

West Thames College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130447

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Last day of inspection: 26 November 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. West Thames College is a medium-sized further education college in the London Borough of Hounslow. The main campus is in Isleworth. The Skills Centre in Feltham, four miles away, specialises in vocational skills such as catering, motor vehicle and construction and is a joint venture with the London Borough of Hounslow, the British Airport Authority (BAA), and local schools.
2. Around half of the students live in the borough of Hounslow, the remainder are from other West London boroughs and surrounding counties. Although educational achievement and levels of unemployment in Hounslow are around the average for West London, some wards in Feltham, have low literacy, numeracy and skill levels. Youth unemployment is high around Feltham.
3. In 2009-10, the college had over 6,000 students on roll; approximately 2,000 were aged 16 to 18 mainly full-time students. Approximately 1,000, mainly young adults, studied full time and around 1,600 adults studied part time. Around 300 pupils aged 14 to 16 studied part time and around 100 studied full time. The college enrolled approximately 20 apprentices and 300 on Train to Gain programmes, but these numbers have reduced in 2010/11. Sixty five per cent of students are of minority ethnic heritage and 55% of students are male. Thirty per cent of enrolments are onto intermediate programmes, and around 20% each are onto entry, foundation and advanced level courses.
4. The college offers education and training in 13 subject areas, but numbers are small in the social sciences and education and training. The largest curriculum areas, by enrolment and by student learning numbers, are Skills for Life, arts, media and publishing, health and social care, and science and mathematics. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) partner-provider programmes are community based.
5. The college's mission is 'to be a vibrant college, inspiring all our learners to fulfil their dreams and ambitions. Our outstanding education and training will contribute to a prosperous and cohesive community'.
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Lifeline Learning (Community based ESOL)
 - Summit (Community based ESOL)
 - Gurdwara (Community based ESOL)
 - Cute Dogs (Train to Gain National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Customer Care).

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2009/10
Young learner provision: 14-16 Further education (16-18) Plus Foundation Learning, including Entry to Employment (E2E)	91 full-time learners 282 part-time learners 1,157 full-time learners 41 part-time learners 684 full-time learners 17 part-time learners 55 Learners
Adult learner provision: Further education (19+)	1,129 full-time learners 1,602 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	284 learners 20 apprentices

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	Grade3
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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	Grade
Construction	3
Visual arts and media	3
Literacy, numeracy and ESOL	3
Foundations for learning and life	2

