

Tower Hamlets College

General further education college

Inspection dates		9-13 December 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- The college makes a very significant difference to people's lives, the vast majority of whom come from very diverse and challenging backgrounds.
- Success rates have improved considerably and are now high for the large cohort of adult learners throughout the college and for young people on A-level courses.
- The college has a very strong focus on developing learners' employability skills through a range of successful and, in many cases, innovative initiatives.
- The provision is outstanding for learners on college-based business courses.
- Enthusiastic and skilled teachers have the confidence to plan and teach lessons thoughtfully and imaginatively, enabling learners to be successful.
- Learners appreciate the good support they receive, particularly those who have additional learning needs.
- Courses are closely linked to the needs of the local community and have a clear emphasis on learners' progression to further and higher education and into employment.
- Strong leadership and management have effected a very positive culture change in expectations throughout the college, which has raised standards successfully.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Too many learners on A-level courses do not make the progress they are capable of, particularly in the second year of their studies where the proportion achieving high grades is low.
- Too many teachers miss naturally occurring opportunities in lessons to develop learners' English and mathematics and to enhance their understanding of equality and diversity.
- The quality of workplace learning requires improvement. Not enough learners complete their training on time.
- Not all managers are adept enough at developing a sufficiently self-critical approach to target-setting for staff and to their observations of teaching and learning in order to bring about sustained improvements in the quality of lessons and in learners' outcomes.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Stretch and challenge A-level learners more, particularly those who come to the college with high prior attainment, so that more of them can achieve the high grades of which they are capable.
- Provide all teachers with the necessary skills and confidence to help learners improve their understanding of English and mathematics and to promote equality and diversity better through the use of naturally occurring opportunities in lessons.
- Improve the coordination of workplace learning that takes place both on employers' premises and at the college. Involve employers more effectively in the process of reviewing and developing learners' skills.
- Provide relevant curriculum managers with the necessary training, sharing of good practice and skills to become more self-critical and to grow further into the role.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Learners' outcomes are good. The college makes a very significant difference to people's lives. The vast majority of learners live in wards which are characterised by some of the most complex and severe social problems nationally and where high unemployment is commonplace. For example, courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) improve learners' standing in their local community and are highly successful in helping learners to enhance their prospects of employment. Most learners leave the college upon completing their studies with much improved prospects of finding a job and/or progressing to further education.
- Success rates have improved dramatically both prior to, and since, the last inspection, and particularly so in 2012/13. This improvement in performance has been most noticeable for learners aged 16 to 18. The college is particularly successful in enabling young people on advanced-level courses and adults on intermediate-level programmes to achieve their qualifications. However, success rates remain at the national average for a significant minority of learners aged 16 to 18 on intermediate-level courses.
- Vocational courses have contributed significantly to much of this improvement. Success rates for these programmes have risen markedly in a number of subject areas in 2012/13 to at least the national average and in many cases, such as early years, information and communication technology (ICT) and business, well above it. Learners on ESOL courses, who account for almost one third of the total student cohort at the college, also achieve very successfully. Two subject areas, hairdressing and beauty therapy and engineering, remain resistant to this much-improved performance and have low success rates. Success rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy have improved and are satisfactory, but have remained more resistant to change. The college is very successful indeed in retaining learners, particularly those aged 16 to 18, but is less so in ensuring this group achieve their qualifications.
- A-level provision forms a smaller part of the college's curriculum offer, but learners on academic courses are successful in completing their qualifications. AS-level success rates improved very significantly in 2012/13 and are now high, as they are for A-level learners. Success rates are very high in many A-level subjects, including business, English, media and sociology.
- Learners enjoy studying at the college and are highly motivated in most lessons. Attendance in most subjects is good. Learners develop good practical and technical skills in many subjects, as well as a sound knowledge of theoretical concepts. Their communication skills improve noticeably. The college's thriving student volunteer and ambassador programme enhances learners' employability and personal skills significantly. Learners take part in an appropriate range of other extra-curricular activities. The college exudes a strongly inclusive culture and a

calm and professional learning environment. Learners feel safe and their respect for, and tolerance of, each other is very evident in all areas of the college.

