



Oaklands College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published December 2005	Provider reference 130723
--------------------------	----------------------------	------------------------------

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	5
Curriculum areas	
<hr/>	
Overall judgement	6
Main findings	8
Curriculum area inspections	12

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Oaklands College
Type of college:	Further Education College
Principal:	Mark Dawe
Address of college:	Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts, AL4 0JA
Telephone number:	01727 737000
Fax number:	01727 737000
Chair of governors:	Michael Newton
Unique reference number:	130723
Name of lead inspector:	Lindsay Hebditch HMI
Dates of inspection:	17–21 October 2005

Background of the organisation

1. Oaklands College is a large general further education (FE) college which was formed from the merger of three colleges in south and mid-Hertfordshire in 1991. It has four major campuses at Borehamwood, St Albans, Smallford and Welwyn Garden City. The college offers provision in all 15 subject sector categories and at a range of levels from pre-entry to higher education (HE).
2. The college serves a relatively prosperous area in which unemployment is low and educational aspirations are high. Over one third of the local workforce are engaged in managerial and professional employment compared with one quarter nationally. The proportion of school leavers with five or more General Certificate of Education (GCSE) grades A* to C in Hertfordshire is 58.5%, well above the national average for England of 53.7%.
3. About 75% of learners live in Hertfordshire. Some 12% of learners belong to minority ethnic groups, nearly double the representation of these groups in the local population and well above the 9.1% in England. Approximately 62% of learners are female and 9% have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
4. The college enrolled 17,275 learners in 2004-05, of which 83% were studying part-time and 82% were adults. Some 40% of learners aged 16 to 18 years are enrolled on courses at level 3. Most adults are enrolled on courses at levels 1 and 2. More than 2,000 adult learners are enrolled on courses not leading to externally validated qualifications. The college also caters for some 379 Year 10 and 11 school pupils drawn from 13 local schools on a range of vocational courses and 380 learners following modern apprenticeships. The college's mission is to be 'first choice for learning and skills'.

Scope of the inspection

5. 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); 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: health and social care; horticulture and animal care; building and construction; information and communication technology (ICT) for users; crafts, creative arts and design; English and modern foreign languages; literacy and numeracy; English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); business management

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
----------------------------	-----------------------

Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
---------------------	---------------

Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3
----------------------------	-----------------------

Quality of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
----------------------	-----------------------

Leadership and management	Satisfactory: grade 3
---------------------------	-----------------------

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

Health and social care	Good: grade 2
------------------------	---------------

Horticulture and animal care	Good: grade 2
------------------------------	---------------

Building and construction	Inadequate: grade 4
---------------------------	---------------------

ICT for users	Good: grade 2
---------------	---------------

Crafts, creative arts and design	Good: grade 2
----------------------------------	---------------

English and modern foreign languages	Satisfactory: grade 3
--------------------------------------	-----------------------

Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: grade 3
-----------------------	-----------------------

English for speakers of other languages	Satisfactory: grade 3
---	-----------------------

Business management	Satisfactory: grade 3
---------------------	-----------------------

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

6. The college has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Learners' achievements are satisfactory overall. Success rates are at, or slightly above national averages at most levels, although they have declined for adult learners on level 3 programmes. The number of high grades achieved by learners is low, but learners generally achieve what is expected of them, based on their prior attainment. The achievement of the full framework within time scale by apprentices is still poor. Attendance is good.
7. Teaching across the college is satisfactory, but inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there is insufficient teaching that is good or better. Most learners enjoy their lessons and respond well to the good variety of activities that teachers prepare for them, although information and learning technology (ILT) is underused in most curriculum areas. The teaching and learning observed in lessons for learners aged 14 to 16 was good. There are good systems in place for initial assessment and subsequent learning support. Although the college has placed a high priority on improving the quality of key skills provision, achievements are still too low.
8. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. An extensive range of courses is provided within the college and strong partnerships have been formed to develop work in the community. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to further their development through enrichment activities. Learners receive good guidance and support.
9. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new principal and governors set a clear strategic direction for the college. Self-assessment is rigorous. Quality assurance arrangements are generally effective in monitoring and improving performance. Although the performance of learners of minority ethnic heritage is analysed at college level, the review of their progress in curriculum areas is cursory.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

10. The college demonstrates good capacity to improve its provision. Quality assurance arrangements are effective in monitoring and improving performance. The college has a well-managed and effective lesson observation system which has helped it to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements have been made in the management of work-based learning, and in the use of data for decision making and quality assurance. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and rigorous. The self-assessment report for 2004/05 was broadly accurate. A strategy is in place to address the acknowledged weaknesses in the college's accommodation.