Overall effectiveness

7. This is a satisfactory college with some good aspects. The curriculum is well designed and students' progression through to higher education or employment is good. The Skills Centre offers a range of vocational programmes which are well subscribed, suiting the needs of students from age 14 upwards. Partnerships with schools and the local authority are strong. Pastoral support for students is good, as are support and provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The safety, well-being and personal development of students are prioritised. The promotion and understanding of equality and diversity are good. Curriculum enrichment and links to employers enhance students' learning experience, although opportunities for work-based programmes, such as apprenticeships, are limited. The new building at Isleworth incorporates excellent educational, social and sporting facilities. Both campuses are welcoming and student feedback is very positive on many aspects.
8. Despite the drive to improve teaching and learning, too many lessons do not fully meet the diverse needs of students. Quality improvement processes have not focused sufficiently on learning outcomes nor individual students' needs. While the monitoring of student attendance, punctuality and assessments has improved this year, targets set by subject teachers are not sufficiently detailed and specific nor focused on students' language, literacy and numeracy needs.
9. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory and improving for most groups of learners. Whilst adult students on intermediate and advanced courses do well, too few adult students on entry-level courses succeed. The college has not addressed this underperformance within language, literacy and numeracy provision which has a significant impact on student outcomes.
10. Communication within the college is good. Managers have generated a cooperative ethos and morale is high. College goals are ambitious. However, managers do not set sufficiently challenging targets and milestones to reach them. Management information systems have improved since the last inspection, but self-assessment of the provision is too generous.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates are high on entry level courses for learners aged 16 to 18 and on intermediate and advanced level courses for learners aged 19+. Success rates of adults on entry level courses are very low and declining. Success rates on work-based learning programmes are satisfactory. Outcomes for learners aged 14 to 16 are good.
- Students' economic and social well-being is promoted well. Progression within the college and onto higher education is good. Students feel very safe at West Thames College. Attention to health and safety practices is good. Behaviour around the college is good.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In better lessons, teachers challenge students effectively and pace their lessons well, making learning vivid and relevant. In too many lessons, however, teachers do not make sufficient use of a range of teaching methods to meet students' individual learning needs. They do not make sufficiently effective use of directed questions to check learning.
- Teachers' feedback on assignments varies in quality. While some teachers give students good, detailed information on what they have done well and how they can improve their performance, others do not. They do not make sufficient use of assessment outcomes to help students progress.
- Teachers set subject-specific targets, learning-support targets and targets for attendance and punctuality. However, these targets are not sufficiently detailed or specific and progress in meeting them is not recorded in sufficient detail on students' individual learning plans.
- Provision meets the needs and interests of the local community well. The college offers a broad range of courses from foundation level to higher education with good progression routes. However, the opportunities for work-based learning are limited. The extensive, well-planned enrichment programme supports students' personal and social development and enhances their studies.
- Partnership working is good. Links with local schools and Hounslow Borough Council are strong. The college plays a key role in the development of provision for 14 to 19 year olds. Links with community groups, support agencies and higher education benefit young people. Close links with employers ensure work placements and vocationally relevant experience for students.
- Care, guidance and support for students are good. The well planned and coordinated range of support services helps them stay on course. The success rate of students receiving specialist support is above that for the college as a whole. Students' progress is regularly reviewed during tutorials; the varied tutorial curriculum offers topics and activities of interest and value to students.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior managers communicate to staff well and have generated a cooperative ethos that ensures high morale. Robust safeguarding procedures ensure students and staff feel safe. Overall college targets are ambitious, but the specific targets set are not sufficiently challenging to ensure staff are fully stretched to make improvements.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff have a thoughtful approach to equality and diversity that celebrates the diversity and achievements of students and staff very well and has increased the proportion of managers and teachers from a minority ethnic background. Staff training is comprehensive and helps to promote teamwork and equality and diversity.
- Self-assessment and quality assurance procedures are satisfactory. Managers now monitor the performance of courses thoroughly. Judgments from the lesson observation scheme are over graded. Staff development has not focused sufficiently to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Self-assessment is an inclusive process involving most staff, but grades are over generous.
- The college provides good value for money. Financial controls and budgeting processes are rigorous and there is particularly good project management for major capital building projects that offer high-quality accommodation and resources for students and staff.

What does West Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on adult programmes in language, literacy and numeracy, especially at entry level, by urgently implementing the recommendations within the subject report.
- Raise learners' success rates so they are consistently high in all areas by improving the quality of teaching and learning, assessing learners' progress more sharply and by monitoring outcomes and progress more accurately through quality assurance processes.
- Develop teachers' skills so that teachers plan for the individual needs of all learners, and make better use of a range of teaching methods, in order to improve students' progress and outcomes and increase the proportion of good or better lessons.
- Develop the programme of observation of teaching and learning to evaluate the progress that students make during lessons so that the college's assessment of its teaching and learning is more accurate.
- Set and monitor more specific targets with students, based on a full range of information including prior attainment and initial and diagnostic assessments, in order to improve their progress and maximise their potential for achievement.
- Ensure that all students receive sufficiently detailed feedback on their assessments so they know how to improve.
- Strengthen links with employers to further develop vocational provision, such as apprenticeships, to extend the opportunities for learners.
- Improve the accuracy and use of data in self-assessment procedures to ensure judgements are accurate, all areas for improvement are highlighted and actions for improvement are put into place.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- supportive and friendly teachers
- being treated fairly and with respect
- the trips and additional activities organised for students
- good support to help them succeed in their studies, including support from assessors in the workplace
- good facilities and resources, in particular in the new building
- opportunities to get qualifications for career progression
- good practical training.

