

Sandwell College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130479

Name of lead inspector: Lindsay Hebditch HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address:
Pound Road
Oldbury
West Midlands
B68 8NA

Telephone number: 0121 556 6000

Information about the provider

1. Sandwell College is a medium-sized general further education (FE) college situated in the West Midlands. It has three main campuses in Oldbury, Smethwick and West Bromwich but the college intends to move into new accommodation in West Bromwich in 2011/12, at which point the three existing campuses will close.
2. The college provides courses in all subject areas with the exception of agriculture, horticulture and animal care but with more than one half of learners following programmes in preparation for life and work. Approximately two thirds of learners are adults. More than half of all learners follow courses at entry, foundation and intermediate levels. The majority of learners aged 16 to 18 follow full-time courses and the majority of adult learners follow part-time courses. Pupils aged 14 to 16 attend the college as part of their school Key Stage 4 programme and follow courses in engineering and hairdressing and beauty therapy. The college's employer responsive provision includes the Train to Gain programme and apprenticeships in five subject areas.
3. Levels of deprivation are high in Sandwell and the number of Year 11 pupils who achieve five A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics is well below the national average. The local unemployment rate is well above average. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups at the college is 55%, above the figure locally. The college has more female learners than male learners. The Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency fund the majority of the college's provision.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - University of Wolverhampton
 - Thames Valley University
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider/college:
 - Holly Lodge School
 - Smethwick Youth Community Centre
 - West Bromwich Albion Football Club
 - YMCA – West Bromwich

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	77 part-time learners
Further education (16 to 18)	1,428 full-time learners 346 part-time learners
Foundation learning	723 full-time learners 199 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	498 full-time learners 3,763 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	514 learners 375 apprentices

Summary report

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

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

Subject Areas	Grade
Health, social care and child development	2
Construction	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	2

Overall effectiveness

6. Outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates for learners have increased since the last inspection and are now close to the most recent national rates. Success rates in work-based learning are good. Learners develop satisfactory levels of specialist skills and make the progress expected of them, based on their starting points. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The most effective lessons are planned well and challenge learners' understanding. However, nearly half of the lessons observed were satisfactory because teachers place too much emphasis on teaching, rather than learning. Assessment is satisfactory but good in work-based learning. The quality of marking varies but generally provides learners with sufficient information about how they could improve it. Learners' targets frequently provide insufficient detail about their next steps in learning and this slows their progress. Provision meets the needs of learners well and partnerships are good. The college works well with a wide range of partners, helping it to maintain its strong commitment to social inclusion and develop provision, which is closely matched to local community needs. Care, guidance and support are good. Learners who receive additional

support to improve their literacy and numeracy achieve higher success rates than those who do not receive it. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has faced a variety of challenges relating to its finances and building project but has reduced its deficit and is expecting to deliver its new building on time and within budget. The college has yet to establish challenging performance targets for the new college. The promotion of safeguarding and equality and diversity is good. Management information is used well to monitor college provision and learners' views are sought and acted upon.

Main findings

- Success rates have increased and on the majority of courses are now close to the most recent national average. The increase has been most marked on courses for adults where success rates have risen at a faster rate than the average for similar colleges. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have improved more slowly and they were low for learners following advanced level courses in 2009/10.
- Work-based learners achieve good outcomes. The proportion of apprentices and learners following the Train to Gain programme who achieve their qualifications within the agreed time is well above average.
- Learners make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points and mostly achieve satisfactory levels of specific vocational skills. There are no significant differences in performance between learners on long courses grouped according to their gender or ethnic heritage. Learners who find learning difficult achieve at least as well as other learners.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons teachers use information on learners' prior attainment well to plan learning and help learners make good progress. In less successful lessons, too much emphasis is placed on teaching, rather than learning, and progress is much slower.
- Assessment practices are satisfactory overall but good in work-based learning. Most learners have targets but they frequently contain insufficient detail to inform next steps in learning, thus slowing learners' progress. The quality of marking varies between departments. Although most teachers provide helpful comments on how learners could improve their work this good practice is not employed consistently.
- Provision matches the needs and interests of users well with courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in nearly all subject areas. The college has been successful in increasing its range of higher education (HE) provision and introducing new subjects, including radiography, pharmacy and dentistry, where there is an identified local need.
- Partnerships are good. The college has strong links with a wide range of schools, community groups and other organisations, which benefit learners and promote inclusion. The college uses its links with employers well to develop training and assessment arrangements that are responsive to the needs of employees and those seeking work.

