

# Harlow College

General further education college

## Inspection dates

26–28 January 2016

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good college

- Leaders' effective planning of programmes of study ensures learners benefit from career pathways that place emphasis on their achieving substantial qualifications and gaining purposeful, work-related learning; as a result, most learners make good progress towards their chosen careers.
- Leaders have established highly effective partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, employer networks and local authorities that are successful in enabling unemployed adults to secure work.
- The large majority of learners studying A-level courses make excellent progress compared with their starting points.
- Learners enjoy a broad range of enrichment activities that develop their personal, social and work-related skills well.
- The large majority of learners make good progress because their teachers plan lessons with good resources that make learning challenging and stimulating, and enable learners to acquire a good level of subject knowledge and apply relevant theory well.
- The large majority of learners studying vocational courses improve their understanding of employers' expectations and develop good practical skills to industry standard.
- Learners identified as needing further help in their studies receive very effective and timely support from their teachers and support staff.

### It is not yet an outstanding college

- Not enough teachers challenge younger learners and apprentices to improve their English and mathematics skills sufficiently.
- Self-assessment at subject level does not focus sufficiently on teaching, learning and assessment.
- Apprenticeships provision requires improvement; too many apprentices do not have a good understanding of relevant theory that underpins their practical skills development.

# Full report

## Information about the provider

Harlow College is based on a single-site, modern campus in Harlow town centre. The college attracts learners from Harlow and the areas of West Essex and East Hertfordshire. At the time of the inspection, nearly 4,000 learners and apprentices were enrolled at the college. Of the six local secondary schools for which published data are available, far more young people taking GCSE examinations achieve five or more grades at A\*–C, including English and mathematics, than nationally in two of these schools. However, fewer young people achieve as well as the national average in the remaining four schools. More people of working age are employed than nationally and unemployment and economic inactivity are much lower than across England. A smaller proportion of the local population is educated to levels 3 and 4 than in the region and country.

## What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve English and mathematics provision further by ensuring that:
  - teachers provide stimulating tasks and activities that challenge their learners and apprentices to accelerate their learning and make good progress
  - all teachers mark controlled assessments on GCSE English courses accurately
  - teachers who have yet to up-skill their expertise in English and mathematics take up relevant training promptly
  - all assessors set challenging targets with apprentices to extend their English and mathematical skills.
- Rectify swiftly all the identified weaknesses in apprenticeship provision.
- Improve the impact of self-assessment at subject level by:
  - focusing on the identified strengths and weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and plan specific, timely actions to strengthen all teachers' practice
  - focusing on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on outcomes for learners and apprentices
  - comparing performance against published national rates and averages.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders and governors have high expectations for the learners. They work well together and have established a culture forged on expectations that learners will achieve the highest qualification they can, make good progress and improve their life chances through securing sustainable careers. In turn, the majority of staff set high expectations for their learners and work effectively to enable learners to reach their potential. Learners now study substantial qualifications that enable most to reach their career aspirations.
- Partnership working is good. Leaders work very well with an extensive range of organisations, including employers, local authorities and the local enterprise partnership to ensure that provision is very responsive to local and regional priorities. Collaborative partnerships and work with local schools are very effective. Leaders' effective planning of study programmes ensures learners benefit from career pathways that place emphasis on their achieving substantial qualifications and gaining purposeful, work-related learning; consequently, most learners make good progress towards their chosen careers. Close partnership working with Jobcentre Plus enables the majority of adult learners on employability courses to progress to employment, some for the first time in their lives.
- Leaders and managers have a well-informed understanding of the college's key strengths and areas for improvement because they meet frequently with staff teams, focus on poor performance at individual learner level and plan actions at course level to secure improvement. Managers are highly flexible in their approach and use their good skills and expertise well to bring about improvement. Leaders have dedicated significant resources and up-skilled a large proportion of the workforce in order to improve the poor English and mathematics provision, and introduced new managers and teachers in engineering, which has started to bring about improvements in teaching, learning and assessment in these areas.
- Leaders and managers have implemented robust arrangements for observing teaching, learning and assessment. The judgements from these observations provide managers with a clear understanding of the performance of individual teachers. Developmental action plans for teachers supplement the majority of lesson observations and provide useful information on individual development needs. All teachers benefit from regular professional development interventions and support to improve their practice.
- Leaders' self-assessment has a relentless focus on improving learners' progress, particularly those studying level 3 courses. However, self-assessment at subject level is insufficiently self-critical and does not provide sufficient information for leaders, managers and staff to use to ensure quality improvement is sustainable; curriculum self-assessment reports do not make sufficient reference to outcomes for learners over time when compared against the published national rates, nor focus sufficiently on teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have introduced a new performance monitoring system to further analyse and improve performance at course level, but this has not had sufficient time to demonstrate impact.
- Leaders have ensured that the arrangements for managing sub-contracted provision are good. Comprehensive processes and procedures help managers maintain the quality of their provision. Apprentices managed by partners make very good progress and achieve well.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - Governors know the college well and have established a clear set of key performance indicators with which they monitor the performance of the college. Governors challenge senior leaders effectively and are well informed about the performance and direction of the college. However, not all performance targets are sufficiently ambitious to help improve the quality of provision further at the college.
  - Governors further improve their understanding of provision by conducting visits to lessons with experienced managers. Learners and employers are represented well on the governing body and their views are sought regularly.
  - Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of the issues of extremism, radicalisation and safeguarding relating to learners attending the college.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Leaders and managers have effective policies and procedures in place to ensure that learners are kept safe while attending their courses and in their personal lives. All managers and staff have been appropriately trained on safeguarding. Appropriate checks, processes and risk assessments to ensure the safety of all learners and apprentices are implemented thoroughly when new staff commence work at the college.