What learners would like to see improved:

- some aspects of timetabling
- better explanations from a few teachers
- better resources in a few instances
- the size of some classrooms that are too small for the number of learners.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- very professional trainers/assessors
- flexibility of assessor visits
- improved confidence and social skills in their trainees
- improved performance in the job
- ability to access funding to offer formal qualifications to staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more employer networking events at college.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

11. The previous inspection judged all key aspects of the college to be good, but this level of performance has not been maintained. Outcomes for learners are no better than satisfactory overall and show inconsistency over the past three years, with some groups achieving high success rates and others underperforming. Many strengths reported at the previous inspection are consolidated further and action has resolved some key areas for improvement. For example, management information is now used much more effectively by staff to monitor performance and action is taken if required. However, key weaknesses remain unresolved from the last inspection, particularly the high proportion of teaching that remains no better than satisfactory.
12. The draft self-assessment report available at the time of inspection was over generous in its judgement for many aspect and curriculum grades; inspectors identified areas for improvement that were not included. Quality assurance procedures are satisfactory, although not for sub-contracted provision. Senior managers and governors communicate well with staff and students and have their support and commitment. The availability of a new campus building, the financial health of the college and its strong, learner-centred ethos are strong assets for staff in their commitment to improve.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

13. The overall success rate on long courses in both 2008/09 and 2009/10 is around the national average, having previously been above the national average. Success rates of learners aged 16 to 18 improved in 2009/10, especially on advanced level courses where they are now around the national average. Learners aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses make the progress expected of them. Success rates of adult learners on intermediate and advanced level courses have been high over a number of years. Success rates are high for learners aged 16 to 18 on entry level courses. However, adults' success rates on entry level courses are very low and declining and have been for two years. Most entry level courses are in literacy, numeracy and ESOL; data on these programmes at all levels are unreliable. Students succeed well on key skill level 2 programmes, but success rates are low on level 1 application of number and communications key skills where enrolment numbers are high. Outcomes for learners aged 14 to 16 are good.
14. Success rates of learners on Train to Gain programmes are satisfactory and trainees develop strong vocational skills. The college enrolls very few apprentices and their success rates within the expected time frame are low. Good vocational standards are achieved in many areas, for example in catering and construction at the Skills Centre, and in hair, beauty and specialist make-up where students have won national competitions. Media students display strong technical skills.

15. Students' economic and social well-being is developed through a wide range of employment-related opportunities and enrichment activities. Students feel very safe at West Thames College. In-house security assistants are integrated into Student Services and are actively involved in a range of student events and activities, including the extensive sport facilities. Attention to health and safety practices is good and is clearly communicated during induction. Behaviour around the college is good. Regular informative events and tutorial sessions help students make healthy lifestyle choices. Students' contribution to the community is satisfactory. Students are encouraged to volunteer with community organisations and some are active in fundraising. Some curriculum areas are active in community events.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

16. Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. In better lessons, teachers challenge students effectively and pace their lessons well. They make good links to vocational and personal interests to make learning vivid and relevant. They include a variety of tasks and activities that meet students' needs effectively and check learning frequently. In some of these lessons, students take responsibility for their own learning and manage it well. In better lessons, teachers make good use of digital projectors and electronic whiteboards to help students understand concepts or develop their thinking. Employers and assessors provide good training and coaching at work for learners on work-based learning programmes. Inspectors also saw lessons in which equality and diversity were promoted effectively, celebrated well, and helped to build students' knowledge and confidence.
17. The college's arrangements for assessing and diagnosing students' needs are timely and effective and teachers are given information on students' learning and personal needs to guide their lesson planning. In too many lessons, however, teachers pay insufficient attention to meeting the individual needs of students, for example failing to adapt resources or their explanations to accommodate the needs of students whose English is not fluent. They do not use a sufficient range of teaching methods, questioning techniques, tasks or activities either to enable students who are struggling to make better progress or to challenge the more able. Too few lesson plans give sufficient detail on how additional learning support will be used to help students make progress. Although interactive learning technology is available, some teachers use it simply for the presentation of slides and not as a tool for improving students' learning and understanding. Too many lessons are dominated by the teacher, with insufficient involvement of students or variety in activity to maintain students' interest, motivation or meet their precise needs.
18. Teachers have well-planned schedules of assignments for students. They mark accurately and moderate assessments effectively. However, teachers' feedback on assignments varies in quality. While some teachers give students good, detailed information on what they have done well and how they can improve their performance, others do not make sufficient use of assessment to help students to progress.

19. The college has recently introduced a well-designed system to monitor students' progress in completion of their assignments and set targets for behaviours such as attendance and punctuality and for learning support. Most staff and students value the transparency and accessibility of the system and the information it provides. Subject teachers set separate academic targets. However, the targets set for students are not sufficiently detailed or specific and progress in meeting them is not recorded in sufficient detail on students' individual learning plans.
20. The college's lesson observation scheme and associated staff development programme have not been sufficiently effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The scheme has not identified the weaknesses in teaching and learning found by inspectors and grading is too generous. Lesson observation records are too descriptive and do not focus sufficiently on student learning or how well individual needs are met in lessons. Records do not provide clear information for teachers on what they are doing well and on what needs to be improved. Although an action plan for improvement is prepared following lesson observations, the recording of teachers' development needs, or their reflection on the feedback given, are often left blank.
21. Provision meets the needs and interests of the local community well. The college offers a broad range of courses from foundation level to higher education with good progression routes. Young people aged 14 to 16 from local schools enjoy a variety of vocational options at the college. A Fresh Start programme engages and motivates vulnerable and disaffected young people and their progression to further education and employment is good. GCE AS and A level provision offers good progression through to higher education to students who begin their studies on ESOL courses at foundation level. The Skills Centre offers vocational courses for young people in some of the most deprived wards in Hounslow. However, opportunities for work-based learning, such as apprenticeships, are limited. The extensive, well-planned enrichment programme supports students' personal and social development and enhances their studies.
22. Partnership working is good. Links with local schools and Hounslow Borough Council are strong. The college plays a key role in the development of provision for 14 to 19 year olds. Links with community groups and support agencies benefit young people, for example providing sexual health services in the college and close links with community police. Partnerships with higher education establishments enable students to progress. Close links with employers and external organisations lead to work placements and vocationally-relevant experiences for students, for example taking part in productions at the Donmar and Lyric theatres.
23. Care, guidance and support for students are good. The college offers appropriate and accessible career information and advice. The well-planned range of pastoral, learning and welfare support helps students stay on course. In 2009/10, the success rate of students receiving support for a range of difficulties and disabilities was seven percentage points above the rate for the

college as a whole. However, the college is aware of the need to evaluate fully the impact of all support. The team of student learning advisers, now trained and fully in place, monitor closely students' attendance, punctuality and progress during individual tutorial sessions. Group tutorials cover topics of value to students. For example, in sessions seen during the inspection, students were engaged in serious debate about discrimination and the different beliefs that people hold.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

24. The executive team and governors set a clear strategic vision for the college that focuses appropriately on improving the learners' experience. They communicate this well to staff and morale is high. The overall goals of the college are ambitious, but specific targets for performance indicators, such as students' attendance rates, are too modest to provide sufficient challenge. Students' outcomes are inconsistent. They improved for most students in 2009/10, but have not reached the level they were at in 2007/08. The college has consolidated strengths identified at the previous inspection, but some of the weaknesses remain unresolved.
25. The governing body has a broad range of skills and experience. Governors receive sufficient training and briefings for their role. They receive good support through very effective clerking. Minutes of board meetings are detailed, informative and show how decisions are reached. Governors evaluate meetings thoroughly. Strong links are established by some governors with curriculum areas and the learning resource centre staff. Despite the high levels of commitment shown by governors, they have not provided sufficient challenge to senior managers since the previous inspection and the quality of key aspects has declined.
26. Arrangements for safeguarding young people and adults are good. Staff and students feel the college offers a safe learning environment. Appropriate checks ensure the suitability of all staff and volunteers working in the college. Safeguarding records are comprehensive. Health and safety are prioritised and careful risk assessments are carried out for all relevant activities. Incident emergency plans are in place, including the facility to interrupt all computers within the college with a warning notice if required. An effective safeguarding committee reviews safeguarding procedures regularly. Safeguarding training for all staff gives them a good understanding of their duty of care responsibilities and how to talk to students about bullying and harassment. Strong links are established with a broad range of relevant agencies including the local authority, probation service and youth offending team. These partnerships help staff to keep students safe.
27. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Very effective training has taken place for senior managers, teaching and support staff. Staff adopt a thoughtful approach to the cultural needs of students and staff and deal sensitively with any issues raised. There is good promotion and understanding of equality and diversity in group tutorial sessions and students are clear about

what constitutes discrimination and its effects. Senior managers encourage the recruitment of staff of minority ethnic heritage and the proportion of managers, teaching staff and governors of minority ethnic heritage continues to increase annually.

