

Stanmore College

Partial reinspection report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Introduction

Stanmore College is a smaller than average further education college in the London Borough of Harrow. Courses are provided in all curriculum areas except for agriculture, construction and engineering. In 2010/11, there were 1,588 full-time learners of whom 1,384 were aged 16 to 18 and 204 were adults. Of the 830 part-time learners, 26 were aged 16 to 18 and 804 were adults. Employer-responsive provision accounted for 850 learners. Currently 79% of learners aged 16 to 18, and 70% of adult learners, are of minority ethnic heritage.

The previous inspection in December 2010 judged the college's overall effectiveness to be good; outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and leadership and management were also good, but literacy and numeracy provision was inadequate. The reinspection monitoring visit in September 2011 investigated six themes linked to the 2010 inspection. Inspectors judged that the college had made reasonable progress in four themes, significant progress in one theme and inadequate progress in one theme.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Literacy and numeracy	4	3

Context

The college provides day and evening adult literacy courses from entry to intermediate level, with a total of 97 learners currently. Approximately 92% of these learners speak English as an additional language. Some 30 adult learners are taking numeracy courses at foundation and intermediate levels which run for 18 weeks and start in September and February. In addition, the college has recently started a six-week course in literacy, with some numeracy, for unemployed learners who are referred through Jobcentre Plus. In 2010/11, 102 learners took GCSE English and 136 took GCSE mathematics.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates improved for literacy and numeracy at foundation and intermediate levels in 2010/11, although they are still below the national averages. At entry level in literacy, success rates have continued to increase to well above the national figures. College data for the newly designed 18-week courses starting in 2011/12 show a marked increase in success rates for all literacy and numeracy courses.
- Success rates for GCSE English and mathematics decreased in 2010/11, from 72% to 57% and from 58% to 46% respectively. Success rates at these grades in 2010/11 were above the national average for English and slightly below it for mathematics.

- Learners make good progress, particularly in adult literacy programmes at foundation and intermediate levels. They understand a wide variety of texts and increase the fluency and accuracy of their written work. Learners enjoy the social interaction of lessons and develop good communication skills.
- The use of initial assessment has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Staff ensure that learners are on accredited courses, or a non-accredited course where appropriate as an interim step to support their development before they progress to a higher level.
- Literacy learners have individual learning plans with effective and relevant learning targets. Staff and learners use the plans well to identify and record their individual development needs and their progress. The targets focus well on the specific language tasks that learners need to develop in order to reach the required standard. However, learning plans do not always include learners' specific medium- or long-term career goals to ensure that their literacy development supports their plans for progression.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good expertise in teaching literacy to those who speak English as an additional language. Learning activities are well planned and promote the development of learners' language skills very effectively.
- Large class sizes, particularly for entry level learners, slow the progress of learners in improving the accuracy of their work and teachers find it difficult to provide sufficient individual support and challenge to all learners.
- In GCSE English and mathematics, teachers provide useful tips to tackle examination problems and tasks, but they do not always assess how well learners perform under examination conditions or how well they study independently in order to develop these skills further.
- Teaching and learning materials have improved and learners enjoy using a wide range of resources that are relevant to their daily lives. Innovative use is made of internet resources. All staff promote the use of the college's self-study resources well, but do not provide sufficient guidance to learners on how they can continue to develop their literacy skills in everyday settings in their own time.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The post-inspection action plans for literacy and numeracy are detailed and provide a sound framework that has led to improvements. Managers and staff promote equality and diversity satisfactorily.
- Staff work well as a team and participate in a broad range of training events and meetings where they share ideas, learning resources and good practice very effectively. They use a revised individual learning plan across the discrete literacy provision to enable learners to progress between courses more easily. Managers have identified the need to increase the amount of numeracy provision available to learners.

What does Stanmore College need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates in GCSE English and mathematics at grades A* to C through the use of improved assessment procedures which support learners to complete tasks under examination conditions.
- Improve the independent study skills of learners by helping them to understand how to reinforce their learning independently.
- Ensure that class sizes are appropriate, especially for entry level programmes, to enable teachers to provide learners with sufficient individual support and challenge.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

What progress has the college made with its self-assessment and quality improvement planning to drive improvements in learners' progress?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection in 2010 reported that self-assessment and action planning were good overall, but targets were not always sufficiently precise. The college now has specific targets covering a wide range of performance indicators, including learners' rates of attendance, retention, achievement and success. Curriculum and senior managers regularly review progress towards these targets. The targets are realistic, based on the current performance of learners, and take full account of national averages from similar colleges.

Managers have developed detailed action plans to tackle identified weaknesses in provision. These include more stringent assessment procedures for AS learners and more extensive support for students shown to be underperforming. These actions are beginning to improve learners' achievements.

What progress has the college made to improve learners' outcomes since the previous inspection, particularly retention and attendance rates?	Reasonable progress
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Many courses have high success rates and the overall success rate for learners of all ages, at all levels, improved marginally in 2010/11. The indications are that this improvement will continue for 2011/12. Retention rates for learners during 2011/12 are higher than for the corresponding time last year. They have improved for adults and learners aged 16 to 18 at all levels. Managers are implementing more stringent procedures for predicting the achievement and success rates of learners and these indicate a likely increase in achievement and success rates in 2011/12.

Pass rates increased for the majority of AS modular examinations taken in January 2012, with significant improvements for economics, law and history. Overall results for literacy and numeracy provision have also risen, although the high-grade pass rate for both GCSE mathematics and English fell in 2010/11. The attendance of learners is satisfactory. In 2011/12 the attendance rate has improved for younger learners, and for adults remains comparable to that of the previous year. The results of surveys carried out during this year show that learners continue to enjoy attending the college.

What progress has the college made to improve the quality of teaching and learning through accurate lesson observations that lead to improvement actions for teachers?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection identified that the lesson observation scheme was effective in helping improvements, but managers did not always moderate accurately the

judgements on the quality of lessons, or monitor the implementation of identified actions for improvement. The college has addressed this area for improvement with great enthusiasm and vigour. The comprehensive range of staff training covers areas identified as a weakness at the last inspection, such as teachers' questioning techniques and meeting the needs of individual learners in lessons. This renewed focus on teaching and learning is exemplified by the appointment of a full-time member of staff to coordinate the work leading to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Heads of department now have clear responsibility and ensure actions for improvement are implemented and monitored. Performance management procedures are rigorous and managers tackle underperformance robustly. However, not all of the observation of teaching and learning records contain sufficient details of the strengths and areas for improvement for teachers. They do not all specify appropriate training needs with specific and time-bound targets.

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