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

11. The college has made good progress in addressing areas noted for improvement during the last inspection. Success rates have improved to be at or above national averages on most courses. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now satisfactory. There have been improvements in the management of curriculum areas and of work-based learning. Arrangements for the provision of additional learning support are broadly satisfactory and the college's quality assurance arrangements are now more effective. Seven of the curriculum areas inspected improved their grade compared to that awarded at the last inspection, with the other two areas receiving the same grade as in the inspection of 2003. Investments have been made in accommodation, but this is still an area which the college needs to improve.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- clear strategic direction
- effective measures to improve the quality of teaching, learning and student achievements
- extensive range of courses
- good support for learners
- rigorous self-assessment
- strong partnerships to develop provision in the community

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- ineffective arrangements for developing learners' key skills
- insufficient teaching which is good or better
- insufficient use of ILT in teaching and learning
- insufficient opportunities for enrichment
- unsatisfactory accommodation in a minority of curriculum areas
- inadequate review of the performance of learners of minority ethnic heritage in curriculum areas.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Satisfactory: grade 3

12. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment that the standards achieved by learners of all ages are satisfactory overall. Learners on vocational courses acquire good levels of skills which help them to progress to employment. Adults on courses not leading to externally validated qualifications develop particularly good practical skills in arts and media.
13. Since the last inspection the college has sought to improve the achievements of its learners by setting challenging targets for success. These targets have largely been met. Success rates on courses for learners aged 16 to 18 years are higher than for adult learners and are now at or above national averages. There are good results in health and social care and in ICT, but success rates continue to be poor in construction and engineering. The number of learners who achieve high grades is low, but value added measures indicate that most learners are achieving the grades expected of them, based on their prior attainment. Success rates for adult learners have improved overall but are still well below the national average at level 3. The achievement of full framework by apprentices within the agreed time scale is low. Success rates in key skills are low.
14. Female learners achieve better than male learners on most courses. Learners with disabilities and health problems perform at least as well as other learners. The achievements of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds are broadly at the national average. Success rates for learners of Bangladeshi and Chinese heritage have been consistently above the average for the college but learners of Black African and Black Caribbean origins significantly underachieve. The college knows this and is taking appropriate action.
15. Retention rates have improved on courses for learners aged 16 to 18 and are at or above national averages. Retention rates have improved on courses for adults, with the exception of those at level 3 where the retention rate is well below the national average and has declined since the last inspection.
16. Attendance has improved significantly. The college's attendance rate of 84% in 2004-05 was well above the national average and exceeded the college's own target. Inspectors observed a similar good level of attendance during this inspection. Punctuality is satisfactory. Health and safety practices are comprehensive and carefully observed throughout the college.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

Contributory grade:

Learners aged 14 to 16

Good: grade 2

17. The overall quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory, although inspectors agreed with the college that there is insufficient teaching which is good or better. Self-assessment has enabled the college to identify where improvements are needed. Actions taken to improve the planning of lessons, to engage learners more fully and to extend their learning are proving increasingly effective. Most learners enjoy their lessons and respond well to the good variety of activities that teachers prepare for them.
18. Teachers in vocational areas use examples from their own and learners' experience to enliven lessons and increase the relevance of learning. Learners aged 14 to 16 are enthusiastic about their studies and develop good skills on courses in horticulture and animal care, building and construction, and in health and social care. Work-based trainees are well-supported in the workplace by mentors and employers.
19. In the less successful lessons the needs of individual learners are not always identified or met. In a significant minority of lessons the most able learners are insufficiently challenged and do not make the progress they should. Inspectors confirmed that teachers make insufficient use of ILT in lessons.
20. Learners make unsatisfactory progress in developing their key skills. Arrangements for the integrated development of key skills are ineffective. Too many learners fail to complete portfolios and pass rates in key skills tests are low. Teachers do not fully understand their role in the assessment and verification of key skills. The college recognises these weaknesses but revisions to the management of key skills are yet to have any significant impact on the overall quality of provision.
21. Inspection confirms that most assessment is effective. Improved arrangements for the initial assessment of learning needs ensure that most learners receive timely and appropriate support. However, in a number of areas inefficient use is made of learning support assistants because they are given incomplete information about the individual learners' needs. Some support assistants are insufficiently skilled in assisting learners to develop the techniques they need to become independent learners. On-site assessment of work-based learners is well-planned and comprehensive. Most teachers provide detailed comments on how learners can improve their work. Regular progress reviews incorporate a well-developed system using 'minimum achievable grades' which are based on learners' attainment at the start of their course. These grades are entered on individual learning plans and reviewed in tutorials. Full-time learners on most courses have a good understanding of the process. There is insufficient

monitoring and review of individual learning on many adult and community courses.

