillcroft College has very sound governance. Governors play a major part in setting the direction of the college and have a good awareness of day-to-day issues. They have high expectations and thoroughly challenge decisions made about the curriculum. Governors are provided with data at the quality and standards committee meetings, but they do not sufficiently use this to question the performance of some courses.
16. Managers place a very high priority on safeguarding and ensuring the safety of learners. All staff, including those of subcontractors, are suitably checked with the CRB. Staff carry out thorough risk assessments. They make considerable effort to ensure that learners' concerns are taken seriously and addressed.
17. Hillcroft College has a very strong ethos of social inclusion and ensuring that learners' potential barriers to participation are eliminated. Staff take an excellent approach to meeting each individual learner's needs. A very high number of learners receive financial help from the college to enable them to attend. Over the last three years, the proportion of learners who are socially or educationally disadvantaged has increased in line with the college's mission statement. Managers and staff promote the values of learning in a multicultural community well and manage any issues of discrimination or complaints appropriately. Managers use data effectively to monitor participation and success rates by different groups. They are developing a single equality scheme and action plan, which is at too early a stage to demonstrate impact. Although several staff have received recent training in specific disability awareness, managers recognise that they have not all had recent equality and diversity training, which is planned for the current year.
18. Learners have a very broad range of opportunities to give their views, some of which are highly innovative. Staff use these very effectively to plan improvements. Curriculum managers make good references to the high level of learner satisfaction within their course reviews, but do not sufficiently analyse responses to individual questions or make comparisons with previous years.

19. Hillcroft College has highly effective arrangements for quality improvement. Managers continuously review all aspects of the service and are swift in making changes. They ensure targets for high quality lessons are met by thorough observations of teaching and learning. Managers use the results of these observations well to identify best practice and themes for staff development. Hillcroft College has a well-established course review and self-assessment process. Curriculum managers use a wide range of evidence during course reviews, but do not use data effectively to judge success rates, progression, trends over time or the impact of some of the initiatives they have introduced.

20. Hillcroft College provides good value for money. Senior managers thoroughly monitor finances and value for money. Leaders have invested significantly in developing and improving resources. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced in their specialist field.

Information about the inspection

21. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's curriculum manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, Framework for Excellence indicators, the previous inspection report and the provider's own data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
22. Inspectors used group, individual interviews and telephone calls to gather the views of learners and partners. They looked at questionnaires learners had completed on behalf of the provider. They also visited lessons and taster sessions. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subjects the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Hillcroft 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. **Social and personal development:** all adult safeguarded provision

| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall | 19+ Learner responsive | Social and personal development |
|--|----------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | | | |
| Full-time learners | 18 | 18 | 0 |
| Part-time learners | 39 | 27 | 12 |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 | | |
| A. Outcomes for learners | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 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? | 2 | | |
| A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 2 | | |
| A3. Do learners feel safe? | 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 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development? | 2 | | |
| B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users? | 2 | | |
| B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners? | 2 | | |
| B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 2 | | |
| C. Leadership and management | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 2 | | |
| 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? | 2 | | |
| 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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