- Robust working partnerships with relevant agencies, including local authority social care teams, enable trained managers to react swiftly to individual cases as they arise and ensure prompt resolution. Dedicated safeguarding leads record and update frequently all details of the status of disclosure and barring service checks undertaken for staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors on a single central register.
- Learners benefit from a well-designed tutorial programme that enables them to demonstrate a good understanding of how to stay safe, including while using online social media sites. All staff have taken up training on identifying learners who may be at risk from radicalisation. However, only a small minority of apprentices are aware of the implications of extremism in their workplace and job roles.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good**

- The large majority of learners on study programmes and adult learning courses make good progress because their teachers set high expectations and challenge learners to produce work of a high standard in their subject qualifications. Most learners enjoy their learning and work diligently in lessons. However, a small minority of learners are not challenged sufficiently to make good progress.
- In the large majority of subjects, most teachers plan lessons with good use of resources that make learning challenging and stimulating; well-planned activities and tasks enable learners to acquire a good level of subject knowledge and understanding and to apply relevant theory well. The large majority of learners studying vocational courses improve their understanding of employers' requirements and expectations and develop good practical skills to industry standard. Most assessors ensure that the majority of apprentices make good progress in their learning in the workplace.
- Most teachers ensure that the large majority of learners studying A-level courses make very good progress from their starting points; they often plan exacting tasks and set learners assignment briefs that compel learners to extend their critical analysis skills further and deepen their learning successfully.
- In the small minority of lessons that are weak, teachers adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that pays scant attention to the needs of all learners and apprentices. Teachers do not routinely check whether all learners have understood their taught explanation and ensure that all are able to apply new understanding. Teachers do not plan to ensure that all learners, particularly the most able, are challenged to reach their potential and make good progress.
- Teachers and assessors have not ensured that all apprentices have acquired a robust grasp of key underpinning knowledge that is critical to their progress and future employment.
- Although more learners are making better progress in their English and mathematical skills than in previous years, not enough teachers promote English and mathematics within their teaching of vocational subjects well and as a result, not enough younger learners and apprentices make sufficient progress in developing these essential skills. However, teachers on discrete adult learning courses place a strong emphasis on the importance of these skills in everyday relevant contexts and, as a result, enable most of their learners to develop their English and mathematical skills well. Further improvement is required to ensure that all teachers mark controlled assessments on GCSE English courses accurately.
- Most teachers make excellent use of information and learning technology to support learning; a majority of learners use tablet devices to record teachers' oral feedback in lessons and this helps learners improve their work.
- The large majority of teachers use a good variety of assessment methods to know accurately the progress their learners are making. Teachers ensure that their learners regularly self-assess their progress against precise criteria and this, together with teachers' constructive written feedback, enable the majority of learners, particularly those studying on level 3 courses, to improve their work and often excel. A small minority of teachers do not assess learners' work sufficiently or mark learners' work accurately enough to ensure that they are making good progress. This impairs teachers' knowledge of their learners and inhibits their ability to set specific targets with their learners and challenge them to improve weaker aspects of their work. Not enough assessors set precise targets with apprentices that enable them to know what to do to improve their work and by when.
- Staff identify learners' and apprentices' support and additional learning needs promptly through effective assessment at the start of their programmes. Trained staff provide very effective and timely support for learners and apprentices, particularly for those with experience of dropping out of previous learning and facing complex issues in their lives.
- Although learners and apprentices are highly respectful of each other, not enough teachers and assessors plan to ensure that their learners and apprentices have sufficient understanding of the importance of equality and diversity in today's Britain and how they will meet the needs of clients and customers they encounter or will serve in their future or current employment.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Most learners attend well and on time. However, attendance in English and mathematics classes requires improvement. A minority of apprentices do not attend their off-the job training sufficiently frequently.
- The large majority of learners benefit from a broad range of enrichment activities that develop their personal and social learning, raise their aspirations and enhance their work-related skills. Leaders ensure that cross-college events and course enrichment promote the importance of healthy lifestyles and well-being effectively. Specific events highlighting the dangers of radicalisation ensure that most learners have a good understanding of the importance of British values. However, not enough apprentices are sufficiently aware of the relevance of these values to their workplace and job role.
- On study programmes, the large majority of learners have yet to benefit from external work experience. However, leaders have precise plans in place to ensure that all younger learners benefit from meaningful, work-related learning and take up purposeful work experience in the current year.
- The large majority of younger learners on vocational courses improve their understanding of underpinning theory that helps them develop their practical skills well. On A-level courses, the large majority of learners improve their wider critical analysis skills to deepen their understanding of subject knowledge effectively.
- Not enough learners and apprentices make good progress in extending their English and mathematical skills.
- Although not enough apprentices develop their practical skills sufficiently to enable them to develop greater independence in their learning and workplace, of those who do, a high proportion make good progress in their job roles, often securing promotion or increasing their work responsibilities. However, in 2014/15, the destinations of around a sixth of all apprentices who left their programmes are unknown.
- Learners and apprentices behave well towards each other and staff; they exhibit high levels of positive behaviour throughout the college's campus and on sub-contractors' sites.
- Learners and apprentices are safe; learners demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding issues such as internet safety and bullying. Both learners and apprentices know how to report their concerns and to whom if they do not feel safe. However, the majority of apprentices do not have sufficient understanding of how health and safety relate to their job roles.
- The large majority of learners use the information, advice and guidance provided by dedicated staff well to plan the steps they need to take to achieve their career aspirations. Managers and staff work swiftly and effectively to ensure that most learners at risk of dropping out of learning receive a good level of support to remain in learning and make progress.