- The ways in which the college develops learners' employability skills is a particularly strong, and in some cases innovative, feature of its provision. All learners on advanced-level vocational courses have a two-week work placement, whilst learners on foundation- and intermediate-level programmes take part in imaginative competitions to develop their enterprise and business skills. The college works very effectively in partnership with a number of employers to run bespoke pre-employability courses which help unemployed learners find jobs. Internships with prestigious companies in Canary Wharf enable a number of learners to gain a valuable insight into the world of work. Business professionals act as mentors and role models to inspire learners to succeed and to progress to higher education.
- Most learners who enrol on advanced-level courses at the college have performed well or satisfactorily on their previous GCSE or equivalent qualifications. They make good progress in lessons in many subjects and produce high, or very high, standards of work. The college is refining its processes for measuring the progress that learners make based on their predicted grades, but not enough learners currently achieve their A-level qualifications at grades A* to B, given their high prior attainment. However, the proportion of learners achieving high grades on AS-level courses has improved significantly in 2012/13 and is now satisfactory.
- The college has been successful in reducing gaps in achievement for some, but not all, of the very diverse groups of learners. Learners with identified learning needs consistently perform better than their peers, although the gap has now started to narrow. Some cohorts of learners from minority ethnic heritages achieve particularly well, most notably the very large group of Bangladeshi learners. Others, such as those learners from Caribbean and White British backgrounds, perform below the college average. Male learners perform less well than their female peers, and have done so for the last three years, due mainly to the poorer retention of men on ESOL courses.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics requires improvement, and is too variable between different subject areas. The proportion of learners who are successful in achieving GCSE mathematics at grades A* to C is satisfactory, but the high-grade pass rate for GCSE English has been low for the last two years. Learners on GCSE science are very successful in achieving high grades. Functional skills success rates have improved significantly and are now satisfactory. They are particularly high for learners studying English, mathematics and ICT functional skills at entry level.
- Success rates for apprentices and other learners training in the workplace are improving, but are still too variable. They are satisfactory on apprenticeships, having shown a significant improvement in 2012/13. Many more apprentices than previously now complete their qualification in the timescale planned for them when they started the courses. Success rates for other workplace learners have been low for the last two years. The development of learners' work-related skills is satisfactory overall and, in some cases, very good.
- The college has been successful in 2012/13 in capturing data on destinations from more learners when they finish their courses than previously. The focus on progression to employment, higher education and good quality internships is strong and is reflected, for example, in the high proportion of learners who enter higher education. Many ESOL learners and those with moderate or severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress into employment or to other courses provided by the college. Of over 750 learners who have completed the college's 'preparing for progression' programme, more than 90% had a positive progression outcome.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the last inspection, teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly and are now good. Success rates reflect this improvement, having improved over a number of years. They are now high in most areas of the college's provision. Managers have a strong focus on

raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, whilst the proportion of lessons that are less than good has reduced markedly and very few are inadequate, not enough teaching and learning are outstanding.

- Thoughtful and committed teachers set high expectations for their learners. They have developed a highly successful culture of putting learners at the heart of the learning process and everything they do. Learners participate enthusiastically in lessons, attend well in most subjects and enjoy their learning.
- In the better lessons, teachers constantly check learners' understanding of key topics and theoretical concepts. They use their vocational experience and expertise very effectively to develop and reinforce the development of learners' skills. Lessons are interesting and relevant, particularly those that are practical or activity based. Teachers are not afraid to experiment in their lessons with new and often innovative activities, resulting in a brisk but appropriate pace of learning and learners making good progress. Learners often work well independently, in pairs and in groups, sharing imaginative and creative ideas and learning well from each other. Teachers' use of questioning is precise in checking learning, extending learners' knowledge and enhancing their thinking and analytical skills.
- A minority of teaching and learning requires improvement. These lessons are characterised by teachers whose planning is not sufficiently thorough to take account of the needs of all learners. As a result, activities fail to challenge learners sufficiently, particularly those who are more able, and learners do not participate willingly in taking responsibility for their own learning. Teachers fail to use the opportunities available to them to improve learners' skills or to develop appropriate links to industry standards and job requirements. A small number of teachers summarise lessons too hurriedly. Apprentices' training does not integrate aspects of college-based learning with the skills the apprentices are learning in the workplace sufficiently well.
- In too many lessons, the development and reinforcement of learners' English and mathematics is haphazard and not sufficiently well integrated with the main topic of the lesson. Apprentices frequently study English and/or mathematics at the level required to achieve their apprenticeship qualification, irrespective of the level that might best meet their needs according to their prior qualifications or the outcomes of initial assessment of these skills.
- Teachers use information and learning technology (ILT) well to enliven and enhance lessons, taking advantage of the wide range of electronic learning resources available to them. However, not all learners have sufficient opportunities in lessons to practise their own use of ILT. The extent to which teachers provide additional information and resources on the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) for learners to extend their knowledge and to help with their homework is good overall, but is less well developed in a few subject areas.
- Managers have rightly placed a great deal of emphasis on strengthening teachers' assessment practices since the last inspection. Consequently, they have improved and are now good. Most teachers assess learners' work assiduously, giving learners detailed and constructive feedback on how to improve their work and knowledge. They correct grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes correctly in most, but not all, subjects.
- The college's enrichment and group tutorial programme supports and enhances the good development of learners' social, personal and wider study skills. External events, internships and mentoring by employers promote learners' employability skills very effectively. The majority of learners benefit from work experience and other enterprise activities. The college promulgates highly effective links with the Canary Wharf financial and business sector, and with other local employers, to equip learners well for working in industry.
- Learners in the college benefit from receiving good support through effective individual tutorials. Recent enhancements to the tutorial process by the college have placed more time and a greater emphasis on the monitoring of learners' progress. Learners have frequent reviews, incorporating good action planning, which set them challenging and meaningful individual targets. The monitoring of learners' progress on the college's workplace learning programmes focuses too much on the completion of their qualifications and not enough on what skills and knowledge they need to develop.