22. The college provides an extensive range of courses for the learners it recruits. Its approach to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and includes provision for learners with profound learning difficulties or challenging behaviour. There are good progression routes from entry level to level 3 and HE courses in the majority of subject sector areas. The college has effective relations with local partner schools and is actively involved in a well-established 16 to 19 consortium. Provision for learners aged 14 to 16 is good. There are strong partnerships with local agencies to develop courses in the community, including non-accredited first step programmes and courses designed to recruit under-represented learners. Links with employers are good in construction and horticulture, but in other areas they are underdeveloped. The college enrichment programme does not provide learners with sufficient opportunities to gain additional qualifications or provide suitable opportunities for recreation. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities on entry level programmes have insufficient access to work-related experience which would help them to improve their employability.
23. Learners receive good support and guidance. Potential learners receive detailed information about the courses on offer. Induction is thorough. There are good arrangements for tutorial support for full-time learners and for learners on significant part-time courses. The tutorial programme helps learners to develop their study skills, to be aware of the progress they are making, to agree targets for improvement, and to gain information about relevant topics such as money management and healthy living. Learners receive appropriate advice about careers and HE choices. Parents are kept informed of progress. Recently introduced procedures to improve learners' punctuality and attendance have been successful. The college has significantly improved its capacity to provide support for learners who are dyslexic.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: grade 3

24. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new principal and governors provide a clear strategic direction. Standards of teaching and learning and success rates have improved and are now satisfactory. Quality assurance arrangements have been effective in directing improvements. Performance monitoring is aided by accurate and generally well-used management information. The college has effective methods for gathering and analysing the views of learners. Overall satisfaction ratings have improved over the last three years.
25. The lesson observation scheme is effective. Peer observations take place to facilitate the sharing of good practice and much staff development is focused on improving teaching and learning. The college has a well-established appraisal system, but appraisal records are not always completed quickly

enough. The co-ordination and monitoring of reports and actions resulting from external verifier visits are weak for a minority of courses.

26. Self-assessment is comprehensive and rigorous. Detailed programme logs containing performance data and action plan reviews are used to produce thorough self-assessment reports for each curriculum area. The college identified the most significant areas for improvement noted by inspectors.
27. Leadership and management of curriculum areas are generally satisfactory, although managers in building and construction have responded too slowly to address key weaknesses and provision remains inadequate. Management of work-based learning has improved, and the number of framework completions has recently increased. Financial management is effective.
28. The college has responded suitably to race equality and disability legislation. It is successful in securing positive outcomes for young people as identified in the Children Act. The college is making satisfactory progress towards meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. The college analyses the performance of different groups of learners, but within curriculum areas there is insufficient analysis of student performance by ethnicity. Most areas of the college are now accessible to learners with mobility difficulties.
29. The college has appropriate health and safety arrangements. An anti-bullying policy is in place and procedures are applied effectively. Staff recruitment procedures are sound and child protection arrangements are well co-ordinated. Communications are generally effective. In 2005, governors became more probing and challenging when monitoring college performance, having recognised the limited impact of their previous approach. The college provides satisfactory value for money. Staff utilisation is high in relation to their contracted hours. The accommodation strategy has brought improvements, although some rooms are still poor in a minority of areas. Room utilisation has improved with the disposal of some property.

Curriculum area inspections

Health and social care

Good: grade 2

Context

30. The college offers provision from levels 1 to 4 for full and part-time learners. The 53 full-time 16 to 18 year old learners follow courses including General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) foundation and intermediate, Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and a national certificate in care. There are more than 2,200 adult learners enrolled on programmes leading to counselling qualifications, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4 and a range of short courses for those currently employed in the health sector, such as safe handling of medicines, infection control and health and safety.

STRENGTHS

- significant improvement in achievements and standards since the last inspection
- good success rates on many courses
- good links between theory and practice
- effective assessment

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- poor pass rates in key skills
- narrow range of programmes for learners aged 16 to 18
- insufficient sharing of good practice on NVQ programmes

Achievements and standards

31. Achievements and standards are good and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Retention and success rates are now at or above the national average on most courses. Success rates on NVQ courses which were poor at the last inspection are now good. However, pass rates in key skills are poor. Learners develop a good understanding of the links between their theory and practical work. NVQ learners reflect on and improve their practice. Employers appreciate the resulting development in their skills and empathy and say that it has a direct impact on improving the quality of life of their clients.

Quality of provision

32. Teaching is satisfactory, and sometimes better. Most teachers plan good lessons, often providing activities that challenge the more able learners whilst supporting those who find the work more difficult. In the best lessons resources

are provided in different formats so that learners can select the style that suits them best. In the less successful lessons teachers talk too much and do not check whether learners understand what they are doing.

33. Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress are effective. CRB checks are completed during induction to ensure that learners meet the requirements for working with children and vulnerable adults. Diagnostic assessment is thorough and includes special arrangements for distance learners who do not attend the college. Learning support workers effectively integrate literacy, numeracy and language support into lessons. This additional support helps learners to build confidence. All full-time programmes include work placement opportunities.
34. The range of provision is satisfactory overall, but the narrow range of full-time programmes for 16 to 18 years olds does not meet the needs of those aspiring to health related HE. Learners receive good guidance and support. Tutorials are effective. Learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities whilst in college.

Leadership and management

35. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear focus on raising standards. Quality assurance of teaching and learning is rigorous and has led to improvements. Self-assessment is accurate. Equality and diversity are promoted effectively. Communication within the college is good, but the assessors and verifiers who work on NVO courses in the college do not share good practice with those who work with distance learners. Most teachers are well qualified and experienced, but do not possess the skills to teach the scientific aspects of health and social care courses. Resources are deployed effectively.

Horticulture and animal care

Good: grade 2

Context

36. There are courses in horticulture, horse management, animal management and floristry from entry level to level 3. Some 60% of the 720 learners are adults who are enrolled on part-time courses. Currently there are 26 employed apprentices in greenkeeping. More than 100 local school pupils, aged 14 to 16, attend courses in land-based studies.

STRENGTHS

- good and improving success rates on most courses
- good attention to the vocational relevance of courses
- effective tutorials
- good curriculum management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient use of ILT in teaching and learning
- poor teaching accommodation in horticulture

Achievements and standards

37. Achievements and standards are good. Success rates have improved on most courses since the last inspection and are now mostly above national averages. The proportion of learners achieving high grades is good on the national diplomas in horse management and in animal management. The success rate for the completion of full frameworks by apprentices is high. Learners also achieve well in external competitions such as at the Chelsea and Hampton Court Flower Shows and UK Skills competitions. In 2004-05, learners who competed at the Riding for the Disabled National Horse Show were awarded four of the highest places.

Quality of provision

38. Teaching and learning is satisfactory or better. Teaching takes account of learners' needs and preferred ways of learning. Learners enjoy the mix of practical work and theory. There is a strong emphasis on health and safety. Individual targets are set and these provide challenge for the learners. Although ILT resources are adequate, learners make little use of them outside of the production of assignment work.

39. Assessment is good. Teachers make sure that the assignments they set are relevant to employment in land-based industries. Where specific vocational expertise is not present in the teaching team, speakers from industry are invited to talk to the learners. Much of the accommodation has been improved very recently but learners dislike the portacabins, and some polytunnels are in need of repair. Resources for practical work are generally good with access to the estate, farm and a good range of animals.
40. The range of provision is good. Learners welcome the opportunity to take additional courses to improve their employability and value the vocational expertise of their teachers. Learners receive good support. The tutorial system is effective. Learners' individual learning plans and targets are monitored carefully by teachers at their regular review meetings. Learners find the targets helpful in assessing their own performance.

Leadership and management

41. Leadership and management are good. There is good teamwork. Quality assurance is effective. Course reviews draw on an increasingly sophisticated use of data to set targets and monitor performance. Self-assessment is accurate. The management of work-based learning has been improved to provide more rigorous tracking of the progress of learners. There are particular teachers designated to support the development of teaching and learning and some of these are land-based specialists. This resource has helped to improve the quality of teaching and provided valuable support for teachers new to the profession. Staff have received training in equal opportunities and apply the college's policy well in their lesson planning.

Building and construction

Inadequate: grade 4

Context

42. There are currently 146 full-time and 808 part-time learners. More than 60% of learners are adults. Technician, management and craft courses are available at levels 1 to 3 in construction and civil engineering, and in a range of occupations including electrical, plumbing, gas, wood occupations, brickwork, and painting and decorating trades. There are 251 work-based learners. Local school pupils, aged 14 to 16, attend courses in carpentry and joinery and in painting and decorating.

STRENGTHS

- high levels of student engagement in lessons
- good standard of practical skills in the workplace
- good support for learners

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- poor success rates in construction
- slow framework completion for work based learners
- inadequate management response to key weaknesses identified at the last inspection

Achievements and standards

43. Achievements and standards are inadequate. Although learners achieve well on a minority of courses, the overall success rate is poor at 43% and has not improved since the last inspection. Most work-based learners take too long to complete the full framework. Current learners demonstrate a higher standard of practical skills in the workplace than past success rates suggest.

Quality of provision

44. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is effective teaching and learning in the majority of both theory and practical lessons. There is a high level of student engagement in learning and the standard of written and practical work they produce is satisfactory. The college has recently invested heavily in ILT, but the resources are not used sufficiently in lessons. Attendance is well above the national average for the sector.