## Outcomes for learners

are good

- Since 2012/13, leaders have significantly reduced the volume of short award and certificate qualifications and increased the number of learners on two-year or substantial diploma qualifications. There was a decline in the overall success rate between 2012/13 and 2013/14; leaders' data indicate that this slowed markedly in 2014/15 to just below that of other, similar colleges. More learners stay in learning than nationally.
- The large majority of learners on vocational courses make good progress, and on A-level courses they make excellent progress compared with their starting points. Adult learners referred to the college by Jobcentre Plus develop good personal, social and work-related skills that result in a high proportion securing employment.
- Learners' success in different subject areas differs greatly. For example, in most areas, such as in sport and art and design, learners make good progress and succeed, but those who study construction and engineering fare far worse than those studying in similar colleges.
- Data for 2014/15 indicate that the proportion of apprentices who succeed has increased over time and is just above that of other, similar colleges. However, there is too much variation across the subject areas in the proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes successfully and not enough apprentices following electrical engineering, construction, motor vehicle and hairdressing programmes succeed.
- Data indicate that in 2014/15, learners with experience of local authority care and those in receipt of bursary payments did not achieve as well as their peers. However, leaders' in-year data indicate that a greater proportion of both groups are staying in learning than in previous years and making progress at a similar level to their peers.

- Leaders' data indicate that they have significantly reduced the differences in performance among the majority of groups of learners on study programmes. The achievement gaps between men and women and between younger and adult apprentices continue. Apprentices with learning difficulties now achieve as well as their peers; however, those with dyslexia do not.
- Not enough younger learners and apprentices make sufficient progress in developing their English and mathematical skills. Leaders' data for 2014/15 indicate that the proportion of learners who achieved A\*–C grades on GCSE English and mathematics courses or achieved their functional skills qualifications was too low. However, most adult learners develop their English and mathematical skills well.
- In 2014/15, data indicate that a very high proportion of learners studying on level 1 and level 2 courses progressed to study substantial qualifications at a higher level of learning. Leaders have yet to secure information on the destinations of just under a tenth of all younger learners who left their study programmes in 2014/15; of the destinations known, around a quarter of younger leavers progress to higher education and very few do not progress at all.

## Types of provision

### 16 to 19 study programmes

### are good

- The college provides study programmes in most subject areas. The largest areas are business, media, journalism and photography, and visual arts. Currently there are 2,436 learners enrolled on 16 to 19 study programmes provided directly by the college. Two thirds of learners study courses at level 3, the large majority of which follow vocational courses.
- The majority of teachers pay close attention to the diverse range of learners' starting points and abilities in planning challenging activities, including very good use of information learning technology (ILT) that enables them to accelerate their learning. Most teachers make excellent use of ILT to support learning; learners' frequent use of tablet computers enables them to access relevant course and research material and to work well independently.
- The large majority of teachers use their subject expertise well to ensure that learners on vocational courses develop their practical skills and produce work to industry standard; they break down theoretical concepts into ways that enable learners to understand and apply these to their practical work effectively. In art and design, learners improve their understanding of the use of materials and media through routinely critiquing each other's work sensitively and competently, identifying strengths and weaknesses and relating these to commercial opportunities.
- Most teachers demand high standards of their learners on A-level courses and challenge them to develop their critical analysis skills and produce work that is compelling and lucid. Consequently, the large majority of learners make very good progress when compared with their starting points. For example, a teacher challenged learners skilfully in an A-level sociology lesson to analyse and present aptly and confidently how quantitative and qualitative research relates to the different schools of sociological thought and can be best carried out when researching the impact of society on the family.
- A small minority of teachers do not plan to ensure that all their learners, particularly the most able, are provided with sufficiently difficult work and as a result, learners tire of mundane tasks and fail to advance their learning and progress. Teachers' use of personal learning targets often lacks specificity and challenge to enable learners to further develop their knowledge and skills.
- The large majority of teachers provide constructive written and oral feedback on learners' work that enables them to clearly understand what they need to do to improve. However, a small minority of teachers do not mark learners' work accurately, or provide written feedback that is trite and fails to provide sufficient insight into what could be improved and how.
- Leaders and managers have taken actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics, and more learners are now making better progress, from often very low starting points, than previously. However, not enough teachers promote learners' English and mathematical skills thoroughly enough; in a significant minority of lessons, the development and reinforcement of learners' English and mathematical skills are too weak.
- Leaders ensure that learners receive good-quality impartial information, advice and guidance throughout their programmes and as a result, most learners progress to employment or take up substantial qualifications at a higher level. Most teachers place good emphasis on industry-specific contexts in their teaching and promote effectively the demands of employers; consequently, most learners have a good understanding of expectations of work in their chosen careers. A sixth of learners have taken up work experience in the current year; managers have precise plans in place to ensure that all learners benefit from purposeful work experience in the current year, with clear briefs and responsibilities aligned to the subjects learners are studying.

- Teachers take good advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to promote diversity in lessons. For example, learners on a beauty course were encouraged to consider how they would consult with clients who have physical disabilities or learning difficulties, or for whom English is an additional language, and to consider appropriate techniques to use. However, not enough teachers plan to ensure that their learners consider equality and diversity in the workplace sufficiently.

## Adult learning programmes

## are good

- At the time of the inspection, there were 74 adults studying full time, mostly on access to higher education programmes, and 1,005 adults on part-time courses, the large majority of whom were referred by Jobcentre Plus and studying short courses at entry level and level 1.
- Leaders have established highly effective partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, employer networks and local authorities that are successful in re-engaging, retraining and up-skilling unemployed adults. Learners on short courses develop good levels of confidence to bolster their speaking and listening skills, improve their problem-solving and teamworking skills. As a result, the majority of learners progress to employment. Adult learners on more substantial courses, who have taken up work experience, develop their vocational skills and knowledge more rapidly than their peers.
- The majority of teachers set high levels of expectations and use resources innovatively to inspire learners to work hard and make good progress. For example, in a childcare lesson, the teacher enabled learners to further develop their higher order thinking skills by challenging them adeptly to research the psychology of morality and present a good standard of critical analysis to the whole group.
- A small minority of teachers' planning does not take into account the starting points of learners and challenge them effectively; consequently, learners do not make the gains of which they are capable. Teachers do not use questioning or other assessment techniques to gauge successfully whether all learners have understood fully before introducing new learning, and as a result, learners make insufficient progress.
- Most teachers provide plentiful oral feedback that enables the majority of learners to accelerate their progress in lessons. Most teachers provide helpful written feedback that clearly enables learners to consider ways to improve their work. However, a small minority of teachers do not inform their learners how they can improve their work sufficiently; as a result, learners do not make the progress they should.
- The large majority of teachers monitor the progress of their learners well and this enables teachers and learners to plan ambitious targets that help them to excel. However, not all teachers set sufficiently demanding targets with their learners and fail to challenge them to make enough progress. Managers ensure that a high level of targeted support is available to ensure that most learners identified as requiring further help with their studies participate fully in their learning and make good progress.
- Teachers plan interesting and challenging activities and tasks that motivate most learners to develop their English and mathematical skills well. Teachers provide helpful, relevant contexts that illustrate the value of these essential skills and consequently, most learners gain confidence in solving mathematical problems and improve their written and oral English skills.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. Their behaviour is exemplary; they exhibit high levels of tolerance and respect for one another and their teachers and support staff.
- Managers ensure that impartial information, advice and careers guidance enables the majority of learners to acquire a sound understanding of the required next steps they need to take to achieve their career aspirations. Learners on access to higher education programmes receive a good level of support in applying to study at university. However, a small minority of learners are unaware of the career pathways and opportunities available to them.

## Apprenticeships

## require improvement

- The college has 485 apprentices enrolled, of which just over a half are following programmes at intermediate level and six tenths are aged 16 to 18. The majority of apprentices follow programmes in administration, construction, engineering, childcare or hairdressing. Subcontractors teach and assess just under a fifth of apprentices.
- Teachers and assessors do not ensure that all apprentices have a good understanding of relevant theory that underpins their practical skills development; too many apprentices in motor vehicle, brickwork, and painting and decorating lack sufficient theoretical subject knowledge to make the required progress in their programmes.

- The standard of apprentices' work and skills is good for most apprentices in administration, childcare, engineering, and carpentry and joinery; as a result, employers value the contribution they make in the workplace. For example, an employer particularly valued the improvement apprentices studying administration made when producing well-written reports on methods to improve the use of company data to make efficiency savings.
- The majority of teachers and assessors provide a good level of constructive feedback on apprentices' work; helpful guidance and challenging targets enable the majority of apprentices to understand clearly how to improve their work and make good progress. However, a significant minority of assessors' feedback lacks clarity and does not enable apprentices to know what they need to do to improve their work and which skills they need to develop.
- The majority of apprentices develop good practical skills in the workplace because the majority of assessors ensure that employers are involved fully in planning and reviewing the contribution apprentices provide at work. However, assessors, apprentices and employers do not plan and coordinate learning activities and challenging targets sufficiently well to ensure that all apprentices can make good progress.
- Not enough assessors set specific targets that challenge apprentices to make good progress in all aspects of their programme; too many assessors do not promote or develop apprentices' understanding of health and safety, safeguarding, and equality and diversity sufficiently well.
- Leaders have restructured apprentices' programmes to ensure that apprentices have more time than previously to study English and mathematics. However, not enough teachers plan challenging activities that motivate and enable all apprentices to develop their English and mathematical skills swiftly; they often rely on past examination papers exclusively and this causes a minority of learners to switch off from learning. Too many assessors do not set sufficiently challenging targets for apprentices to accelerate their English and mathematical skills. Leaders do not ensure that enough apprentices have sufficient opportunity to develop their English and mathematical skills beyond the minimum expectation of their programmes.
- The majority of apprentices who successfully complete their programmes in the planned timescale make good progress in the workplace and often secure promotion or an increase in job responsibilities. However, the destinations of around a sixth of all leavers in 2014/15 remain unknown.



## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	General further education college
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	7,446
<b>Principal</b>	Karen Spencer
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.harlow-college.ac.uk">www.harlow-college.ac.uk</a>

## 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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	306	940	504	84	1,588	67	6	–
<b>Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	192	66	102	115	–	10		
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	2		–		2			
<b>Number of learners aged 14–16</b>	–							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
<b>At the time of the inspection, the provider contracts with the following main sub-contractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Academy of Learning</li> <li>■ Essex County Council</li> <li>■ King John Academy Trust</li> </ul>							

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Matt Vaughan, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Hunsley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pauline Hawkesford	Ofsted Inspector
Lindsay Pamphilon	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Bealey	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Pickering	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector

The above team carried out the inspection and was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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