

# Aylesbury College

## Partial reinspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 130607

**Name of lead inspector:** Alex Falconer HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 25 May 2011

**Type of provider:** General further education college

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## Introduction

Aylesbury College is a medium-sized general further education college with over 4,000 learners. Around half of the course enrolments are learners aged 16 to 18 and approximately 40% of all full-time learners are on advanced programmes. The college offers courses in all 15 subject areas, but most learners follow courses in health, public services and care, retail and commercial enterprise, languages, literature and culture, preparation for life and work and arts and media.

At the previous inspection in March 2010, the college was found to be satisfactory overall, with good capacity to improve. Outcomes for learners and the quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory. Leadership and management, safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity were found to be good. Of the five curriculum areas inspected, two were judged to be good, two satisfactory and science and mathematics were found to be inadequate.

Following a monitoring visit in November 2010, inspectors judged the college to have made reasonable progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the inspection and in improving the science and mathematics provision.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	3

## Context

The college offers a small range of science and mathematics courses, both full- and part-time to around 140 learners. Approximately 50 learners take GCSE mathematics and 16 take GCSE science. There are 45 learners currently studying either AS- or A-level psychology. Just over 20 learners are taking the BTEC diploma in applied science and around 40 are following an access to higher education human biology programme. A very small number of learners are completing A-level mathematics, human biology and science in society.

## Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. The proportion of learners who successfully achieve their qualifications in science and mathematics courses has improved slightly and, in 2009/10, was broadly at the national average. However, the proportions on A-level mathematics, AS-level psychology and human biology were below national averages. High-grade pass rates for GCSE mathematics have been at the national average for some years.
- The proportion of learners who complete their courses is satisfactory. Managers, tutors and teachers have worked hard to encourage and support learners to attend lessons and complete their courses. Completion rates

improved in 2010/11. Attendance has also improved and is currently well above the rate recorded in 2009/10.

- Overall, learners' work in lessons is of a satisfactory standard and is good in psychology and access to higher education. January 2011 module results show an improvement on previous years. In human biology and mathematics, at both AS and A level, all the learners were successful. However, in psychology modules, two thirds of the learners were successful and the AS module showed the least success.
- Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory. Learners make best progress in psychology, access to higher education and applied science. They use information and learning technology (ILT) to good effect in access provision and applied science. Learning materials on the college virtual learning environment are interesting and attractive, and learners enjoy using them in psychology, access to higher education and applied science. However, the materials for mathematics, whilst functional, are not very stimulating. Teachers and managers acknowledge that this is still an area for development.
- Teachers plan well and lessons contain a good range of activities designed to meet the range of learners' needs and abilities. For example, learners in a psychology lesson successfully revised for examinations using a 'circus' of different activities such as marking examination scripts, filling in crosswords on key definitions and identifying evidence to support conclusions.
- Managers have worked well to support teaching and learning. In the best lessons, teachers check learning and make sure that learners are fully engaged and busy. Teachers are appreciative of the new emphasis on improving learning and appreciate the professional development and support they have received. In most lessons teachers use directed questions to assess learners' progress but do not always probe deeply enough to explore their understanding fully. In mathematics, checks on learning do not always take place, the pace is too fast and some learners become anxious as the teachers move on too quickly.
- Assessment practice is satisfactory and tutors now track and monitor learners' progress well. Managers have developed clear procedures and expectations, and, as a result, those learners at risk of falling behind or not completing are identified more quickly and then supported. 'At risk tutors' are successful in helping learners to catch up and to improve their attendance record.
- Science and mathematics provision has been reduced considerably to eliminate poorly performing courses. A-level courses in mathematics, human biology and science in society, along with GCSE psychology, have been discontinued. However, subject area staff have successfully developed advanced vocational provision in applied science and are introducing an intermediate vocational science course for 2011/12. Curriculum enrichment is satisfactory. A range of visits and speakers meets learners' needs in the sciences. In psychology, however, enrichment is good.
- Teachers and managers have worked hard to improve guidance and pastoral support. Group tutorials are now more subject based and tutors are better able to meet the academic and personal needs of the learners. At key times of the

year, for example the run up to examinations, some teachers use the tutorial time successfully to mount revision sessions. Learners report that they find these sessions helpful.

- Progression to higher education is satisfactory overall, and good in psychology and access to higher education. However, progression from AS to A level is variable and in some subjects it is low.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers give clear, firm leadership to the sciences and mathematics. They have clearly identified the key weaknesses and have worked with energy and sensitivity to develop more focus on supporting learners to succeed, and on using the college procedures to record and support their progress. Teachers benefit from help to improve their professional practice and a good range of support and development activities.
- Teaching and learning observations have been strengthened, and advanced practitioners give thoughtful and appropriate support to teachers following observations. However, some lesson observation records are too descriptive and do not focus enough on evaluating learning. Managers are aware of this and realise that there is still work to be done in this area.
- Self-assessment is much improved and identifies accurately key strengths and areas for improvement. The quality improvement plan is highly evaluative and clearly records all the actions, support and developments that have taken place to raise learners' attainment.
- Managers have been quick to identify weak practice and to support teachers to improve or to use the college procedures to make changes. Staff morale is good and teachers are clear that the focus is on improving learners' attainment. Teachers promote equality and diversity satisfactorily on most courses, and have developed this aspect well in psychology.

### **What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?**

- Raise attainment by ensuring that teachers probe learners' understanding more deeply and by giving learners more time to explain their ideas.
- Improve the quality of learning in mathematics by ensuring that teachers always check learning and do not move on too fast when some learners are still unsure.
- Engage and interest the learners, especially in mathematics, by building on best practice in providing relevant and engaging learning materials on the virtual learning environment.
- Raise attainments of learners by a more rigorous focus on learning outcomes in the judgements emerging from the lesson observation scheme.

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