28. Managers analyse students' outcomes and complaints thoroughly to identify any discrepancies in terms of ethnicity, gender and age. The performance of minority ethnic students aged 16 to 18 compares well with other students within the college and nationally. Black Caribbean and mixed-race students of this age group are less successful, but targeted action has improved their performance. The picture is less positive for adults, with several groups under-performing, particularly Black Africans on entry level programmes, and male students. Work-based learners are briefed on equality and diversity issues at induction, but subsequent progress reviews do not always check the development of their understanding. Provision and support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. Accessibility for learners with restricted mobility is good.
29. Arrangements to collect and act upon the views of learners, employers and parents are good. The views of students are collected through regular surveys and meetings. Course representatives are elected for all full-time courses, although not all part-time students are represented in this way. The student forum, Diversity, has a positive impact, especially on accessibility issues. Staff are responsive to the issues raised by students and have made many changes to improve the experience of students. The student union is active in the college this year. Parents are kept well informed of the progress of their children. Partnerships with key employers are strong in many curriculum areas.
30. The college's self-assessment and quality assurance procedures are satisfactory. The performance of individual courses is now monitored rigorously by managers. Students' attendance, retention and achievement rates are scrutinised to highlight any poor performance and corrective action is taken when necessary, although it is too early to judge the impact on students' outcomes. Managers have improved their use of data since the previous inspection. The college's lesson observation grades are over generous and the associated staff development programme has not been sufficiently effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Quality assurance processes for sub-contracted employer-responsive provision lack rigour, focusing mainly on learners' assessments. All staff, including agency staff, are involved fully in the self-assessment process. The college's draft self-assessment report was accurate and self-critical for some curriculum areas, but the use of data was insufficient and inspectors identified a number of areas for improvement that were not highlighted. Many aspect and curriculum grades were over graded.
31. The use of resources is good. Financial controls and budgeting processes are good and the financial health of the college is sound. Staff are well qualified. A major capital building project, finished this year, was completed on time and within budget; a new building project totalling £70 million is currently underway and on track. This new building features many sustainable features, such as an

improved energy rating, which is planned to provide better value for money through reduced energy costs compared to the previous buildings. Specialist equipment and resources are good in a number of areas, including media and the hair salon, and the college's new building is planned to improve accommodation further.

Subject areas

Construction

Grade 3

Context

32. Approximately 270 students are enrolled on courses in construction; 140 are aged 16 to 18, and some 54 are 14 to 16 school pupils are studying part time on the introductory diploma in construction. The college offers a range of full-time foundation and intermediate level courses in construction, mostly for craft learners. These include diplomas in bricklaying, painting and decorating, site carpentry and the certificate in basic plumbing.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates on the basic certificate course in plumbing remain good, although they have slightly declined from previous years. Success rates are low for the level 2 diplomas in painting and decoration and bricklaying, the latter due to learners taking up apprenticeship offers prior to completing their studies. Success rates on all other construction courses are at national averages.
- Students develop good understanding of health and safety early in their course. At a very early stage, plumbing students actively and without prompting ensure safe working practices are adopted, such as the wearing of personal protective equipment and maintaining safe working areas at all times.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in practical lessons where students make good progress. In a carpentry lesson, learners new to the college had developed good skills in using wood tools along with sound technical knowledge needed in forming various wood joints. Standards produced were good. Teachers use their industrial experience in providing good demonstrations that are followed up with individual support when the learners require help.
- When teaching theory, teachers use too narrow a range of teaching strategies that do not meet the differing needs of students. Information learning technology (ILT) is mostly used to support whole-group explanations rather than imaginatively to develop students' knowledge and understanding. In addition, in a small number of lessons, checking of learning is insufficiently developed. Written feedback on learners' work is very supportive, but does not always guide students on how to improve.
- The range of provision is satisfactory and relevant to students' career and employment goals. Progression opportunities onto advanced level courses and apprenticeship programmes are taken locally through other providers and employers.
- Well-planned construction-related site visits ensure students have the opportunity to experience and develop construction employability behaviours. In addition, students make good use in developing their employability skills of

realistic college projects, such as working with contractors in laying a concrete floor for an extended brickwork workshop.

