Hillcroft College

Specialist designated institution

Inspection dates		13–17 December 2012
Overall effectiveness	**This inspection:**	**Inadequate-4**
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Inadequate-4
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is inadequate because:

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate as learners' achievement of qualifications is too low, particularly by minority ethnic heritage groups, on the access to higher education and GCSE mathematics courses.

- Managers have incomplete and poor quality data to analyse why some groups achieve less well, learners' progression, trends in success rates and the effectiveness of quality improvement plans. Learners' achievement rates are not improving quickly enough.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Most learners have insufficient targets or written feedback from tutors to help them improve their skills and work.

- The college does not offer learners enough opportunities to gain functional skills or intermediate level qualifications to help them progress to further or higher education or gain jobs.

- Leadership and management require improvement because while council members, managers and tutors have reviewed and changed many of its processes, introduced new initiatives and strengthened curriculum management it is too early to judge how effective these measures have been.

- When managers observe and appraise tutors they do not always identify early enough the wider underlying issues that affect learners' likelihood of successfully achieving. Tutors review their courses regularly to help improve the next course, but reviews vary too much in their effectiveness and not all are sufficiently critical or based on accurate data.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners develop good levels of confidence, personal, social and computing skills.

- Enthusiastic tutors and staff provide a very caring and supportive learning environment that has much good or better teaching and up-to-date learning resources that reflect industry standards.

- Managers and tutors use innovative ways to gather learners' views and invest significantly in improving the college's accommodation, resources and facilities.

- The college is a highly inclusive learning environment where tutors and staff celebrate diversity, challenge learners' perceptions and promote equality of opportunity well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Bring together appraisal, observation of teaching and learning and course review systems into a cohesive process that allows managers and tutors to identify and deal with issues at an earlier stage.

- Implement a data system that enables managers and tutors to monitor trends in retention, achievement, success and attendance rates and the impact of quality improvement initiatives.

- Identify why some groups achieve less well and set actions to improve their retention and achievement rates.

- Devise a mechanism for gathering and analysing meaningful progression data for all learners.

- Work with tutors to develop the quality of individual learning plans, targets and written feedback to learners so they are clear about what they need to improve and how they can achieve their maximum potential.

- Provide better opportunities to recognise, and where appropriate accredit, learners' functional skills learning. Review the current courses offered for information and communication technology (ICT) at intermediate level 2, GCSE mathematics and English to ensure they meet learners' needs sufficiently

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Inadequate

- Approximately 70% of learners last year were enrolled onto courses where they take an accredited qualification and their overall success rates were low and below national averages. Success rates are consistently very low on the access to higher education and GCSE mathematics courses, some of which is caused by learners leaving at an early stage in their course.

- Overall success rates on long courses have remained static for the last two years and declined on short courses in 2011/12. Learners on very short course had better achievement rates in 2011/12, but these remain below the national average which also increased. The college has strengthened its initial assessment and enrolment systems in 2012/13 and early signs of improvement can be seen in learners' retention in the current year and their achievement of units within qualifications.

- The small minority of learners who do not take accredited qualifications achieve their course objectives successfully and many gain confidence to continue with their learning. However, few learners have challenging personal or learning targets to extend or individualise their course objectives as these tend to be whole group targets related to the course objectives.

- Success rates by different groups of learners are too mixed across the college. Learners identified as needing additional learning support or with a disability achieve better than others, particularly those with mental health issues, visual or hearing impairments. However, success rates for Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani learners are low and declining. The minority of learners aged under 20 or over 60 have lower achievement rates.

- Learners develop good levels of research and independent learning skills, which is particularly impressive as the majority have few prior qualifications and have not been in learning for some time. Many learners overcome barriers they have to participation and increase their social and personal skills. They increase their ICT skills well through using industry standard equipment and software.

- Most learners who complete the access to higher education course progress to university, some of which are well known. Apart from the access to higher education courses and the starting

point weekend module, managers and tutors do not collect sufficient or reliable data about learners progressing into employment, to external education providers or within the college. Many learners progress onto other courses offered by the college, but managers are unable to identify whether they are going onto modules within the same qualification or taking courses at a complementary or higher level.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Although much tutoring and support are good or better, this is not sufficiently raising outcomes for learners, which are inadequate. However, inspectors found early signs of improvement following recent actions taken by managers.

- Staff set high expectations for learners through challenging learning activities and assignments. They encourage learners to complete additional courses, such as stress management and dyslexia support, to help increase their personal effectiveness. Learners work effectively during independent study and research periods.

- Much teaching and learning are good or better, and learners make good progress in taught sessions. Tutors use their good subject knowledge effectively to respond to learners' needs and questions, encouraging learners to provide peer support which increases their understanding and confidence in a safe environment. Tutors differentiate learning and assessment activities successfully, enabling learners to progress at their own pace and present work using different media.

- Learners have access to good learning resources and equipment, including industry standard computers and software. The college facilitates learning at times convenient to learners, many of whom are residential, through ensuring the learning resource centre is available to learners 24 hours each day, extending wireless connections into both accommodation blocks and loaning laptops to learners. However, tutors do not use or promote the virtual learning environment sufficiently and this resource is underdeveloped.

- Enthusiastic tutors and support staff provide good individualised help for learners during taught sessions and in the learning resource centre. They use the results of learners' initial assessments well to identify appropriate in-class support, although a few tutors do not plan or use this support effectively to link with the main learning session. Too few learners have suitable development or learning targets based on the results of their initial assessment within their individual learning plans.

- Tutors provide a very mixed level of feedback to learners about how they can improve their skills and very little of this is written down or used to set targets. In the best, and minority of, learning sessions, learners receive precise written comments from their tutor for each task or assignment on which they can reflect later. In most learning sessions, tutors give learners motivational verbal feedback which lacks clarity about the areas learners need to develop.

- Tutors incorporate the functional skills of mathematics, English and ICT effectively within most lessons, which is helping learners develop good ICT skills and improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Apart from GCSE mathematics, the college does not offer learners the opportunity to accredit these skills through GCSE, functional skills or intermediate level ICT qualifications. This affects learners' potential opportunities to progress to the next level, higher education or employment.

- All staff provide learners with very good quality care, guidance and support. Learners receive useful information before they start their course, particularly through the starting point weekend module that allows them to try taster sessions, complete initial assessment tests and receive advice about courses. Partners visit the college regularly to offer learners highly relevant careers guidance, counselling and a well-being service.

- Tutors and staff promote a culture of respect and equality through supporting a wide range of learners from different and disadvantaged backgrounds. They celebrate diversity well by

promoting different cultural events in learning sessions. Many learners' barriers to learning are eliminated through the provision of an on-site nursery, counselling and accommodation.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- The Principal has set a very clear and ambitious direction for the college since being appointed just over a year ago. The college has challenging, yet realistic, targets for success rates and improvement. However, managers did not take sufficient action quickly enough in 2011/12 to raise success rates to an acceptable level on all courses.

- Managers and tutors do not have sufficiently robust, useful or complete college data to assess trends in learners' attendance, retention, achievement and progression, including by different groups. They cannot judge easily the effectiveness of improvement initiatives or progress towards achieving targets. The college has invested in a new management information system, but it is not yet being used by managers and tutors.

- Governance arrangements are sound and council members use their expertise well to support the college and challenge decisions and the rate of progress in implementing action plans. Their ability to monitor improvements is affected by poor quality data and the lack of quality and standards committee meetings between March and December 2012.

- Managers and tutors use innovative ways to gather learners' views about what the college needs to do to improve. They make good use of this feedback to improve areas such as the common room, accommodation and increasing the size of the nursery to take more children. Managers work productively with partners to offer new programmes to meet learners' needs, facilitate progression routes and respond to learners' support requirements.

- The college's appraisal systems support staff development effectively. Managers recognise where tutors have not achieved targets in the previous year and plan to introduce a mid-year review to help speed up the rate of improvement.

- Managers complete very thorough, accurate and inclusive overall and programme area self-assessment reports, some of which build on course reviews. However, the quality of course reviews is too variable and the less effective ones lack focus and do not take into account learners' views or supporting data.

- Observers assess the quality of tutors' teaching annually, making clear judgements about the strengths and areas for improvement of particular lessons. Tutors use the observers' feedback to improve aspects of their teaching, such as differentiating learning activities, promoting equality and diversity and planning in-class support. However, observers do not give sufficient consideration to wider course issues such as low retention and achievement rates, the late submission of learners' work and learners' attendance within the grade and feedback to tutors.

- The employment of two new programme managers and enhancing the two heads of curriculum's role have strengthened curriculum management. One of the heads of curriculum reviewed the courses offered by the college and introduced innovative pilot programmes. Generally, the college offers a good range of flexibly delivered courses but does not offer enough intermediate level courses; changes to the way the college delivers its GCSE mathematics course this year resulted in fewer learners starting the course.

- Senior managers have returned the college to a more stable financial status while making significant investments to improve the accommodation and infrastructure. A few courses run with small group sizes, below the minimum size set by the college, because a large number of learners who express an interest do not enrol. Managers and tutors are not always able to plan effectively for these erratic group sizes.

- The college offers a very inclusive environment and attracts a high proportion of learners from hard to reach groups, such as carers and single parents, the unemployed and adults with few prior qualifications. Tutors value the diversity within their groups, challenging learners' perceptions and promoting equality of opportunity well. However, some of these groups do not achieve well and managers are unaware of the reasons.

- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Staff receive highly effective safeguarding training which they use to good effect to recognise issues, support learners and refer them to outside agencies where appropriate. A designated staff member routinely carries out risk assessments and learners feel safe at the college.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Hillcroft College

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	**4**	4
Outcomes for learners	**4**	4
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	**3**	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	**3**	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Community learning	**3**

Provider details

Hillcroft College	
Type of provider	Specialist designated institution
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 23
	Part-time: 466
Principal/CEO	Mr Michael Wheeler
Date of previous inspection	November 2010
Website address	www.hillcroft.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	**Level 1 or below**		**Level 2**		**Level 3**		**Level 4 and above**	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	-	-	-	-	-	23	-	-
Part-time	1	253	-	110	-	102	-	-
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider has no subcontractors.								

Additional socio-economic information

Hillcroft College is a charity based in Surbiton, south west London. It is a small residential college for women aged over 19. The college offers courses over a weekend, several weeks and a small number of long courses. A new principal was recruited in 2011/12. The college attracts learners from across England. It has 50 bedrooms and an on-site nursery. Many learners are unemployed when they join the college, have been out of learning for some time, have few qualifications and receive financial support to attend. The college additionally offers courses and initiatives at the college and in the South West of England, the East Midlands and the North East through lottery funding and the European Integration Fund which were not inspected.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Janet Rodgers HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the head of academic quality and learner support as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded community learning.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View is a new website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk or if you have any questions about Learner View please email Ofsted at: