



West Herts College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published January 2006	Provider reference 130720
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	West Herts College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Elizabeth Rushton
Address of college:	Hempstead Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD17 3EZ
Telephone number:	01923 812000
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Chair of governors:	Declan O'Farrell
Unique reference number:	130720
Name of lead inspector:	Philip Pullen HMI
Dates of inspection:	14 – 18 November 2005

Background of the organisation

1. West Herts College is one of four large General Further Education colleges serving Hertfordshire. It has three sites in Watford and one in Hemel Hempstead. The college also attracts students from North London and from neighbouring areas of Hertfordshire. One campus has been designated as a Sixth Form Centre.
2. West Hertfordshire is a largely affluent area with high levels of professional and management employment and educational aspiration. The proportion of school leavers with five or more General Certificate of Education (GCSE) grades at A* to C in Hertfordshire is well above the national average. Despite this relatively affluent profile there are also some significant pockets of local deprivation in areas served by the college including one in Hemel Hempstead which is amongst the five most deprived wards in the county. Unemployment in Watford is above the county average at 2.1%. A significant proportion of Hertfordshire's black and minority ethnic population live in Watford, making up more than 10% of the total population.
3. In 2004-05, the college enrolled a total of 10,591 learners of whom 72% were studying part-time and 74% were adults. Almost 90% of the 2,774 full-time learners were aged 16 to 18. Just under a third of learners aged 16 to 18 were enrolled on courses at level 2 with a relatively even spread of learners taking level 1 and 3 courses. Around half of adult learners are enrolled on courses at level 1. The college also provides a range of vocational courses for some 300 Year 10 and Year 11 pupils from local schools. There are around 150 learners following modern apprenticeships and other work-based learning programmes. The profile of learners from minority ethnic groups, at 20%, is significantly higher than that of the West Hertfordshire population as a whole. The college's mission is "to create opportunities for people to succeed through learning."

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate re-inspection monitoring visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management

- specialist provision in: motor vehicle engineering; information and communication technology (ICT); hairdressing and beauty therapy; travel and tourism; performing arts and music; social science; provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; business.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Curriculum areas

Motor vehicle engineering	Good: grade 2
ICT	Satisfactory: grade 3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Outstanding: grade 1
Travel and tourism	Good: grade 2
Performing arts and music	Satisfactory: grade 3
Social science	Good: grade 2
Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Satisfactory: grade 3
Business	Satisfactory: grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

5. The college has made good progress in addressing the many serious weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. Success rates at most levels have increased rapidly, and are now well above the national average on most courses for learners aged 16 to 18. The quality of teaching has also improved and is good overall. In a minority of lessons the needs of all learners are not met. The use of ILT is underdeveloped. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. Good progress has been made in meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. There are strong links with schools and good provision for 14 to 16 year olds. Partnership working with local community groups is improving and good links exist in community provision. Learners receive good support and guidance. Leadership and management are good. Governors and senior managers set a clear strategic direction for the improvement of learners' experiences. Financial management and control are now good. Substantial improvements have been made to the college's accommodation although some facilities remain underdeveloped. Quality assurance systems are robust and generally effective.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

6. The college demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve its provision. Since the last inspection there has been rapid improvement in the overall quality of provision and many significant weaknesses have been addressed. Strong leadership and management aided by effective quality assurance processes have enabled the college to focus on improving the quality of learners' experiences. Success rates have improved overall. The college's lesson observation system is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There is good use of data to analyse college performance and identify areas for improvement. The self-assessment process is good. It is well-embedded, thorough and rigorous. The self-assessment report for 2004-05 presents an accurate picture of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. There is good financial management and control. The college's strategy for further improvement in accommodation is well considered and far-reaching.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

7. The college has made good progress in addressing areas for improvement noted during the last inspection. Success rates have generally improved to be at, or above, the national average on most courses. Those for 16 to 18 year old learners are well above the national average overall. The quality of teaching

and learning has improved and is now good. Of the eight curriculum areas inspected, four improved their grade compared to that awarded at the last inspection, with the other four areas receiving the same grade as in the inspection of 2003. Learners receive good additional learning support. Leadership and management are now good. There is a clear and appropriate strategy for improving the quality of learners' experiences. Financial management of the college is now good. Considerable improvements have been made to the accuracy, effectiveness and use of the college's management information systems. There have been significant improvements in the quality of accommodation.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- effective leadership and management to address key weaknesses
- the clear and appropriate strategic direction set by governors and senior managers with a high priority given to improving learners' experiences
- significant improvements in achievements and standards
- much improved teaching and learning
- robust and effective quality assurance and self-assessment processes
- good additional support for learners
- good and reliable data effectively used and analysed
- improved community links

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- achievement of learners aged 19 and over
- the use of ILT in teaching and learning
- the development of teaching strategies which meet the needs of all learners
- the consistency of target setting and monitoring of students' progress
- links with employers and arrangements for work-related experience
- the implementation and full embedding of New Measures of Success, particularly in relation to value-added analysis

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

8. The college sets challenging targets for improvement in learners' achievement. Success rates have improved significantly, particularly for learners aged 16 to 18. In 2004-05, they were well above the national average at levels 1, 2 and 3. The achievement of adult learners at level 2 has also improved to above the national average. The college recognises that it needs to address the declining achievement of level 1 adult learners. Pass rates for GCE A level courses have improved significantly over the period 2003-04 to 2004-05 and are above the national average. Whilst the percentage of high grades achieved is low, value added measures show that learners on GCE A level and national diploma courses make good progress relative to their starting point. There are very high pass rates on all courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Pass rates in the social sciences, motor vehicle engineering and travel and tourism are also high. Achievement in work-based learning is low but improving. Pass rates for key skills are higher than the national average at levels 1 and 2 although few learners are entered for application of number. Learners' achievements on adult and community courses are satisfactory overall. Success rates in community provision are satisfactory overall and some pass rates are significantly above national averages. Achievement on non-accredited courses are not yet measured.
9. Female learners perform better than male learners on most courses at levels 2 and 3. However, at level 1, male learners outperform female learners. There has been a pattern of underachievement for learners of Pakistani heritage although their performance improved significantly to around the national average in 2004-05.
10. Retention rates have improved for learners aged 16 to 18 and are generally at or above the national average. Retention rates for adult learners also show a pattern of improvement and are above the national average at level 2.
11. Learners' attendance and punctuality in lessons observed by inspectors was high overall, except in business, where low attendance is affecting some learners' achievement. The college's overall attendance rate in 2004-05, at 79.5% was above the national average, although the college recognises the need to improve this further.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

12. Significant improvements have been made in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection and these are now good overall. Quality assurance procedures, including self-assessment and a system of lesson observations, have been effective in identifying areas for improvement. Lessons are generally well organised and include a range of activities to motivate

students and encourage participation. In many cases teaching methods match the learners' preferred ways of presentation. Most learners enjoy their lessons. Learners in community provision benefit from good support and develop their skills well.

13. In the less successful lessons the needs of all learners are not fully met although they are identified in lesson plans. The college has invested significantly in ILT. However, its use remains underdeveloped. The use of the virtual learning environment is not well advanced. Computer projectors are not always available in community learning venues.
14. Additional support provided for learners is good. Initial assessment of learning needs is thorough and efficiently organised. Good links exist with schools and the Connexions service to identify the additional learning needs of new learners. Learning support advisers work effectively with teachers to help learners in lessons. Learners aged 14 to 16 are accompanied by support staff where appropriate. Initial assessment is planned for part-time learners including those on ACL courses. The success rates of learners receiving support are mostly good.
15. The progress of full-time learners is monitored carefully and detailed reports are sent twice a year to parents of 16 to 18 year old learners. Parents' evenings are well-attended and parents are well informed. Communication with employers and with work-based learning providers is good. Short term targets in individual learning plans are often too vague, although long term targets are challenging.
16. The assessment of students' work is inconsistent across the college. In some areas there is little feedback on marked work to help the students to improve while in others feedback is detailed. Not all staff are aware of the college's assessment policy.
17. The college has made satisfactory progress in improving key skills provision. There is good integration of key skills within the vocational curriculum. Work-based learners make good early progress and key skills are often completed before their main vocational qualification is finished. However, too few learners are entered for application of number qualifications and not all key skills are available in all curriculum areas.
18. The college provides a broad range of courses. Its approach to social and educational inclusion is good. Successful efforts have been made to improve the availability of progression routes between levels 1, 2 and 3, particularly for 16 to 18 year old learners. The college has opened a Sixth Form Centre at one of its main sites to deliver GCE A levels in over 20 subjects. A range of accredited and non accredited provision is available for community learners and venues used in the community are well located. There is good support for students including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Since the previous inspection, the college has significantly improved its partnership with schools and makes well planned and managed provision for learners aged 14 to 16.

Partnership working with a wide range of local organisations including voluntary and community groups has also improved. The college recognises that links with employers are underdeveloped. Many learners do not have sufficient opportunity to obtain work-related experience and gain sufficient knowledge of current business practices. An enrichment programme has been developed and provides many opportunities for extra-curricula activities. Learners who participate value the opportunities, although the overall take up is low. The college consults well with learners to ensure that their views are heard and acted upon.

19. Support and guidance for learners are good overall. Initial advice and guidance for potential learners is generally effective. The college's induction programme enables learners to settle into their courses quickly. Tutorial provision for full-time learners aged 16 to 18 is effective in supporting and monitoring their progress. The college recognises that tutorial support for adult and part-time learners is underdeveloped. Learners receive good advice about progression into higher education, further training and employment. A very effective strategy has been introduced to improve and challenge some learners' unsatisfactory behaviour, punctuality and attendance. Support for learners with learning difficulties including dyslexia has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Good support is provided for learners with mental health difficulties on community courses. Work is in progress to increase uptake of healthy food in the college's refectories and to promote dietary improvements.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

20. Leadership and management are good. The robust recovery plan from the last inspection has been effectively implemented, with the active support of the local LSC. The principal, governors and senior managers set a clear strategic direction for the improvement of learners' experiences.
21. The quality assurance system is effective in bringing about improvement. The best elements include: comprehensive lesson observations; robust internal inspections and a self-critical and accurate self-assessment process. A substantial staff development programme exists for full-time staff, but part-time staff are insufficiently involved. Performance monitoring is aided by accurate, timely and well-used management information data. These are used well to support course reviews and to monitor learners' progress. In a few areas, course reviews are insufficiently rigorous and target setting is vague. The college recognises the need to increase the use of value-added analysis in response to the New Measures of Success initiative.
22. Leadership and management of curriculum areas are generally good. Senior managers work closely and effectively with middle managers. Managers intervene where necessary to improve the quality of provision. Management of work-based learning is good. Management of adult and community learning is satisfactory and its recent restructure well thought through.

23. The college has made good progress in the last two years to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. It secures satisfactory outcomes for young people as identified in the Children Act. The college analyses and compares data on learners by gender, minority ethnic background, age and learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Action plans and targets are in place to address issues of concern, but the processes of review and monitoring are not yet fully embedded. Learners with mobility difficulties can now access all areas of the college. The college implements appropriate procedures to meet the requirements of the Child Protection Act (CPA).
24. The college has sufficient numbers of suitable staff, who are appropriately qualified. They demonstrate high levels of commitment to continuous learner improvement. The staff recruitment process is thorough and takes full account of applicants from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Teachers and support staff give a high priority to continuous improvement and to learners' success.
25. Appropriate health and safety policies are in place but the college has yet to evaluate progress across all areas. The college has made major progress with its accommodation strategy and has concentrated its provision to improve room utilisation. The complex proposals for the new accommodation are well considered. Considerable investment has been made to improve learners' facilities and resources to a high standard in many areas, but some facilities and accommodation are underdeveloped.
26. Financial management and control are now good and the college is on course to achieve a balanced budget this year. Major savings have been secured in staffing and premises costs, whilst improving the quality of the learners' experience. Success rates of learners aged 16 to 18 have improved considerably and are good overall. The college provides satisfactory value for money.
27. Governance is now good. A clear strategic direction has been set prioritising improving the learner's experience. Governors have appointed appropriate senior managers and have established effective systems for leadership and management. Governors recognise the need to secure greater collaboration with other providers of education and training for learners aged 14 to 19 in the area. They are also seeking to increase the diversity of their membership.

Curriculum area inspections

Motor vehicle engineering

Good: grade 2

Context

28. There are 204 enrolments on motor vehicle engineering courses. The majority are full-time learners aged 16 to 18 following IMI certificate, national diploma and pre-apprenticeship award courses. Approximately 58 learners are undertaking modern apprenticeship programmes. Over 30 school pupils, aged 14 to 16 also attend courses in engineering.

STRENGTHS

- high success rates on all courses
- well-developed use of ILT to support learning
- good links with industry
- effective learning support
- good curriculum management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient reinforcement of health and safety in the workshop areas

Achievements and standards

29. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high and above the national average on all full-time courses. Pass and retention rates for 14 to 16 learners are also high. Achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is satisfactory overall and improving. Standards of written assignments are particularly good. Portfolios of evidence contain diverse and well organised material. Learners on higher level courses quickly develop good analytical and diagnostic skills. Learners' attendance and punctuality are good.

Quality of provision

30. Teaching and learning are satisfactory or better. Lessons are well planned with a clear emphasis given to the development of key skills. Teachers take care to ensure that they address the needs of different learners. Theory teaching is very effective and learners gain sound underpinning knowledge. Particularly good use is made of the college's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to enable learners to research topics via the internet. Learners in the workplace benefit from well planned training programmes designed and delivered by enthusiastic and experienced employers.

31. Teachers give clear and constructive feedback on assignments. Assessment and verification activities are satisfactory overall and particularly good in work-based learning programmes. Work-based learning reviews are effective and take into account the monitoring of learners' progress.
32. Support for learners is good. Those with learning difficulties are very well supported in the classroom. The support they receive is comprehensively documented and effectively monitored. There is good tutorial support for all learners.

Leadership and management

33. Leadership and management are good. There is good use of quality assurance processes such as lesson observations, to improve aspects of teaching and learning. Workshops are spacious and well equipped. Very good links with employers have led to them donating state of the art cars for learners to practise on. Thorough risk assessments are carried out in the workshops but some aspects of health and safety are insufficiently reinforced, for example the wearing of protective eye wear.

ICT

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

34. The college offers a wide range of computing and ICT courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels providing good opportunities for progression. There are about 220 learners, mostly aged 16 to 18, attending full-time courses and over 500 adults taking part-time courses. The curriculum meets the needs of the local community but also attracts learners from further away. There are courses specifically for learners with mental health difficulties.

STRENGTHS

- high success rates on level 1 and 2 courses
- high and improving success rates in AS ICT
- wide range of courses providing good progression
- very effective additional support for learners

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- declining success rates on level 3 vocational courses
- insufficient involvement of learners in lessons
- underdeveloped understanding of the world of work on vocational courses
- inconsistent use of realistic and challenging targets

Achievement and standards

35. Achievements and standards are satisfactory overall. Success rates on ICT courses for beginners are high and are at or around the national average for other courses. There are declining success rates on level 3 vocational courses. Pass rates for AS ICT have improved over the last two years and, in 2005, were above the national average. Learners' practical skills are well developed. Attendance has improved during the last year but there is still some persistent lateness.

Quality of provision

36. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the better lessons, teachers use effective questioning to assess learners' understanding and make good use of a balance of group and individual work. In weaker lessons little attempt is made to vary teaching and learning styles and learners are not actively engaged or inspired.
37. Assessment of learning is satisfactory overall. There are appropriate internal verification procedures. However, feedback on assignment work is inconsistent and some does not provide learners with enough guidance on how to improve their work.

38. Support for learners is good. Initial assessment is used well to identify learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Learners receive good additional learning support where necessary. There is insufficient use made of short-term targets to help learners improve. On vocational courses, there is an underdeveloped use of experiences and assignments related to the world of work.

Leadership and management

39. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear focus on raising standards. Quality assurance of teaching and learning is improving. Self-assessment reports are accurate and contain relevant action plans to address weaknesses. There is insufficient sharing of good practice. Resources are adequate overall. Some rooms are well-equipped and furnished but others are cramped. Computers are also available in a learning resource centre but these do not have all the specialist software needed by learners.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Outstanding: grade 1

Context

40. There are approximately 400 learners taking hairdressing and beauty therapy courses at levels 1 to 3. Most learners are female, aged 16 to 18 and study full-time. In addition, there are 64 learners on work-based learning programmes and 30 school pupils taking an NVQ 1 course in hairdressing.

STRENGTHS

- very high success rates on most courses
- learners' high levels of vocational skill
- much effective teaching
- very good support for learners
- outstanding curriculum leadership and management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

None

Achievement and standards

41. Achievements and standards are outstanding. Success rates are high and consistently above national averages. In 2004-05, retention rates for NVQ level 1 hairdressing were 12% above the national average. Pass rates for beauty therapy courses have been between 10 and 13% above national averages for the past two years. Learners acquire very effective vocational skills. Their understanding and application of specialist knowledge is also good. Achievement in work-based learning is improving but still low. In 2004-05, 44% achieved a full apprenticeship framework within time. Attendance is high at 90%.

Quality of provision

42. Teaching and learning are good or better and very effective. Theory lessons are particularly well planned to meet individual learning styles and needs. Teachers encourage an active approach to learning. Learners work well in small groups; they make good use of ILT. There are good levels of one to one support and effective demonstrations in practical lessons. Key skills are well integrated with the vocational curriculum.
43. Learners' progress is carefully monitored and action plans regularly updated to keep them on track. Assessment and internal verification procedures are satisfactory. Work-based learners have good opportunities to gain assessments in the workplace.

44. Support for learners is very good. Pre-course information, interviews, induction and aptitude testing are effective in placing learners on the right course and level of study. Initial assessment accurately highlights additional learning needs. Learners receive good guidance and support through tutorials and from study support staff. There are high success rates for those needing additional learning support.

Leadership and management

45. Curriculum leadership and management are outstanding. Teamwork is strong with much sharing of good practice. Regular meetings are held to address standardisation of procedures, curriculum development and the monitoring of learner progress. Self-assessment processes are thoroughly applied. Work-based learning is well managed and effective measures to improve framework achievement have been adopted. There have been substantial improvements to specialist accommodation. A new commercial standard hairdressing facility has been developed on the ground floor and a lift installed that improves access for those with restricted mobility. Beauty salons are adequate but do not meet industry norms.

Travel and tourism

Good: grade 2

Context

46. There are 92 full-time learners on travel and tourism courses almost all aged 16 to 18. A narrow range of courses is available from level 1 to 3 and includes an introductory diploma, a first diploma and a national certificate in travel and tourism.

STRENGTHS

- high success rates
- good teaching and learning
- good support for learners

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- narrow range of courses
- lack of involvement of employers

Achievement and standards

47. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high on all courses. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory or better although few learners achieve higher grades. Most learners progress to relevant further and higher education courses or employment in the travel and tourism industry. Learners' attendance has improved in the last year and is now at least satisfactory on all courses.

Quality of provision

48. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching methods take account of learners' preferred ways of learning and individual needs and a range of work is set in lessons to meet the needs of individual learners. Teachers plan their lessons well, with frequent changes of activity to maintain learners' interest. There are frequent checks on learning during lessons. Learners participate well and with enjoyment in group discussions and role play activities. Learners' progress is effectively monitored and they receive clear and helpful feedback from teachers. Additional qualifications are not currently available to learners who are unable to acquire the further occupational skills that these provide.
49. Learners receive good support. The literacy and numeracy levels and other needs of all learners are assessed at enrolment. Learning support staff provide support from the start of learners' programmes where needs have been identified. This support and that provided by teachers is valued highly by learners.

50. Local and residential visits are used effectively to bring greater industrial relevance to courses and are enjoyed by learners. However, employers have little involvement in the planning and provision of programmes. In 2004-05, there were no opportunities arranged for learners to gain work experience. A start has been made to find employers to provide suitable work experience later in the current academic year.

Leadership and management

51. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Changes to the management of the area took place in September 2005 to address weaknesses in provision. The manager and a new staff team have moved quickly to construct development plans and have made a good start towards making improvements. Resources are satisfactory. The investment in the college's VLE is beginning to benefit learners by making learning resources more accessible. The range of relevant books and journals is appropriate although rarely used by learners.

Performing arts and music

Satisfactory : grade 3

Context

52. There are 294 enrolments on full time courses in performing arts and music of which 193 are on music courses and 101 on performing arts courses. Most learners are aged 16 to 18. Provision includes first diplomas, national diplomas and a foundation in performance skills course attended by local school pupils aged 14 to 16.

STRENGTHS

- improving success rates to above national averages
- good teaching in performing arts
- good performance work in acting, dance and music theatre

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- no formal industry links
- lack of rigour in course reviews in music

Achievement and standards

53. Achievements and standards are high. Success rates on all full-time courses have improved to well above national averages. The proportion of learners achieving high grades has also improved. Learners in performing arts achieve good standards of performance work. They show very strong commitment to their courses. Attendance rates are good and above national averages.

Quality of provision

54. Teaching is good in performing arts and satisfactory in music. Teachers set high standards, which motivate and inspire learners. Lesson planning in both music and performing arts is mostly good, with appropriate attention given to health and safety, risk assessment and individual student needs. There is poor classroom management in some music lessons where teachers do not set clear boundaries and guidelines for appropriate, productive behaviour.
55. Students' assessed work is returned promptly. Assessment feedback is detailed and well presented in performing arts. However, in music, written commentary lacks detail and sufficient points for improvement. Students do not receive a detailed year plan or assessment schedule at the start of their courses.
56. Additional learning support is good. Tutorial programmes are mostly well planned. In music, targets for improvement set during progress reviews are too vague to be of use. Learning is enhanced by visits to the theatre, dance

performances and music events. However, there are no formal industry links and curriculum content is not checked for its currency through regular input from external industry professionals.

Leadership and management

57. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Course teams work together well. New teachers are supported well by experienced mentors. Self-assessment is accurate but there is lack of rigour in course reviews in music; they lack detail and are not used to best effect to drive up standards of teaching and learning. Teachers have good access to professional development, including external courses. Accommodation and specialist equipment are satisfactory overall. However, lack of soundproofing in the performing arts area causes noise pollution and makes learning difficult in some lessons. There are too few music computer workstations available to students.

Social science

Good: grade 2

Context

58. The college offers full-time courses in economics, history, psychology and sociology at AS and GCE A level and government and politics at AS level as a major part of its Sixth Form Centre provision. The majority of learners are aged 16 to 18. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 300 learners enrolled for these subjects.

STRENGTHS

- high success rates on most courses
- good teaching and learning
- effective management to improve the student learning experience

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- low pass rates in AS economics and government and politics
- underdeveloped study materials and activities for differentiation
- insufficient written feedback on students' work

Achievement and standards

59. Learners' achievements are good. There are high success rates on most courses. GCE A level pass rates are particularly good in psychology, sociology, economics, and government and politics. At AS level, pass rates have improved in sociology and history and are above the national averages. AS level pass rates in government and politics have consistently fallen over the last three years from satisfactory to very low. The standard of learners' work is good; they use technical terms with confidence and support their arguments with appropriate evidence. Attendance is good and punctuality greatly improved.

Quality of provision

60. Teaching and learning are good. There is good sequencing and pacing of full group, small group and individual work to engage and maintain learners' interest. Learners enjoy their activities which include role plays and presentations of their research to the class. Well structured booklets for AS psychology learners help organise note taking. Teachers plan questions to take account of individual abilities but there is little use of differentiated materials or activities to meet the needs of individual learners. Assessed work is returned promptly but written feedback is insufficient and lacks effective guidance on how to improve.
61. Support for learners is good. The tutorial programme is valued by learners and they receive effective guidance in applying to university. Learners are initially set appropriately challenging targets for achievement of examination grades but

targets set in progress reviews are too often vague and unhelpful. Few learners take part in enrichment opportunities.

Leadership and management

62. Leadership and management are good. There is an increasing focus on developing teaching and learning, supporting new staff and raising standards. The self-assessment report is accurate but quality assurance procedures lack sufficient analysis of progress made by learners in relation to their prior attainment. Staff have received appropriate and relevant training on equality and diversity although this has yet to have an impact at course level. There are improved facilities for learners in the Sixth Form Centre. Learners have good access to computing equipment and the internet. ILT is incorporated into schemes of work but the virtual learning environment contains little material of interest to social science learners.

Provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

63. The college offers full and part-time pre-Entry and Entry level courses on two of its sites and in a local day centre. All classes are held during the day. There are 70 full time and 103 part-time learners, 31 of whom are aged 16 to 18. All courses are externally accredited.

STRENGTHS

- learners' good progress in lessons
- effective target setting and monitoring of learners' progress
- good integration of literacy and numeracy skills
- effective leadership and management resulting in improvement of learners' experience

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient opportunities for learner progression to vocational courses
- insufficient access to ICT to support learning
- underdeveloped work experience

Achievement and standards

64. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Learners make good progress in lessons. They work towards well defined goals which build well on previous learning. All learners achieved externally awarded qualifications in the last academic year. Learners taking the Enterprise programme demonstrate a high degree of confidence and skill and work to a high standard. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to progress to vocational courses.

Quality of provision

65. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy skills are thoroughly integrated in all subjects. Learners' spoken and written vocabulary is built on well through the use of written words and symbols. In practical cookery lessons, learning objectives are carefully planned so that each learner can make progress with their individual skills. Punctuality and attendance are good. Where available, teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards. However, in some lessons there is insufficient use of ICT to support learning. Computers are not always available in classrooms. In a few lessons, learners were unresponsive to questions.

66. Target setting and the monitoring of learners' progress are good. Initial assessments lead to the setting of targets in literacy, numeracy, vocational, personal and social skills. Targets inform individual learning goals in each

subject area. Tutorial systems are thorough. Records are detailed and generally well kept. Although work skills are developed in Enterprise lessons and through lunchtime working in the staff shop, learners have little opportunity to undertake work experience.

Leadership and management

67. Leadership and management are good. Effective actions taken have resulted in significant improvement. Teachers have good ownership of the self-assessment process. Programmes effectively meet the needs of the learners with a range of project work, practical skills and vocational options. Good attention is given to the health and safety of learners. Each learner has an individual risk assessment. Accommodation is suitably equipped in most cases although some rooms are not accessible to wheelchair users.

Business

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

68. The college offers a broad range of courses including GNVQ foundation, intermediate, AS and A level business and AAT accounting courses. The majority of the 544 learners enrolled on these courses are aged 16 to 18 and are taking full-time advanced level programmes. There are approximately 177 part-time learners aged 19 and over enrolled on AAT accounting courses.

STRENGTHS

- high success rates on GNVQ intermediate business, AS and A level business studies
- effective teaching and learning on vocational business courses
- good curriculum enrichment
- effective team work to improve standards

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient attention to meeting the needs of less able learners
- inconsistent target setting for learners

Achievement and standards

69. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Success rates for GNVQ intermediate business have been high for the last two years. In 2004-5, AS and GCE A level business studies success rates improved to above the national average. Success rates on other courses are satisfactory. Learners on vocational courses develop good practical business skills. On advanced courses, learners make reasoned conclusions when analysing work-related case studies. Low attendance in some classes reduces learner achievement.

Quality of provision

70. Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes better. In the best lessons, teachers use a range of activities that maintain and motivate learners. Learners work well in groups developing and applying theory and understanding of business issues and practice. However, insufficient attention is given to meet the needs of less able learners. Strategies and extension materials are underdeveloped with some learners struggling to understand theory and maintain interest.

71. Teachers mark assignments promptly and provide constructive feedback that shows learners how to improve. Target setting for learners is inconsistent. Some progress reviews do not set clear targets for skill development or address the problem of low attendance.

72. There is good enrichment of the business curriculum. This includes productive industrial visits and mandatory work experience on some courses. Key skills are not effectively linked to assignments.
73. Learner support is good. Learners receive comprehensive advice before they enrol. Individual learning needs are accurately diagnosed and learners have access to effective additional support. Teachers make particular efforts to give individual support to learners in lessons. Comprehensive careers education and guidance is included as part of the tutorial scheme of work.

Leadership and management

74. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is effective teamwork to improve standards. There is good communication between team members. Equality of opportunity is well promoted. Teaching materials reflect diversity and the range of provision meets individual and community business needs. The self-assessment report accurately identifies key weaknesses and appropriate action has been taken to improve success rates. Resources are satisfactory overall although noise from some adjacent classrooms sometimes disrupts learning.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age.

2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	01/02	1,216	40	53	-12	1,418	49	50	0
	02/03	1,188	52	56	-4	1,609	54	55	-1
	03/04	1,177	57	60	-3	1,417	55	59	-3
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	42	57	54	3	30	57	41	15
	02/03	26	58	60	-2	19	68	47	21
	03/04	47	81	65	16	1	100	52	
NVQs	01/02	126	64	52	12	78	4	49	-45
	02/03	194	53	56	-3	55	55	57	-2
	03/04	196	57	61	-4	16	63	62	0
Other	01/02	1,048	37	53	-16	1,310	52	50	2
	02/03	968	52	56	-4	1,535	53	55	-2
	03/04	934	56	60	-4	1,400	55	59	-3

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream Level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age.

2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	01/02	1,643	37	50	-13	1,431	34	48	-14
	02/03	1,616	49	52	-3	1,495	53	49	4
	03/04	974	62	56	6	911	59	53	6
GCSEs	01/02	511	39	54	-15	173	53	53	0
	02/03	470	46	57	-11	214	50	55	-5
	03/04	189	49	61	-12	175	57	59	-2
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	304	51	56	-5	35	37	50	-12
	02/03	212	60	59	1	55	33	53	-20
	03/04	163	71	63	8	18	56	57	-1
NVQs	01/02	368	39	43	-4	334	31	45	-13
	02/03	280	48	42	6	330	51	49	2
	03/04	156	74	52	22	120	58	53	5
Other	01/02	460	25	49	-24	889	32	48	-17
	02/03	654	47	50	-4	896	56	48	8
	03/04	466	60	54	6	598	60	52	8

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age. 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	01/02	3,179	43	60	-16	1,402	40	50	-10
	02/03	2,883	52	62	-10	1,320	41	51	-11
	03/04	2,408	61	64	-3	1,103	52	53	-2
A/A2 levels	01/02	648	58	80	-22	230	46	57	-11
	02/03	660	63	82	-18	229	54	63	-9
	03/04	582	71	84	-13	223	66	66	1
AS levels	01/02	1,373	41	60	-18	134	26	47	-21
	02/03	1,196	51	61	-11	161	32	48	-17
	03/04	926	59	63	-4	83	46	50	-4
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	976	34	47	-13	82	33	43	-10
	02/03	731	45	50	-6	79	39	45	-6
	03/04	324	53	52	1	41	32	43	-11
NVQs	01/02	45	60	49	11	220	26	41	-14
	02-03	51	71	51	20	182	38	45	-6
	03/04	44	82	54	28	125	42	47	-5
Other	01/02	137	56	54	3	736	45	54	-9
	02/03	245	42	55	-14	669	39	54	-14
	03/04	532	54	56	-2	631	51	56	-5