45. Assessment is satisfactory. There are effective systems in place for the initial assessment of learners and for the subsequent provision of additional learning support. This learning support is provided by construction specialists and is integrated into most practical, theoretical and key skills classes. There are detailed assessment plans. Assignments are promptly marked and detailed feedback is given to learners. Effective on-site assessment is carried out for work-based learners, even though this is not a requirement for some construction trades.
46. Learner support is good. The comprehensive progress tracking systems are regularly updated and used effectively by workplace mentors and teachers. Learners are visited regularly in the workplace and value this contact with college staff. Health and safety procedures are of a high standard and there is continuous reinforcement of health and safety on site. Learners understand the college requirements and all wear appropriate protective clothing and assist staff in keeping workshops tidy and tools correctly stored. The range of provision is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

47. The management response to key weaknesses identified at the last inspection has been inadequate. The college has found it difficult to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff. Some courses have continued to perform poorly and no effective steps have been taken to rectify the situation until very recently. Managers are now addressing the weaknesses more systematically and there are signs that their efforts are taking effect. The quality of teaching, attendance and the monitoring of progress have all improved. Equal opportunities are promoted effectively. Resources for construction are satisfactory, with some recent investment in new woodworking machinery and plumbing equipment. Accommodation is well maintained.

ICT for users

Good: grade 2

Context

48. The college offers a broad range of full-time vocational programmes from levels 1 to level 4. Some 162 learners aged 16 to 18 years and 28 adults are enrolled on full-time courses including GNVQs, AVCE and national diplomas. There are currently 821 adult enrolments on part-time ICT courses, both at the college and in community venues. Most adults follow courses at levels 1 and 2. Sometimes courses do not take place due to low enrolments, but learners are offered suitable alternatives.

STRENGTHS

- good and improving success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on vocational courses
- effective support for learners in lessons
- broad range of courses for 16 to 18 year olds
- good management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- low success rates for adults on some courses

Achievements and standards

49. Achievements are good for learners aged 16 to 18 and satisfactory for adults. There are high and improving success rates on most full-time courses. Some courses for adults have good levels of success, but learners on others achieve very little. Success rates on several European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) courses were well below the national average in 2004-05, with one course retaining only 22% of those who enrolled. Learners aged 16 to 18 years attend well and are punctual. There is a high proportion of 16 to 18 year old learners from minority ethnic groups. They make good progress, with female learners of minority ethnic heritage achieving the best results. Many learners aged 16 to 18 progress to more advanced courses and to HE.

Quality of provision

50. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. Lessons are generally well planned to meet the needs of individual learners and are taught in a lively way. This engages younger learners but does not always lead to good levels of learning. Learners aged 16 to 18 value the support they get from their teachers in lessons because it helps them to develop their knowledge and understanding.

The needs of learners with difficulties and/or disabilities are addressed appropriately in lessons.

51. Adult learners enjoy their learning and speak highly of the college's drop-in centres. Resources are used well. Teachers make good use of the college's virtual learning environment to check on learners' progress, sometimes using imaginative techniques such as contextualised quizzes. Most accommodation is satisfactory and enables teachers to use a variety of teaching methods, but one of the drop-in centres is noisy, which interferes with learning.
52. Learners receive good support. Tutors use individual target setting with 16 to 18 year olds. It motivates the learners and they strive to do well because of it. Sometimes extra help is provided in lessons to support those learners who have been assessed as having learning difficulties, but some learners do not take up the extra support which is offered. Enrichment is used to extend 16 to 18 year olds' experiences but does not always provide the activities they wish.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management are good. Course management is strong. Communication is effective. Teachers benefit from a wide variety of staff development activities which help them to develop their classroom skills. Quality assurance and self-assessment are mostly thorough and lead to clear actions for improvement. However, some self-assessment judgements are insufficiently critical.

Crafts, creative arts and design

Good: grade 2

Context

54. Some 40% of the 395 learners currently enrolled are aged 16 to 18 and following full-time courses at level 3. These include a broad range of national diploma courses and General Certificate of Education Advanced Supplementary/Advanced (GCE AS/A) levels. Most adults follow part-time courses in jewellery, life drawing, ceramics and photography. The Access to HE course in art and design has 16 full-time adult learners.

STRENGTHS

- good success rates on full-time courses
- good proportion of higher grades on many courses
- excellent standard of learners' conceptual and graphics work
- effective teaching strategies
- good enrichment linked to art and design programmes
- effective monitoring of learners' progress
- good curriculum leadership

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient development and accreditation of literacy and numeracy in level 3 courses
- poor punctuality

Achievements and standards

55. Achievements and standards are good. Success rates on full-time courses have been at or above the national average in each of the last three years, and are improving. A good proportion of learners achieve high grades. GCE A level graphics recently won a national award for outstanding results from the Good Schools Guide. Success rates on most part-time courses are good. Learners' work is very good. The conceptual development displayed in their practical work is well above the expected standard. Installation and graphics work are well-realised and of high quality.

Quality of provision

56. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are thoughtfully planned and prepared, although the lack of interactive white boards and computers within studios and classrooms hampers the development of some creative practice. Teaching strategies are effective and assignments are developed to ensure that tasks are taught at the appropriate level. Teachers work hard to raise learners' confidence, but in a minority of lessons the most able learners are not given sufficient challenge. On a minority of courses there is poor punctuality that

hinders teaching and learning. Although the management of key skills has improved, learners on level 3 courses are not given enough opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy.

57. Assessment practices are good. Feedback to learners is constructive and helps them learn. The range of provision is good. Learners benefit from the well-conceived enrichment activities, including visits to galleries and museums in the UK and abroad. Visits are closely linked to project work and themes for learning. Following a visit to a museum of African masks, learners on the first diploma course developed a range of line drawings in inks and pencils which they used to create their own designs on collage with charcoal.
58. Learner support is good. Progress is monitored effectively through individual learning plans, assessment records and tutorials. Additional support is well organised both in class and discrete lessons. Learners value the help they receive from their teachers. The range of provision is good.

Leadership and management

59. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear focus on raising standards, although actions to improve punctuality have been only partially successful. The performance of teachers is appraised regularly and there is a good staff development programme aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Self-assessment is thorough and the resulting report is accurate. Course leadership is strong and communication is good. Most teachers are well qualified and experienced. Resources are deployed effectively.

English and modern foreign languages

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

60. The college offers provision for some 180 16 to 18 year olds and 633 adult learners. Most learners aged 16 to 18 follow GCE AS/A-level courses in English. Adult learners can follow courses from beginners' level in French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Some of these are non-accredited and some lead to a Certificate in Business Language Competence. French, German and Spanish are currently taught to GCE AS/A-level.

STRENGTHS

- good success rates on most courses
- much imaginative teaching
- good range of provision for adult learners in modern foreign languages
- strong and effective leadership and management of English

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- poor retention in GCSE French and German for adult learners
- teaching which does not provide enough challenge for the most able learners
- insufficient enrichment opportunities
- not enough use of ILT to support learning

Achievements and standards

61. Achievements and standards are good. Success rates are very much improved since the last inspection and are above the national average on most courses. Learners aged 16 to 18 on GCE AS/A-level courses perform slightly better overall than would be expected from their previous attainment, but too few are achieving high grades. Success rates on modern foreign language courses for adult learners are mostly satisfactory, although retention is poor in GCSE French and German. Attendance is good.

Quality of provision

62. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have been well trained in developing methods to encourage learners to take an active part in their learning. In the best language lessons, adult learners are speaking the foreign language confidently and developing authentic pronunciation. There are excellent systems for setting assignments and for giving detailed and helpful feedback, but sometimes not enough work is being set. The more able learners on level 3 courses are insufficiently challenged.

63. The range of provision is good. Adult learners have a good choice of modern foreign languages, and beginners can progress up to advanced level. Imaginative ways have been found to bridge the gap between levels with interim courses, and learners are well matched to the correct level through initial assessment. However, in courses where learners are not working towards a qualification, their progress is not systematically recorded or monitored. Some accommodation is dilapidated, but classrooms are made attractive through displays of learners' work. Facilities for ILT are inadequate, and although television is available it is not being used enough. There are few opportunities for enrichment activities for learners outside lessons. Links with schools are good. The college is working to further develop its links with employers.
64. Learners receive good support. Tutors share with learners the minimum grade they might be expected to achieve based on previous results, and monitor their progress carefully. Courses provide opportunities for learners to collect evidence for key skills qualifications, but personal tutors do not have a common approach to making sure their learners do this.

Leadership and management

65. Leadership and management for English are good. The team is enthusiastic and has a strong shared vision, developed through regular meetings and training. Self-assessment is generally accurate and reliable. Weaknesses from the last inspection have been effectively addressed. Staff have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues and this informs their curriculum planning.

Literacy and numeracy

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

66. The college offers a range of discrete literacy and numeracy courses from entry to level 2 as well as learning support on vocational courses. There are currently 30 learners aged 16 to 18 and 198 adults on discrete provision. This includes 12 learners on literacy and nine on numeracy courses which are delivered under contract with the probation service. There are 20 learners enrolled on Entry to Employment courses. Some 102 16 to 18 year olds and 75 adults receive learning support on mainstream vocational courses. The college also offers family learning and 'return to learn' courses, but these were not running at the time of the inspection.

STRENGTHS

- significant improvement in achievement on accredited courses
- good response to meet the needs of learners on vocational courses
- effective application of initial assessment

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient teaching that is good or better
- not enough appropriately trained teaching and support staff
- inconsistent planning to meet individual learning needs

Achievements and standards

67. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. There has been a significant improvement in the achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications since the previous inspection. Success rates are now mostly at or above national averages. The attendance and progress of learners in lessons are satisfactory. Retention rates are generally at, or slightly above the national average.