- Learners receive good information, advice and guidance, which enable them to make well-informed decisions about their choice of course. Good pastoral support and effective communication with outside agencies ensures learners with specific needs receive the best possible care. Learners requiring additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy receive effective help from an early stage but the college has not evaluated the service in sufficient detail to inform future improvements to its arrangements.
- The Principal and governors have a clear strategic vision for the college, which is based on a detailed understanding of the diverse communities it serves and a clear response to national priorities for training. The reflection of this vision is the development of the college's new campus, which is scheduled to be completed shortly. The college makes good progress in relation to its targets for participation. Targets for improving success rates are well developed at course and department levels but are not challenging enough at college level.
- Well-qualified governors provide good support to the Principal and college managers during the building programme. They monitor most aspects of the college's provision well but have approved a target for success rates this year that does not challenge the aspirations of learners sufficiently. Governors have not approved targets relating to the college's long-term strategic objectives.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good and the inclusion of learners, including many from hard to reach groups, is a strong feature of the college. Diversity is widely celebrated. Clear and comprehensive arrangements are in place to safeguard learners and staff training is effective in raising awareness of safeguarding concerns.
- Quality assurance arrangements are extensive. Managers deal with poor performance quickly, and in most cases effectively. Procedures for improving teaching and learning have reduced successfully the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons but a high proportion of lessons are satisfactory. Lesson observations do not always give sufficient priority to the quality of learning in lessons.
- Teachers are well qualified and the college is making satisfactory progress in relation to its targets for workforce reform. Staff development activities focus clearly on helping teachers provide better lessons but the college does not provide an adequate evaluation of the impact of its training. The sharing of good practice within and between subject areas is satisfactory and improving.
- The college listens carefully to learners and acts on their views. It recognises the need to develop further its arrangements for engaging with employers, particularly in relation to their involvement in quality improvement procedures. The college makes the most of its existing accommodation, although much of it is barely fit for purpose. Resources and value for money are satisfactory.

What does Sandwell College need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates still further by providing learners with clearer and more challenging targets, and giving them more detailed information about how they could improve their work.

- Help learners make better progress by ensuring that teachers use information about learners' prior attainment when planning their lessons so that tasks are better matched to learners' interests and abilities.
- Further develop teachers' skills by focusing staff development activities more sharply on learning in lessons and evaluating fully the impact of staff development on raising the quality of learning.
- Improve the rigour of lesson observations by ensuring that observers focus more consistently on the learning and progress that takes place, to enable the college to have a more accurate picture of the quality of lessons and so inform improvement planning more effectively.
- Provide more opportunities for employers to become involved in quality improvement procedures in preparation for their greater involvement in the new college.
- Set challenging performance targets for the new college and ensure that college managers are prepared fully to meet them.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- safe and friendly environment
- the mix of different cultures
- support by tutors in lessons
- work experience opportunities where available
- how their confidence has improved by being at the college
- presentations and discussions by visitors from local businesses.

What learners would like to see improved:

- opportunities for work experience across more courses
- learning environments and college accommodation in general
- access to computers to support their work
- progression to higher qualifications or employment.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- good communication with the college
- the quality of apprentices who have been trained by the college
- guidance provided at the start and throughout work-based learning courses
- how the college meets their particular needs.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more formal opportunities to make their views known, for example through visits to the college.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement Grade 2

7. The college is successfully negotiating a period of turbulence during which it is contracting from its existing three sites to a newly built single campus. The building project is on schedule and within budget. It will provide much improved accommodation and resources for learners. The college has achieved this feat at the same time as exceeding its targets for growth and meeting the targets which result from its difficult financial position. Governors have monitored most aspects of the college's business appropriately but have not had sufficiently high expectations of learners in terms of the targets for success rates they have agreed. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory and these have improved since the last inspection. This improvement is most marked in the success rates for adult learners which have increased at a rate above that found in similar colleges and for work-based learners whose timely success rates are well above the most recent national rate. Key strengths identified at the last inspection have been consolidated and actions to deal with areas for improvement have mostly been successful. Self-assessment is largely accurate and identifies the majority of the college's most important areas for improvement. The college takes good account of learners' views and managers are making good use of data to monitor all aspects of college performance. Quality assurance arrangements are thorough and systematic, although the college's view of the quality of teaching and learning is higher than that of inspectors.