- Support and guidance for students are good. Initial assessment is used well to plan support and further develop students in reviews. Support staff are effective and provide good individual support to students both within and outside lessons. On-going guidance enables students to develop options either into work, as apprentices, or other local colleges.
- Equality and diversity are well promoted. Tutorials follow key equality themes that are discussed and contextualised by students. Two women teachers in plumbing challenge typical male stereotypical views in the construction industry by clearly supporting students in their skill development.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers and teachers have good relationships, are enthusiastic and are focused on improvement. Self-assessment is accurate and robust in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Effective partnerships with local schools ensure good 14 to 16 provision in which most learners achieve. Actions for monitoring learner progress are not sufficiently developed or coordinated.
- Resources are generally fit for purpose. However, bays in painting and decorating are cramped when occupied by more than one student. The open sides to a bricklaying area, although creating outside weather conditions, do not allow students to apply correct finishes to their work, as work remains too wet when the weather is cold and damp. Although adequate, assessors in plumbing are part time and pose a high risk to learners' progress if absent.

What does West Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates in painting and decorating by ensuring that each learner's progress is carefully monitored and teaching techniques meet each learner's needs.
- Ensure theory lessons use a range of learning activities, including ILT, to challenge varying levels of students' abilities, and to check that learning is taking place.
- In written feedback, provide specific guidance for students on what they need to do and how they need to do this to improve the quality of their work.
- Coordinate all strategies to retain students, which are being developed or are currently in place, to enable better communication and speedy actions to keep students on course.
- Review and implement changes to workshops in both bricklaying and painting and decorating so that learning experiences are not hampered.

Visual arts and media

Grade 3

Context

33. Approximately 340 students study full time on art and design, animation, media production, photography and film studies, on intermediate and advanced level courses. The offer includes both vocational programmes and GCSE A and AS subjects. Around 55% students are on visual arts courses and 45% are on media courses. Most students are aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses. Just over half are female and 61% are from minority ethnic groups.

Key findings

- Outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates on GCSE A and AS levels in media, in film studies, and on the national diploma in media are good. The diploma in foundation studies has consistently high success rates. Outcomes on the national diploma in art and design are satisfactory. Success rates on intermediate programmes are well below the national average.
- The attainment of high grades on most courses is well below the national average. Students make the progress expected of them based on their prior attainment. In the week of inspection, attendance was good.
- Standards of work are good, especially in media and animation. Students gain good technical skills and produce professional-quality corporate videos for businesses. Progression opportunities are good. Around 60% of students progress to higher level courses at university. Teachers have current industry experience and can offer specialist careers advice to students. All courses have a strong vocational focus.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The better teaching sessions are energetic and engage all students, and are mostly in media. They have a good variety of activities with well-planned resources, accessible through the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). ILT, such as web-based videos, is used well to enhance learning. Students are motivated and participate well, and their learning is checked by open and targeted questioning.
- Some lessons are at a slow pace and the needs of individual students are not always met. Opportunities to consolidate learning are not always planned. Some written feedback is not extensive or specific enough to promote improvements. Questioning techniques and learner focus are better in media classes.
- Support for students is good. Teachers know their students well and are sensitive to their needs. They offer personal support, pastoral, academic and specialist, which students value. Learning support is put in place quickly once the need is identified. Closer monitoring of students' progress through a new VLE tracking system is contributing to improved retention.
- Students have well-planned, relevant enrichment opportunities, including educational trips and visits to extend their studies. For example, students have worked with the National Trust to make a documentary film and have filmed,

edited and broadcast a conference at a major London venue. Opportunities such as attending architectural workshops raise ambitions and aspirations.