- Good initial assessment arrangements enable staff to identify learners’ prior skills and additional support needs both accurately and promptly. Extended induction arrangements allow learners to settle into the college and work-based training environments extremely well and to bridge the gap successfully from their previous educational experiences. The college successfully puts a great deal of emphasis on setting high standards for learners’ behaviour through its ‘behaviours for learning’ policy for learners based at the college and its ‘employability boot camp’ for workplace learners. Well-planned support arrangements allow young people formerly in care to make a successful transition to the college. Learners known to the youth offending services also benefit from good transition arrangements and highly effective strategies such as mentoring and motivational courses to prevent them from re-offending.
- The support to help those learners with additional learning needs and who require extra assistance to achieve their qualification is highly effective. Staff have a wide range of specialist expertise in supporting learners with, for example, dyslexia or dyscalculia. These learners are more successful than their peers in achieving their qualifications. However, although learning mentors frequently support learners well in lessons, teachers do not always plan systematically to make best use of in-class support.
- The college uses the outcomes of its observation of teaching and learning process effectively to support staff development and training. Managers generally have a realistic view of the standard of lessons across the college, but judgements that teachers are outstanding are overly generous in a few instances.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well in a few subjects. In these lessons, learners develop a good understanding of how cultural differences and expectations can affect customers and business practices, whilst also broadening their general knowledge about other countries’ customs and practices. However, too many teachers lack the confidence and skills to use naturally occurring opportunities in lessons to discuss sensitive issues relating to equality and diversity raised by learners who come from a broad range of backgrounds. Apprentices do not discuss concerns they may have about their treatment at work in sufficient detail during progress reviews.

Science and mathematics 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the improving, and mostly positive, outcomes for learners in both subject areas. Retention is good and achievement rates have improved and are now high on most courses. Success rates are similarly high on the majority of courses, particularly in science. However, too few learners achieve the high grades of which they are capable, given their attainment prior to joining the college. The good standards of work and progress that learners make in lessons demonstrate that most are achieving well and that recent improvements to the quality of provision in both areas are being sustained. Actions to bring about improvements in attendance have been effective on most courses with the exception of both GCSE mathematics and science where attendance still requires improvement.
- Teachers promote a supportive and caring learning environment and have high expectations of learners who value the support they receive. Learners participate enthusiastically in most lessons and are encouraged to learn by good teachers who provide additional support willingly outside the classroom. A peer mentoring scheme also enables learners to receive very helpful extra advice and guidance.
- Teachers plan lessons well on most courses, taking account of learners’ individual needs through good use of group profiles. Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects and use questioning well to check that all learners understand key theoretical concepts. The ability of learners to learn from each other and through group work is a strong feature of the better

lessons, for example when teaching each other the complexities of the transpiration process in plants.

- A minority of lessons are less effective. These classes are characterised by teachers who fail to ensure all learners are achieving their potential through a lack of sufficiently challenging activities and who do not carry out sufficient checks on learning. Whilst the planning of additional support arrangements prior to lessons is not always sufficiently thorough, learners nevertheless receive helpful assistance in classes from learning mentors who use their own initiative well to provide what support they think will be most useful.
- Resources in the laboratories and classrooms are good. Teachers make effective use of a wide range of high quality equipment to develop learners' practical skills and help learners understand difficult concepts. Teachers provide a good range of resources to support learning outside the classroom, including workbooks, assessment schemes and revision questions. Most learners make good use of the VLE to support their studies. Teachers use ILT well to reinforce important theory learning such as the use of 'Autograph' to explain the area under a curve, a video clip to illustrate alpha particle decay and online learning materials to encourage independent learning in GCSE mathematics.
- Teachers make good use of detailed initial assessments and diagnostic testing to ensure they identify learners' individual needs and preferred learning styles. The monitoring and recording of learners' progress are very thorough and learners have a very good understanding of their current levels of attainment and what they need to do to improve their work.
- The quality of assessment and feedback to learners is good. Teachers set assignments and end of topic tests frequently and assess them promptly, returning work with helpful comments. Most teachers also provide individual verbal feedback to learners who find this particularly useful in helping them to improve the standards of their written assignments. Teachers make good use of a wide range of assessment methods in lessons to check learning, for example mini whiteboards to assess learners' understanding of integration calculations.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics in lessons is good. On advanced-level courses, teachers correct mathematical errors routinely. In the best lessons, learners assess each other's responses to identify how they might improve their numeracy skills. Teachers encourage learners to improve their communication skills very effectively and are always vigilant in ensuring that learners use the correct technical terms when answering questions in lessons. However, the correction of learners' spelling and grammar errors in assessed work is not always sufficiently thorough.
- Progression rates to higher education or other further study are good. Learners on vocational courses develop good employability skills, but they are less well developed by learners on academic courses who do not benefit as much from work-related activities to enrich the curriculum.
- Working relationships between teachers and learners are good and a culture of mutual respect is clearly evident on all courses. Learners from a diverse range of backgrounds work well together, show respect for each other's views in lessons and behave well.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in hairdressing and beauty therapy is good. Consequently, success rates have improved significantly over the last three years and are now satisfactory overall. They are very high on a number of courses including the Diplomas in Beauty Therapy Techniques and in Hairdressing for Cutting and Styling Techniques. Learners develop good practical skills which meet industry standards. For example, learners on hairdressing

courses use complex hair colouring techniques well and beauty therapy learners perform complex facial electrical treatments to a high standard.

- Well qualified and experienced teachers are highly motivated to do their best for their learners and have high expectations of them. Learners respond well to the trust placed in them and the support they receive, conducting themselves very professionally around the salons and treatment rooms.
- The majority of lessons are good. Teachers check learners' understanding of key topics thoroughly and challenge them to extend their learning through discussions and well-directed questioning. Learners are actively involved in their learning and make good progress in these lessons. Teachers and learners use mobile telephones particularly well to stimulate learners' interest in subjects; for example, through searching the internet or taking part in interactive quizzes.
- Practical teaching is particularly stimulating and interesting. Learners make good use of clients in the best lessons to practise their skills and extend their knowledge of different treatments. Individual coaching helps learners to refine their skills and to develop their self-confidence, for example when completing manicures and creating hairstyles. Teachers make theory lessons enjoyable for learners through the use of imaginative games. However, in too many lessons, teachers forget to reinforce learners' practical business skills, such as costing products and how this might impact on the commercial running of hairdressing and beauty therapy salons.
- In a minority of practical lessons, particularly on higher-level courses, teachers do not set sufficiently challenging tasks for learners and the pace of the activities does not reflect industry standards accurately. Some of the tasks carried out by learners are better suited to lower level qualifications. In these lessons, learners have too few clients on whom to practise their skills, resulting in many of them having to work on each other or on practice model heads. This inhibits the development of their interpersonal skills.
- The college provides good vocational enrichment activities for learners. They attend trade exhibitions and manufacturers' courses and take part in community events and the college's annual hairdressing and beauty therapy competition. The majority of learners attend work experience which develops their employability skills well. Specialist resources for both hairdressing and beauty therapy are of an appropriate standard and the college offers a satisfactory range of courses in both subjects.
- Learners value the good additional support they receive from teachers and specialist learning mentors. Learners whom the college identifies as requiring additional support, for example with dyslexia, receive prompt assistance to enable them to complete their course.
- Target setting for learners is effective and ensures they make good progress in lessons. Learners set their own challenging targets which they agree with their teachers. Individual tutorials ensure that teachers monitor these targets closely and that learners have a good understanding of their progress. Many hairdressing and beauty therapy learners progress to further education and training or into employment.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics is inadequate. Teachers miss good opportunities to demonstrate to learners how essential these skills are in a vocational context when teaching subjects such as the mixing of hair colours or the recording and completion of client consultations.
- Assessment practice is good. Teachers and assessors provide learners with constructive feedback on their written work, correcting spelling and grammar errors where they occur. Teachers ensure learners understand the criteria for assessments. Feedback to learners on the outcomes of their assessments is helpful and constructive so that learners understand what they need to do to improve future work.
- Learners receive highly constructive and detailed advice and guidance once they are enrolled on courses at the college. Most learners feel their course exceeds their expectations. However, the information, advice and guidance they receive prior to joining the college is not always as clear. For example, a number of adult learners this year were confused at the start of their course as

to whether they were on a work-related or a work-ready programme. This has had a negative impact on their prospects of employment.

- The hairdressing and beauty therapy departments consist of a diverse range of learners who work well together and who understand people's different backgrounds and cultures well. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is under developed, particularly where naturally occurring opportunities exist, such as during discussions about different hair and skin types and in beauty therapy nutrition lessons during debates about how different foods and diets from learners' countries of origin can have an effect on healthy eating.

ESOL

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good for learners on ESOL courses, leading to success rates which have improved steadily over the last three years and are now high. Substantial numbers of learners achieve their main objectives on courses, gain skills that enhance their lives and progress to positive destinations. Learners gain confidence and the majority make good progress to develop new knowledge. They use their newly acquired skills and knowledge very effectively to gain employment and to progress to further education. In the majority of lessons, experienced teachers plan their classes skilfully to meet the needs of learners with a wide range of abilities.
- Learning activities are varied and stimulating in the vast majority of lessons. Teachers provide excellent opportunities for learners to take part in activities that help them to become more confident in the perception of their own abilities and self-worth. These skills help learners to integrate more effectively with their local communities and to feel they are making a more worthwhile contribution to other people's lives. For example, in one particularly good lesson, learners were encouraged to identify their skills and strengths and then to discuss how they might use them to help other people. Teachers support this integration with learners' local communities through setting up work experience opportunities for learners as volunteers. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not manage groups of learners well enough to involve them all in learning and the teaching is dull and uninspiring.
- Learners make very good progress in lessons, building their self-confidence, taking personal responsibility for their learning and developing the ability to communicate successfully with their peers. Less confident learners overcome an initial reluctance to participate fully in groups or to present their ideas and thoughts to other class members. A significant number of learners arrive at the college with limited language and study skills. They achieve the specific, challenging and very relevant targets set for them for improvements in their behaviour and develop an appropriately professional manner in everything they do. A robust attendance strategy has led to improved attendance and punctuality, which are now good. Learners show respect for their peers, staff and visitors with whom they interact confidently.
- Well-qualified and experienced staff design very good quality resources and use them well to teach successful lessons that meet learners' needs. Teachers liaise well with other staff to support learning, including those from the college's 'learning zone' and teachers in vocational subject areas. A broad curriculum offer improves learners' social, personal and employment prospects. For example, the college recently introduced a qualification in volunteering and administration which has expanded learners' employability choices and improved their confidence.
- Actions taken to gather learners' views are highly effective and this has helped to create a positive environment where learners feel that staff listen to them and take steps to design the curriculum and class timetables to suit their needs. Initial assessment is good. Teachers identify the needs of individual learners accurately at the start of courses and use this information well to identify their support requirements and to plan their teaching to cater for individuals'

academic abilities. Teachers also plan well for learners who have personal difficulties and learning disabilities, or any other potential barriers to learning.

- Teachers monitor learners' progress well. Most learners are aware of the progress they make and what they need to do to succeed. Teachers set learners clear and challenging targets during informal progress reviews.
- Assessment of learning is good. Learners benefit in lessons from teachers' very positive verbal reinforcement and encouragement. Teachers use questioning techniques and individual coaching well to challenge learners to make further progress. Written feedback on assessed work is detailed and precise about what learners need to do to improve further on most, but not all, courses.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Staff assess learners in detail and allocate them to the right level of courses according to their skills levels and personal needs. A comprehensive induction programme makes the college's expectations clear to learners and has resulted in improved retention and attendance.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is evident in the planning of lessons where teachers use different types of learning resources and teaching strategies to meet learners' individual needs and to promote a greater understanding of other cultures and needs. Learners take part in a student celebration day where all ESOL learners promote their culture and background to their peers and celebrate the diversity of the college.