Outcomes for learners Grade 3

8. Success rates have increased on the majority of courses and are now close to the most recent national averages. For learners aged 16 to 18 success rates on foundation and intermediate courses in 2009/10 were close to the most recent national averages but they were low on advanced level courses. A significant proportion of advanced level learners attended a local school through a franchise agreement that has since been cancelled. With the exception of learners who attended these courses, retention and achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 18 are satisfactory. Success rates on courses for adult learners have increased at a faster rate than the average for similar colleges and are satisfactory. Success rates for work-based learners are high. Apprentices and learners who follow the Train to Gain programme complete their training within the agreed time and make good progress in terms of developing new workplace skills. Learners of minority ethnic heritage achieve success rates that are similar to those of other learners and there are no significant differences on long courses between the success rates of male and female learners. Learners who find learning difficult achieve at least as well as other learners and learners aged 14 to 16 achieve satisfactory success rates. The majority of college learners make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points and develop satisfactory vocational skills. Dental nurses demonstrate high skill levels and are able to process dental records, provide

effective cross infection control measures and identify potential medical emergencies quickly and confidently. Standards of work are generally satisfactory but are good in health and social care and child development, and on courses in ESOL.

9. The development of learners' economic and social-well being is satisfactory. Success rates in key skills are close to the most recent national average and learners make significant gains in their personal and social development, making them better equipped to take their next steps in learning. Progression onto higher level courses and into employment is satisfactory. The college has good arrangements for improving learners' financial literacy but few learners have the opportunity to develop enterprise skills. The overwhelming majority of learners at all three campuses say they feel safe in the college. Learners adopt safe working practices in lessons, including the safe use of the internet, and behave appropriately whilst on campus. Attendance is satisfactory. Despite the limitations of its accommodation, the college has extended the opportunities available for learners to take exercise and more learners are participating in organised sports activities. The college has made appropriate efforts to encourage learners to eat more healthily but many learners do not eat as healthily as they might. Learners are involved in a good range of activities which benefit the local community and have good awareness of global issues through fundraising for national charities and college-wide events such as the 'One World' day.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

10. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the most effective lessons, teachers plan activities carefully to meet learners' individual needs; learners are fully involved in their own learning and are encouraged by their teachers to think for themselves. Teachers use questioning skilfully to check individual learners' progress and to encourage learners to provide their own examples to demonstrate how well they can apply what they have learned. Learners thrive on this approach, gain in confidence and make good progress. However, nearly one-half of the lessons observed during the inspection did not reach this standard and inspectors judged them satisfactory, which is a higher proportion than in the college's own assessment. These lessons are characterised by an emphasis on teaching and class management rather than learning. Teachers dominate the lessons by talking for excessive periods and provide activities aimed at the whole class rather than matched to the needs of individuals. Learners find these lessons less interesting, insufficiently challenging and they make much slower progress.
11. In most lessons, learning support assistants work well alongside teachers and help learners improve their literacy and numeracy. However, teachers do not always make it clear in their planning what actions they expect learning support assistants to take and their skills are not used fully. In work-based learning, teaching and learning are good, both on employers' premises and in the college. Lessons are challenging, proceed at a lively pace and support good

progress. Staff have a good knowledge of local industry and their well-designed activities promoted learning effectively.