- Media accommodation is outstanding in a new purpose-built building. A professional TV studio and recording studio with four Mac suites for digital editing enhance the learning experience for students. Industry-standard software is available to support media work. A new art building will be completed by the summer. Health and safety for specialist areas are good.
- Leadership and management in this area are satisfactory. Strategies to improve retention and achievement are beginning to show results. Communication is good and there is good team working. Staff feel well supported, and are keen to implement strategies for improvement. They have begun a process of self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses as part of a process to improve their teaching.
- Grades awarded through the college observation system of teaching and learning are over generous. Issues identified in observations are not always closely monitored. Quality improvement learning coaches are used to improve teaching and learning with group training and development sessions. Staff share some good practice through peer observations.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is recognised through lack of stereotyping in assignments and visits to culturally-diverse exhibitions. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and identifies most areas for improvement, but there is insufficient emphasis on improving teaching and learning.

What does West Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on intermediate level programmes through close monitoring of learners' attendance and progress and planning for their needs better in each session.
- Ensure individualised learning opportunities are available in each session to improve the quality of teaching and learning and increase the proportion of high grades achieved.
- Ensure questioning techniques check the understanding of students and consolidate their learning, especially in art and design classes.
- Leadership and management should focus attention on securing improvements in teaching and learning through more rigorous lesson observations and through the sharing of the good practice from media.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Grade 3

Context

34. Approximately 3,000 students study on full- and part-time literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes, some in the community. Of these, 66% attend functional skills, 21% adult ESOL, literacy and numeracy classes, 8% outreach ESOL and 107 learners attend integrated language and vocational classes. Around two thirds of students are women. Over 80% are from minority ethnic groups. All students have the opportunity to take nationally-accredited qualifications from entry to level 2.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory, but very mixed. Success rates for ESOL learners aged 16 to 18 are very high, but for adults are well below national averages, especially at entry level. Outcomes on numeracy courses are high, but on literacy courses they are high at level 2 and low at level 1. Success rates on key skills level 2 programmes rose to a high rate in 2009/10. However, they are very low at level 1. Success rates for functional skills level 1 in English are high, but very low for numeracy.
- Learner progress in lessons is satisfactory overall, but good in some better lessons. Lesson topics are relevant to students' lives, for example they learn language for science and for using public transport.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, teaching promotes good skills development, meets the needs of individual learners and uses technology well. However, in most lessons, individual learning needs are not met; more advanced learners are not challenged whilst others struggle to cope with the task. Teaching strategies are not always effective. For example, stronger learners take over the task and teachers do not use targeted questioning sufficiently to engage less confident students.
- The process of initial assessment, target setting and progress review makes insufficient use of assessment outcomes to set learner-specific targets, and plan and review learning. Feedback on vocabulary and spelling is good but is poor on aspects of spoken English, such as pronunciation, stress and intonation in ESOL classes.
- The range of provision is good. Students have a choice of vocational and academic pathways. For example, the pre-GCSE courses and vocational courses with English language and work experience provide very effective bridges to further education and employment. Progression is good, both within language, literacy and numeracy provision and onto vocational and academic courses, including progression from the integrated language and vocational courses onto higher level programmes.
- Support for full-time students is good. Young learners have access to student learner advisers who advise and guide them well and liaise with curriculum

teams and managers to support their needs. Support for part-time students is satisfactory.

- Partnerships are satisfactory. Student learning advisers work closely with social workers who guide and support 16 to 18 students. Effective links with employers create good opportunities for work experience for ESOL students.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Outcome data for this provision are unreliable and not used well to monitor provision across the area of learning. The management of subcontracted provision has been weak. Recently-introduced systems and procedures to improve the use of data, monitor provision and manage subcontracted provision appear effective. There is substantial improvement in retention and attendance rates compared to last year.
- The observation of teaching and learning is presenting an overly-positive view of the quality of teaching and learning, with higher grades awarded by college observers than graded during inspection. Many reports contain descriptive statements rather than evaluative judgements and the focus is on teaching rather than learning.

What does West Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Review the use of assessment to plan learning and set targets to raise the quality of provision and improve outcomes for learners.
- Ensure appropriate challenge across the diverse range of the students so that all achieve to their full potential.
- Provide feedback on ESOL learners' spoken language in lessons in order to develop their speaking and listening skills.
- Gather and use accurate data on retention, achievement and success to effectively monitor provision.
- Review the observation process in order to focus judgements on the quality of learning outcomes.

Foundations for learning and life

Grade 2

Context

35. Of the 117 students within the supported learning area, 12 are aged 14 to 16, 73 are aged 16 to 18 and the remainder are over 19. Half of all students are from a minority ethnic group, 65% are full time and 46% are female. Courses are offered from pre-entry to entry level 3. Students study independent living skills, literacy and numeracy and vocational options delivered by mainstream staff. Students from the five school link programmes and pre-entry learners work towards a college certificate.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Entry-level learners have consistently achieved externally-accredited awards above national averages for the past four years. Many pre-entry learners improve by at least one milestone. Many learners achieve an award in adult literacy and/or numeracy. However, the recording of non-accredited achievement is not always sufficiently robust to allow for accurate measurement of skills development.
- Learners develop a good range of skills. They improve their ability to communicate and self-advocate well. For example, in one class, learners were able to debate well on a stimulating and relevant topic. In another class they took part in a role play relating to booking a taxi cab after a night out. They make good gains in confidence and self-esteem. For many learners this is a very significant achievement.
- Progression is good. The great majority of entry-level students progress on to a mainstream course at the college. Students enjoy their learning. They work well and cooperatively together in classes which contain a wide variety of needs and abilities. They improve their independent living skills well through topics such as cookery, running a college cafe and working in a community garden. They feel safe in the college.
- Lessons are lively and stimulating. Support staff are deployed well and promote independent learning. A range of mainstream staff deliver vocational classes which add breadth to the learning experience, for example sport, drama, music and photography. Tutors generally have high expectations of learners and challenge them well. In many classes tutors do not plan well enough to meet learners' individual and specific needs.
- Target setting is frequently too generic to offer sufficient guidance to learners and staff and to provide a robust baseline from which to measure progress. Targets are not shared sufficiently across the curriculum. It is not always possible to be certain when a target has been fully achieved. The resulting grade from the initial and diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy does not always fully capture the complex profile of learners' abilities.
- Students benefit from a good range of enrichment activities. For example, they take part in an annual residential visit to a holiday camp. They have visited a

local adventure park where they developed new skills and exceeded their own expectations as to what they could achieve. The football team meets regularly and the members have won a national trophy. Students enjoy their weekly swimming class.

- The range of provision meets the needs and interests of the learners well. All entry-level learners take part in work experience with a wide range of external employers. A few gain employment as a result of this activity. The college works well with five link schools and the great majority of learners from this programme progress to a course at the college. Close working links to various mainstream vocational areas within the college improve the learner experience and lead to progression for many entry-level learners.
- Support for learners is good. Connexions staff visit weekly and offer good advice and guidance. Regular group tutorials enable learners to have a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities. The course handbook is easily accessible to learners and uses a range of visual images well to aid understanding. The work experience booklet is comprehensive and provides useful information. Links to support agencies and therapists are good.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good overall. The supported living area within the college provides an inclusive learning environment. Staff treat learners with great respect. In a few lessons there are missed opportunities to promote aspects of equality and diversity.
- Management of the provision is good. Staff, including agency staff, are well supported and attend a wide range of useful training and development activities. A regular meeting schedule ensures close team working, the sharing of best practice and effective strategies for working with learners. Staff review challenging targets for successful outcomes and attendance regularly.
- The self-assessment report, although broadly accurate, failed to note the areas for development found during the inspection. Observations of teaching and learning focus too much on the performance of the teacher and not on the learning taking place. Although stakeholders' views are gathered informally, there is insufficient formal information gathering and subsequent analysis of evidence.

What does West Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the assessment of literacy and numeracy to ensure it provides a clear baseline profile of learners' abilities.
- Improve the setting and sharing of targets to enable a more robust measurement of achievement. Improve the planning and recording of individual learning to ensure it fully meets all learners' specific needs.
- Improve the rigour of the self-assessment process and include stakeholders' views. Ensure observations of teaching and learning focus on learning outcomes.

Information about the inspection

36. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the college's Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality (cross college), 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.

37. 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 provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes across the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
West Thames 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					
Full-time learners	2,996	44	1,843	1,109	
Part-time learners	1,460	260	7	1,150	43
Overall effectiveness	3	2	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<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>	3				
Quality of provision	3	2	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
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?	2				
Leadership and management	3				
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3				
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?	3				
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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