Quality of provision

68. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but too few lessons are good or better. In the good lessons the learners extend their skills well. However, in the weaker lessons there is insufficient focus on the needs of the individual learner. Lesson plans identify those learners who have support needs but few provide specific information on how those needs will be met. Teachers and learning support assistants do not spend sufficient time together to plan lessons. This affects the quality of learning and the subsequent review of the effectiveness of the lesson. Teachers do not always adapt their lessons when it becomes apparent that the learners are unable to cope.

69. Initial and diagnostic assessment, and subsequent learning support are good. Learners on all courses have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Those learners who perform below an expected level have a diagnostic assessment. Teachers use the results from assessment effectively to inform target setting. Learners' individual learning plans are used to provide regular feedback on progress and encourage the learners to reflect on their learning.
70. Guidance is good. Learners receive accurate advice on course options and tutorials are effective. Registers and feedback demonstrate that the learners are placed on the right course. The range of provision is good.

Leadership and management

71. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Management has responded well to the growing demand for learning support on vocational courses, for example in the provision of additional literacy and numeracy lessons for poorly performing courses in construction. Newly recruited teaching and support staff are insufficiently trained and experienced. Few have teaching qualifications. New teachers benefit from an extensive training programme. Nevertheless, not all learning support assistants have sufficient skills to give effective support. This reduces the quality of learning. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the literacy and numeracy provision, although the college has over-estimated the quality of its teaching.

English for speakers of other languages

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

72. The college offers a good range of ESOL provision to 604 learners, of which 93% are adults. Classes are offered from entry level to level 2. There are 167 learners following a daytime modular programme. They attend two or three language classes weekly. The college also offers part-time language skills programmes, with 86 learners following day classes and 132 learners following evening classes. Women only classes, for learners whose culture does not permit them to study alongside men, and mixed-level community classes take place in four primary schools and one community centre. The college also organises workplace ESOL learning at the premises of two employers for 73 learners.

STRENGTHS

- good retention on college certificated ESOL long courses
- good integration of language skills
- good range of programmes
- effective arrangements for tutorial support
- effective measures to improve provision

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- unsatisfactory planning of individual learning
- insufficient use of ILT in lessons
- poor planning of provision for workplace learning in ESOL

Achievements and standards

73. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Retention on long courses leading to college certificates is good. Pass rates are satisfactory. Take up of the new national skills for life ESOL qualifications is high, but the introduction of these qualifications is too recent to judge how successful they are. Learners significantly improve their fluency, accuracy and confidence in using spoken English on all courses. They make at least satisfactory progress in improving their reading and writing skills.

Quality of provision

74. Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection and are satisfactory. The integrated practice of language skills is good. Better classes routinely combine practice and development of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In most classes learners gain useful listening and speaking practice through working together in pairs or small groups. Learners are often highly

motivated and engaged. Planning of individual learning is unsatisfactory. While lessons often contain a good range of activities appropriate to all learners in a group, most fail to include sufficient activities to cater for specific differences in levels of language skill or need. The use of ILT in lessons is insufficient. Classrooms rarely have computers or other ILT facilities. When classes are timetabled into specialist ICT rooms, teachers often make good use of the resource, but few classes have such access.

75. Learners receive good support. Effective tutorial support is an integral part of all courses, including evening classes. The balance between group and individual sessions is good. Topics are appropriate, and concentrate on the monitoring and support of academic progress. Learners speak highly of the good personal support their teachers provide.

Leadership and management

76. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has put in place effective measures to improve provision. A peer observation programme encourages the sharing of good practice. Staff development focuses successfully on increasing active classroom learning. The college has swiftly introduced the new skills for life ESOL examinations. Uptake is good and learners are enthusiastic. Planning of provision for workplace learning in ESOL is poor. Until recently learning goals for those on the provision were poorly defined. Differences in the expectations of learners and their employers went unresolved and the training of staff was inadequate. The college has recently made significant improvements in the management and delivery arrangements for this provision, but it is too early to assess their impact. Self-assessment is thorough, appropriately inclusive and self-critical. Accommodation is satisfactory and resources are deployed effectively.

Business management

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

77. The college offers provision from level 1 to foundation degree level for full and part-time learners. The 154 full-time learners are mostly aged 16 to 18 and follow courses including GNVQs, national diploma and GCE AS/A-levels. Some 109 adult part-time learners follow courses in accounting and bookkeeping. The inspection focused on full-time general business courses.

STRENGTHS

- improving success rates on most courses
- good monitoring of learner progress
- good leadership and management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- unsatisfactory implementation of key skills
- insufficient impact of recent initiatives to improve teaching and learning
- insufficient employer involvement and work experience opportunities

Achievements and standards

78. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. There are improving success rates on most courses and for all ages. Success rates on GCE AS/A-level courses are broadly in line with those expected, based on the prior attainment of the learners. Retention has improved on most courses. Learners' work is satisfactory and demonstrates an appropriate understanding of business skills and knowledge. Attendance is improving in line with the college trend.