12. Assessment overall is satisfactory. It is good in work-based learning. Procedures are accurate and fair but teachers do not always provide sufficient information how to improve assignments when they return marked work. Teachers frequently leave spelling and grammatical errors uncorrected. Learners' targets are of variable quality and they do not always provide a clear picture of what learners need to do, or by when. Targets are often insufficiently challenging and do not encourage learners to develop high aspirations. However, work is underway to record learners' targets and track their progress towards achieving them on an on-line 'E-tracker'. Work-based learners benefit from good assessment practices as staff have a very good knowledge of their capabilities and use this knowledge well to set appropriately challenging targets.
13. Provision to meet the needs of users is good with courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in nearly all subject areas and an increasing range of HE courses. The college is correctly anticipating its move to a new campus by refining its curriculum so that there will be a good match between the courses on offer and the accommodation and resources available to provide them in. The college takes careful note of the comments of employers and stakeholders in devising its curriculum so that it now offers courses in a range of new subjects including radiography, pharmacy and dentistry, and caters well for learners who require flexible modes of study because of their work patterns. The college has increased the range of enrichment activities since the last inspection and participation in them is good. Not all learners who would benefit from work experience have the opportunity to participate in it.
14. Partnership working is good. The college has developed highly effective links with schools, community groups, employers and other stakeholders to help maintain the college's commitment to educational and social inclusion. The college is very successful in working with its partners, particularly in helping to meet their workforce development needs. Partners hold the college in high regard and value its good record of keeping its promises.
15. Care, guidance and support are good. Potential learners receive good, detailed advice about possible courses from the well co-ordinated central administration team. Induction is comprehensive and memorable, helping learners to settle into college life quickly and easily. Procedures for identifying learners who require additional help with literacy and numeracy have been strengthened; learners who receive support achieve higher success rates than those who do not receive it. However, the college's analysis of the impact of additional learning support does not identify clearly the small proportion of areas and groups of learners where support has been less successful. Links with external agencies are good and enable the college to provide effective specialist support when it is needed. Learners understand who to approach if they are experiencing difficulties and value their individual tutorials. Arrangements to monitor attendance are good. Learners receive good advice on their next steps in education, training and employment.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

16. The Principal and governors have established a clear strategic mission and a vision for the new college which has at its heart is a continuing commitment to making a positive difference to the life chances of learners. The Principal and her capable executive team provide strong leadership and communicate the challenges which face the college clearly to staff so that the drive for improvement is a genuine collective effort. So far they have raised the overall quality of provision so that unsatisfactory aspects have successfully been removed. However, the college knows that to improve the many satisfactory aspects of provision to good provides a challenge which will require a much greater emphasis on target setting and detailed planning. The majority of curriculum management is satisfactory, but the prospect of the move to the new building has energised middle managers and encouraging signs indicate that the pace of improvement is increasing. Work-based learning is well managed.
17. Governors are well qualified and they have provided good support to the Principal and college managers during the building programme. In order to improve their knowledge of curriculum and quality issues within the college, governors have established a learner quality and curriculum committee which provides a greater degree of scrutiny than is otherwise possible given the dominance of financial and accommodation matters at full corporation meetings. Governors monitor most aspects of the college's provision well but have approved a target for success rates this year that does not challenge the aspirations of learners sufficiently. Governors have not approved targets to make their high expectations of the performance of the college in its new building clear.
18. The promotion of safeguarding is good. All staff and governors have undergone suitable training and have a good understanding of the systems in place to protect learners. Training is very effective in raising awareness and informing staff of how to report safeguarding concerns. The college has completed the required Criminal Record Bureau checks for all employees and members of the governing body and works closely with local agencies to safeguard more vulnerable learners, including those at risk of forced marriage. Arrangements to ensure the safety of learners based in the workplace and on work experience are comprehensive and effective; risk assessments are complete and up-to-date.
19. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college is highly inclusive and attracts most of its learners from areas of significant deprivation. The proportion of learners of minority ethnic heritage is high and increasing but there are no appreciable differences in the performance of different groups of learners and no significant differences in their views about how well they are treated at college. The monitoring of the performance of different groups of learners is done well at college level but curriculum managers do not analyse performance within their areas of responsibility consistently. Diversity is widely respected and whole college events which explain and celebrate different

cultures are popular and well-attended. The multi-faith chaplaincy develops learners' awareness of different religions and offers them religious and spiritual support. The college has appropriate policies and plans to satisfy its duties with regard to race, disability and gender legislation and staff receive good levels of training.