Independent living and leisure skills

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This leads to good outcomes for learners who gain confidence working alongside their peers and other learners in the busy college environment. They enjoy developing their life skills through a range of interesting and creative practical tasks in the college and wider activities within the local community. Learners produce high standards of work in practical lessons. Most of them progress to further learning at higher levels and a small minority gain employment.
- Teachers have high expectations of learners and are adept at developing their independent learning skills. Learners explore how to use ILT successfully to support and enhance their own learning. They take responsibility for gathering their own equipment in lessons and for clearing work areas when they have finished an activity. They are able to make their own decisions on how to complete tasks effectively and a small number take responsibility for mentoring their peers. Many learners learn how to travel to college independently. Enterprise activities around the college, such as 'Café 24' and a floristry activity, enable learners to practise skills effectively in a realistic and safe work environment.
- Skilled teachers plan lessons well, incorporating the use of learning mentors to provide very effective support for learners who have a very diverse range of needs, behaviours and abilities to concentrate. Teachers maintain a very clear focus on developing learners' independence and communication and employability skills within a rich and stimulating curriculum. Teachers use a wide range of learning resources very effectively, including well-designed and illustrated handouts to stimulate learners' interest, support their progress and reinforce their understanding of new learning points. In one functional English lesson, for example, learners tasted and described a number of exotic fruits to develop their use of adjectives.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers rely too much on whole group discussions to check understanding and progress. They speak for too long, so that some learners lose concentration and more able learners are not stretched or challenged sufficiently to extend their thinking skills.
- The college has developed a comprehensive initial assessment which uses a range of methods and information from schools and agencies to build a very thorough and detailed knowledge of

learners’ starting points when the learners enrol on courses. Learners understand their long-term targets, but are less sure about their progress towards achieving them. Teachers are currently piloting a number of ways in which to make short-term target setting more useful to learners in supporting their learning and development.

- Learners value highly the feedback and support they receive from the ‘learning zone’ in the college, where they go for additional support and reinforcement of their skills outside the classroom. They receive good verbal feedback in lessons on the development of their personal and social skills. However, learners do not always receive sufficiently clear feedback on their progress towards the main lesson objectives and are therefore sometimes unclear about what they need to do to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Teachers incorporate the development of learners’ English and mathematics well into learning activities at all levels. They develop interesting enterprise initiatives so that learners can develop and practise their communication and employability skills. For example, learners practised talking to customers at the ‘winter fayre’ and explaining how they had made their products. Learners on entry-level courses improve their knowledge of sizes and shapes in creative arts lessons. Other learners learn how to use money correctly when shopping for ingredients to cook their lunch. Learners who intend to progress to other courses at the college have a good understanding of the importance of improving their functional skills.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Potential learners have a number of opportunities to visit the college with parents and carers and to find out about the provision from existing learners. The college has established very good links with schools, agencies and charities to develop work placements and supported employment and to facilitate a smooth transition into college and independent living within the local community.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is good. The college has a very inclusive learning culture. Learners feel safe and welcome in the wider college environment. Course design takes account of the need for all learners to have the opportunity to develop to their full potential. Teachers plan themes relating to equality and diversity in their schemes of work, such as Black History Month and various international weeks and then use these topics well to broaden learners’ knowledge of other countries and cultures.

<p>Business</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good overall. They are outstanding for the large cohort of learners on college-based courses, which is reflected in the extremely high success rates that have improved dramatically over the last year. However, the provision for the much smaller cohort of workplace learners requires improvement. Success rates are improving and are high for administration apprentices, due mainly to much better retention, but are low for learners on business management apprenticeships. Too few apprentices complete their qualification on time.
- Learners at the college develop excellent employability skills, benefiting from stimulating periods of work experience which they find highly motivating in furthering their studies once they return to college. Many learners benefit from mentoring and internships provided by prestigious local business and accounting companies.
- Teachers at the college have very high expectations of learners, continually motivating and challenging them to succeed. Learners respond very positively, achieving high grades for their work and progressing to more advanced courses and employment. The development of learners’ personal and social skills is outstanding and a particularly strong feature of all courses. Learners’ confidence and self-assurance in dealing with a wide range of people are very evident.

Workplace learners benefit from good subject knowledge provided by well-qualified and experienced business trainers and assessors.

- Learners on college-based courses benefit from a wide range of well-planned, stimulating and imaginative activities in lessons. Teachers place considerable emphasis on highly effective group work which helps learners to develop excellent skills when taking part in discussions and negotiations. For example, in a particularly good lesson, learners made incisive judgements about their own business attributes through developing their understanding of Belbin's theory. Learners on an Access to Higher Education course analysed different types of person specifications for specific jobs advertised with a wide range of companies very astutely.
- Learners at the college enjoy their lessons very much. They develop excellent academic and vocational skills. In a very good AS-level lesson, learners made impressive progress in understanding the impact of motivating employees from successful companies, as well as refining their analytical and evaluative skills. Learners on accounting courses enjoy calculating break-even points for their own start-up entrepreneurial business ideas. However, a few teachers sometimes rush parts of lessons and do not give learners sufficient time to discuss their ideas or to reflect on their understanding of important theoretical concepts.
- Teachers check learners' understanding very well in lessons at the college. Regular questioning ensures all learners take part in discussions and teachers probe learners' answers skilfully to promote deeper understanding. Many teachers use quick tests, quizzes, peer assessment and observations of learners' progress in group work very effectively to check learning and allow learners to learn from each other. The marking of assessed work is very thorough and prompt. Trainers and assessors use the VLE well to enable work-based learners to study independently and to ensure good communication between training sessions.
- Training for work-based learners does not always develop their skills and understanding of business-related topics beyond the basic requirements of the qualification. Activities and trainers' questioning are not always sufficiently challenging. The planning of pair and group work is insufficient and learners do not always have enough time following activities to check and consolidate their learning.
- Support for learners at the college is very good. Teachers are responsive to learners' individual needs and help learners to resolve a wide range of issues. This, in turn, motivates them to want to succeed. Tutorials are very helpful and A-level learners benefit greatly from additional workshop sessions. Learners have clear targets which they monitor regularly, ensuring they make very good progress in their studies. Work-based learners benefit from a rigorous 'boot camp' induction activity which allows trainers to assess their skills levels accurately. They receive good support and guidance through regular visits to the workplace, particularly those apprentices at risk of not completing their qualification.
- The development of learners' English is very effective. Learners understand the value of good communication and speak clearly and confidently, using accounting and business terminology accurately. Teachers correct learners' grammar, spelling and punctuation in assignments very carefully. Accounting learners develop an excellent understanding of mathematics through the regular use of complex calculations. Learners on work-based courses also improve their English effectively through writing curriculum vitae and learning job interview techniques. However, handouts and other learning resources for these learners sometimes contain grammatical and spelling mistakes. Trainers do not always use naturally occurring opportunities creatively to encourage learners to develop their mental arithmetic skills.
- Teachers and trainers create an inclusive and respectful learning environment which learners respond to very positively. They encourage and value all learners' contributions in lessons and around the faculty. Teachers and trainers promote learners' understanding of equality and diversity well in lessons and tutorials, although a few miss naturally occurring opportunities to do so. Work-based learners understand the need to avoid the use of slang and other language that people from different backgrounds might not understand.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders at the college have successfully established a culture of improvement and consistently high standards for what all learners, staff and managers can achieve. This expectation is firmly rooted in learners achieving vocationally relevant and academic qualifications which help them progress to further courses within the college, to higher education and/or to good employment opportunities.
- Over the last four years, college managers have eliminated a large financial deficit, raised learners' success rates in all areas, often significantly so, and have enabled high progression rates to further study and employment. In addition, levels of staff absence and sickness have fallen and staff morale has improved immeasurably. The college has almost completely eradicated its small amount of previously persistent inadequate teaching and learning. Leaders and managers support teachers well to experiment with their classroom practice and to develop new teaching and learning strategies. This has enabled an invigorating culture of professionalism and reflective practice to flourish amongst teaching and support staff.
- Governance is good. Governors bring a very strong set of relevant skills to bear on their work for the college with good representation from a wide range of professions and industry sectors, especially business and education. Members of the governing body have a very good understanding of the college's curriculum and provide constructive challenge and support to the Principal and senior managers. The chief focus of corporation business has rightly shifted across the last three years from financial matters to curriculum improvement and regeneration. Learner representatives make a useful contribution to the work of the corporation and its sub-committees. However, despite active searching, the college has been unsuccessful in trying to reflect the ethnicity of the local community in its membership
- Highly effective performance management and wide-ranging professional development for staff have brought about significant improvements in learners' outcomes. Senior managers in a number of key curriculum areas, such as ESOL, have introduced clear performance measures to deal with, and in some cases remove, persistently under-performing staff. In other subjects, staff whose work has not been of a sufficiently high standard have received training, support and the allocation of carefully managed additional responsibilities to improve their performance and to help them engage more fully with the college's agenda for success. Staff morale has risen sharply across the college.
- Links between teaching and learning observations and annual staff professional development reviews are clear and well regarded by staff and managers alike. Staff appreciate the purposeful and relevant internal training opportunities and the generous financial support available for external training and development. However, in a small minority of instances, target setting for staff in reviews is weak, with insufficiently clear deadlines and targets which are either too vague or unrealistically precise.
- Quality improvement activities are very effective in securing improvements to the provision, and in developing staff capacity and professional engagement. The college's self-assessment process is well established in subject areas with appropriate moderation and other quality checks throughout the year. Quality improvement plans for different subjects are detailed, clear and updated frequently. Since the previous inspection, the understanding and use of performance data by staff have improved significantly. However, in a minority of curriculum areas, managers do not yet have a sufficiently self-critical approach to evaluating the performance of all of the teachers for whom they have responsibility.
- Learners have access to a wide range of ways in which to express their views about the college and feel well consulted about changes in college policies, for example with regard to attendance and punctuality. Responses from the college and the actions it has taken in respect of learners' feedback are well publicised. College managers involve the students' union well in decision making.
- A re-invigorated and re-focused curriculum meets the needs and interests of learners, employers and the local community successfully. Managers have been diligent in establishing curriculum

pathways as a conduit to further opportunities at higher levels or into employment. Clear links to further study or employment exist in all subject areas. Enrichment activities within the curriculum are wide ranging and work experience is available for all learners on study programmes.

- Workplace learning and other employer-focused provision is a small, but increasingly important, area of the college's work. Excellent links exist with high-profile companies in Canary Wharf and other local business communities in areas identified for regional development. However, the college acknowledges that its workplace training is not yet of a sufficiently high standard and that too few learners achieve their qualification successfully on time. Managers responsible for work-based learning are insightful about the challenges they face to improve the provision and now have a clear strategy for improvement following a restructure of roles and responsibilities for the area. The proportion of apprentices staying on their courses has started to improve and the college is confident this will raise success rates over the next 12 months.
- Managers promote equality and diversity vigorously across the college, leading to a widely shared culture of respect and mutual support amongst the learners from many diverse backgrounds. Behaviour is good and learners appreciate the visible presence of staff and the security team in the college's public areas. Staff and learners respect one another and share pride in the college's reputation and standing within the local community. The equality and diversity working group is very active in dealing with a wide range of topics and issues and includes good representation from staff and learners.
- The college meets its statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. A well-managed central record of checks carried out on staff includes volunteers, governors and contractors. Learners feel safe and well supported by the college. Safeguarding officers represent all curriculum areas and college sites and make a useful contribution to the work of the college's safeguarding committee. Good links exist with the local safeguarding board and the college benefits from the frequent presence on its campuses of a 'safer schools' police officer.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Tower Hamlets College

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	3
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	2
Mathematics and statistics	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
ESOL	2
Independent living and leisure skills	2
Business	2

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 2,162							
	Part-time: 4,368							
Principal/CEO	Gerry McDonald							
Date of previous inspection	May 2012							
Website address	www.tower.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	350	7	267	38	804	266	-	-
Part-time	25	1766	30	602	4	182	-	9
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	36	108	7	31	1	-		
Number of learners aged 14-16	26							
Full-time	11							
Part-time	15							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Contextual information

Tower Hamlets College is a large general further education college located in the borough of Tower Hamlets in east London. The college has two main centres in the borough: one at Poplar next to Canary Wharf offering academic and vocational courses mainly to learners aged 16 to 18; and the other at Arbour Square in Stepney which mainly provides English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses and other English and mathematics courses. A third site at George Green is the centre for 'TowerSkills' which provides corporate training and employability programmes. The majority of learners are over 19 years of age. The locality is characterised by multiple and severe deprivation, with 40% of the residents in the borough living in wards which are within the 10% most deprived wards nationally. Unemployment rates are high, particularly amongst young people. Residents come from more than 130 countries and almost half were born outside the United Kingdom. Three quarters of pupils in the borough's primary schools speak English as their second language. The number of pupils at schools in the borough attaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased dramatically in the last three years and was just above the national average in 2012/13.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Richard Moore HMI

Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the vice principal for curriculum 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, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. 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 the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

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>

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