Quality of provision

79. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most lessons are well-planned and the proportion of imaginative teaching is increasing. Teachers make good use of ILT to support learning. In its self-assessment report the college identified the need to increase the proportion of lessons which are good or better. However, current initiatives have yet to result in any significant improvement in the percentage of good lessons.

80. Assessment is satisfactory. Key skills have only been offered to learners since January 2005. There are strategies to teach key skills within the business curriculum but the implementation of these strategies is unsatisfactory. Very few learners have achieved all aspects of their key skills. Some learners have passed the external test but their portfolio achievements have been delayed.

Assessment and internal verification arrangements for key skills are inadequate to ensure prompt achievement.

81. Learners receive good support. Learner progress is carefully monitored through the tutorial system. Learners know their individual targets and value the introduction of the system to determine their minimum achievable grades. There are comprehensive monitoring records from which information is appropriately shared with support and other staff. Tutors provide good encouragement to learners to improve their grades.
82. The college has made progress in establishing links with local businesses but progress has been slow. There are currently no established contacts with local businesses. Learners do not have access to any business-related work experience. The range of provision is satisfactory overall. A few courses have been discontinued at particular campuses for reasons of cost efficiency, lack of demand or previously identified quality issues. This has resulted in some gaps in provision.

Leadership and management

83. Leadership and management are good. Staff are clear about their roles and are encouraged to undertake staff development to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Peer and management observations are welcomed by teachers and are seen by them as central to continuous improvement. ILT is now more frequently used to support learning. Internal communication is good. There are frequent meetings of staff from different campuses to discuss common approaches to course planning and curriculum development. Resources are generally satisfactory and deployed effectively. The self-assessment report is accurate and post-inspection action plans are carefully monitored.

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	637	45	53	-8	1,738	51	50	1
	02/03	872	47	56	-9	2,317	50	55	-5
	03/04	536	69	60	8	1,645	63	59	5
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	84	64	54	10	52	42	41	1
	02/03	86	59	60	0	62	69	47	22
	03/04	87	62	65	-3	1	100	52	
NVQs	01/02	43	70	52	18	11	45	49	-4
	02/03	46	83	56	27	1	0	57	
	03/04	53	68	61	7	5	40	62	
Other	01/02	510	39	53	-13	1,675	51	50	1
	02/03	740	44	56	-12	2,254	50	55	-5
	03/04	396	70	60	10	1,639	64	59	5

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	1,856	43	50	-7	4,735	23	48	-25
	02/03	1,776	44	52	-8	2,428	37	49	-12
	03/04	1,536	57	56	0	2,045	59	53	6
GCSEs	01/02	599	36	54	-18	235	47	53	-6
	02/03	221	52	57	-5	172	63	55	8
	03/04	225	61	61	0	273	61	59	2
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	257	61	56	5	38	16	50	-34
	02/03	230	60	59	1	31	39	53	-14
	03/04	216	74	63	11	14	50	57	-7
NVQs	01/02	268	31	43	-12	504	41	45	-3
	02/03	171	7	42	-35	349	37	49	-12
	03/04	68	43	52	-9	259	47	53	-7
Other	01/02	732	47	49	-2	3,958	19	48	-29
	02/03	1,154	44	50	-6	1,876	34	48	-14
	03/04	1,027	53	54	-1	1,499	61	52	9

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	2,928	45	60	-15	1,584	42	50	-8
	02/03	2,143	57	62	-4	1,186	45	51	-7
	03/04	1,806	54	64	-10	1,158	52	53	-2
A/A2 levels	01/02	507	56	80	-24	150	51	57	-6
	02/03	459	78	82	-4	110	65	63	2
	03/04	365	75	84	-8	152	70	66	4
AS levels	01/02	1,506	39	60	-21	167	43	47	-4
	02/03	878	58	61	-3	189	49	48	1
	03/04	731	48	63	-15	122	53	50	4
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	677	46	47	-1	128	48	43	5
	02/03	538	43	50	-7	73	33	45	-12
	03/04	338	38	52	-15	22	36	43	-7
NVQs	01/02	28	46	49	-2	232	34	41	-7
	02-03	11	18	51	-32	190	35	45	-9
	03/04	1	0	54		148	53	47	6
Other	01/02	210	56	54	2	887	42	54	-12
	02/03	257	50	55	-6	624	44	54	-10
	03/04	371	58	56	3	714	48	56	-7

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college in 2003/04

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of learners*	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	143	20	33	57	50
	Advanced	59	22	32	36	50

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of learners*	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	121	2	16	28	27
	Advanced	54	9	19	20	33

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

1. Outcomes on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes managed by the college 2003/04 to 2004/05

Year	Number of starts in year	Achieved Objectives *	Progression **	Still in learning
2003/04	24	24	***	***
2004/05	32	23	14	12

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms s' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period

*** Data not available