20. The college has developed good arrangements to engage learners in decision-making. The student council and course representatives provide appropriate points of contact for all learners to make their views known. The college acts on the views of learners and illustrates how it has resolved their concerns in prominent displays. Employers speak favourably of their dealings with the college but have little involvement in quality assurance.
21. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and largely effective. Managers use data well to monitor the college's work and hold regular review meetings to ensure that they identify and tackle any underperformance quickly. Although quality assurance arrangements with one franchise partner failed to anticipate poor achievements in 2009/10, managers have strengthened arrangements in the current year and now provide good levels of external scrutiny. Self-assessment is inclusive and broadly accurate. The college has largely eliminated inadequate teaching but progress in increasing the amount of teaching and learning that is good or better is insufficient. Lesson observation procedures are comprehensive but give insufficient priority to the quality of learning in lessons, resulting in some over-grading and missed opportunities to identify key areas for subsequent staff development. New approaches to staff development are developing well through a wide range of activities such as the 'swap shop' of good ideas and a website focused on sharing examples of good practice. While the college records attendance at training events and evaluates staff feedback, managers do not evaluate the impact of staff development activities on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
22. The college provides satisfactory value for money. Although the college has continuing financial constraints, financial controls are good. Learners' attainment of learning goals and progress are satisfactory. Staff are well qualified and although much accommodation is currently barely fit for purpose, resources for learning are generally satisfactory. The college's new building includes many features of sustainable design.

Subject areas

Health, social care and child development Grade 2

Context

23. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in health, social care and child development from foundation level to higher level. Of the 563 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 259 are aged 16 to 18 and 304 are adults. Some 196 learners follow full-time courses and 367 follow part-time courses. In total, 92 learners are at foundation level, 285 learners at intermediate level, 186 learners at advanced level and 15 learners at higher level. In employer responsive provision there are 131 apprentices and some 32 learners on the Train to Gain programme studying health and social care and dentistry.

Key findings

- Outcomes are good. Success rates have increased on the majority of courses, significantly so on the foundation level childcare course where the success rate is now high. Learners make good progress and often achieve higher grades than predicted, based on their prior attainment. The number of work-based learners completing in the expected timescale is high.
- Learners develop their skills well and gain confidence. They achieve good standards of communication, problem solving and teamwork, which all improve their employability. Learners research their work effectively and develop the ability to reflect on their own performance. In work-based learning, learners develop advanced skills in specialist areas of provision such as dentistry and radiography.
- Learners demonstrate safe working practices and are aware of the importance of confidentiality when working with service users. They listen to and respect the views of others, even when these may be contrary to their own experiences. Learners have a growing awareness of their roles, rights and responsibilities.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are well planned and take into account the needs of individual learners. In better lessons, a good range of creative activities and assessment strategies motivate learners and enable teachers to check and challenge learning. Where these good features are not in place, learners' progress is slower. Teachers use information learning technology (ILT) to enhance learning but it is more effective in some subjects than in others.
- Assessment is good. Teachers mark work promptly and accurately. Full-time learners make good use of their opportunity to improve their work and resubmit it. Well documented NVQ reviews and observations in the workplace ensure learners remain on target to complete within the expected timescale.

- Provision meets the needs of learners well. The college has responded promptly to the demand from employers in the local area for more specialist training, including both the introduction of new types of work and the development of specialist short courses including dementia awareness. Partnership working is good. Strong links with a broad range of partners enable the college to provide placement opportunities for learners in a good range of care settings.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Initial advice and guidance are effective and learners are placed on courses which match their interests and ability. Learners' targets vary but are mostly challenging and progress towards achieving them staff is monitored well in individual tutorials. Parents or carers and employers receive regular reports on progress.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers have been quick to respond to new initiatives and standards are improving. Teachers are well qualified and experienced and combine their talents effectively to make a strong and productive team. Safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity are good. The subject area makes best use of its available accommodation. Facilities for developing learners' practical skills are good.
- Self-assessment is detailed and accurate and the final report is reliable. The quality improvement plan focuses sharply on areas where improvement is most needed. Managers and teachers use the document well to target actions for improvement and are successful in raising standards.

What does Sandwell College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of less successful lessons by introducing more rigorous checks on learning and encourage learners to use interactive whiteboards, in line with current care practice.
- Further improve the consistency and quality of target setting and progress monitoring by implementing fully the new electronic tracking system.

Construction

Grade 3

Context

24. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in construction from foundation level to advanced level. Of the 397 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 221 are aged 16 to 18 and 176 are adults. Some 179 learners follow full-time courses and 218 follow part-time courses. In total 260 learners are at foundation level, 122 learners at intermediate level and 15 learners at advanced level.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates have increased steadily and most are at or near national rates but the success rate on the diploma in plastering is well above average. The retention of current learners is good.
- The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Although a significant minority of learners produce work of a high standard, other learners are not developing sufficient skills to enable them to progress to a higher-level course with confidence. Attendance is satisfactory but punctuality is unsatisfactory and not challenged sufficiently by teachers.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, learners make rapid progress, working independently and demonstrating good skills. However, less successful lessons teachers do not plan well enough to raise expectations or challenge the more able learners. Some teaching is dull, and fails to motivate learners sufficiently. The assessment of learners' work is accurate and consistent.
- The range of provision is narrow, with insufficient pathways to provide choices and opportunities for all learners. The college currently has no apprenticeship training, and only a few learners progress to advanced courses. The college has recognised that learners have insufficient opportunities for work experience and has increased the number of placements that are available this year.
- Partnership arrangements are satisfactory. The subject area has a few good links with local schools and community organisations. New and developing partnerships with employers and construction organisations are bridging the gap between the college and local industry, and this is beginning to improve the opportunities for learners.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Staff use initial assessment well to identify learners who require additional help and provide support promptly. Individual learning plans are monitored well but the quality of individual performance targets is much better on some courses than others.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent actions are beginning to have a positive effect on standards so that outcomes for learners are improving. However, arrangements to support learners into related employment or to gain industry-recognised qualifications are insufficient.

- Self-assessment and the ability of managers to evaluate critically the quality of provision are underdeveloped. Managers have not recognised key areas for improvement, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, or resolved them through quality improvement planning. The use of data is improving but it is not sufficient to provide an analysis of all aspects of learners' performance.
- Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Workshops are tidy, well maintained and contain a good range of training areas, with good access to tools, equipment and consumable materials. Most areas are able to access ILT to support teaching and learning. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in their vocational area. New staff receive support to gain relevant qualifications and undertake continuing professional development.

What does Sandwell College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the standards of teaching and learning by extending the good practice that exists in some areas, and by planning activities which are challenging for all learners.
- Raise the aspirations of all learners, particularly at foundation level, by setting higher standards and expectations, challenging poor punctuality, and ensuring that learners produce and submit work that meets industry standards.
- Improve the opportunities for learners to progress to higher levels of study and apprenticeships through a detailed analysis of current provision, opportunities for new course developments, and the development of strategic partnerships that can provide further pathways for learners.
- Improve the quality of self-assessment so that development plans focus sharply on areas for improvement.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 3

Context

25. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy from foundation level to advanced level. Of the 283 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 175 are aged 16 to 18 and 108 are adults. Some 222 learners follow full-time courses and 61 follow part-time courses. In total 59 learners are at foundation level, 152 learners at intermediate level and 72 learners at advanced level. A further 45 pupils aged 14 to 16 follow courses in hairdressing as part of their Key Stage 4 programme at school. In addition there are three learners enrolled on a hairdressing apprenticeship and six learners enrolled on a hairdressing advanced apprenticeship.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates are average on the majority of beauty therapy courses and for apprentices but are below average on the majority of hairdressing courses. Current in-year retention rates are high. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are high. Progression rates to higher level courses and into employment are satisfactory.
- Learners' work is mostly satisfactory and sometimes good. Learners have appropriate background knowledge to develop their practical skills and most make satisfactory progress towards completing their qualifications, although learners who take the NVQ level 2 course in hairdressing in one-year struggle to develop sufficient skills. Learners' professional skills are underdeveloped because the college provides insufficient clients for students to practice on.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan the best lessons well to match the needs of individual learners and learners enjoy them. In these lessons, learners make good progress. However, in a significant minority of lessons, teachers fail to make sufficient checks on learning and learners make slower progress. Learners work safely in practical lessons.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Teachers mark written work fairly and provide learners with useful feedback on how they could improve their work. Practical assessments start at a suitably early stage in learners' courses but the low number of clients reduces opportunities for assessment.
- The range of courses is good. Learners following NVQ at level 1 also cover aspects of NVQ at level 2, providing them with more challenging and varied work. The subject area has introduced a number of well-considered curriculum improvements this year, including the introduction of entry-level provision and the consolidation of a number of beauty therapy qualifications into a full NVQ at level 3 course.
- Enrichment activities are good. Learners enjoy many interesting opportunities for extra training, educational visits and careers talks by external speakers. All

learners undertake useful work experience in salons. Relatively few learners participate in sports and recreational activities organised by the college.

- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners receive sufficient advice when they join the college but inspectors found a minority of learners were incorrectly matched to the level of course they were following. Personal support is good and teachers give freely of their own time to help learners improve their standards. Target setting is satisfactory. Targets are clear and provide completion dates but do not provide sufficient focus on the development of skills.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers are excited about the prospect of moving to the new college and this has produced a real sense of purpose throughout the subject area. Improvements are happening quickly; the college has very recently approved a well-focused marketing strategy to increase the number of clients. The self-assessment report is evaluative but does not identify all of the areas for improvement found by inspectors.

What does Sandwell College need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates by ensuring that lessons provide sufficient challenge for all learners and that teachers make more rigorous checks on learning.
- Improve learners' professional skills by ensuring that they have sufficient opportunities to practice on clients.
- Ensure that all learners are on the correct level of course by improving the initial assessment of learners' ability and learning needs.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Grade 2

Context

26. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in literacy and numeracy at foundation and intermediate levels, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Of the 1,167 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 204 are aged 16 to 18 and 963 are adults. Some 203 learners follow full-time courses and 964 follow part-time courses. In total 1,139 learners are at foundation level and 28 learners at intermediate level. There are a further 36 Skills for Life learners on the Train to Gain programme.

Key findings

- Learners make good progress and develop new skills well, particularly the personal and social skills which helps them with future employment. The vast majority of learners meet their challenging personal targets and progress to employment or courses at higher levels. Staff record information about learners' progression but do not use it sufficiently to inform curriculum planning.
- Learners feel safe. The subject area provides welcoming learning environments in the college and community venues and learners from different backgrounds work happily and harmoniously together.
- Teaching and learning are good. The majority of lessons are lively and provide learners with relevant and interesting tasks to do. Teachers plan their lessons well to meet the individual needs of learners and ensure that they are all able to work at a pace which will enable them to maximise their potential. However, learners have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to develop their research skills and improve the presentation of their work.
- Assessment is good. Teachers use questioning techniques well in lessons to check learning. The use of peer assessment is highly effective. Teachers mark written work carefully and they provide learners with helpful oral and written advice on how they could improve their work. Work is of good quality overall.
- Provision meets the needs of learners well. Courses in the community are targeted at the areas of greatest need and prepare learners well for progressing to higher-level courses at the college. Learners in the college have access to a satisfactory range of enrichment activities and staff encourage them to participate fully in college life.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Tutors liaise effectively with support workers and external agencies to provide good levels of individual care. Staff identify learners' additional support needs accurately at interview and they provide support promptly. All learners have an individual learning plan which provides clear short and longer-term targets which are relevant and achievable.
- Leadership and management are good. The subject area has a clear sense of purpose and its development plans reflect local and national priorities well. Self-assessment is accurate. Communication is good and the sharing of good

practice is firmly established. Staff are well qualified and have good specialist qualifications.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Teachers specifically design learning activities in lessons to be relevant to learners from different backgrounds and they encourage learners to respect and value their differences.

What does Sandwell College need to do to improve further?

- Provide learners with better access to computers so that they can improve their independent learning skills.
- Continue to develop arrangements for monitoring the progression of learners into employment and further learning, and use this information to plan the curriculum more effectively.

Information about the inspection

27. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's vice-principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspections, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
28. 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 in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Sandwell 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

	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate					
Approximate number of enrolled learners Full-time learners Part-time learners	2,440 4,561	0 77	1,428 346	498 3,763	514 375
Overall effectiveness	3	n/a	3	3	2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3	3	2
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?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	3				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
Quality of provision	3	n/a	3	3	2
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	n/a	3	3	2
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?	3				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 1231231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk