



Plymouth College of Further Education

Better
education
and care

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published July 2006	Provider reference 130649
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Introduction

Plymouth College of Further education was inspected in March 2004. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in Maths and Science, Construction including WBL, Hair and Beauty Therapy which were found to be less than satisfactory. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is less than satisfactory within two years of the original inspection. If inadequate areas of learning or aspects of provision remain inadequate following re-inspection, inspectors will continue to monitor progress at annual assessment visits, but the areas will not be re-graded. They will be re-inspected during the full college inspection.

The less than satisfactory curriculum areas were re-inspected on March 28-29 2006. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Science and Mathematics	4	4

Context

The college provides a wide range of science and mathematics courses for students aged 16-18 and for adults. During the day, students can study GCE A and AS levels in mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, applied science, GCSE mathematics and vocational science courses at level 2 and 3. The college offers an access to science course for adults returning to study both in the day and the evening. Also, during the evening there are part-time classes in GCSE maths. Overall there are 401 learners aged 16-18 and 227 adults studying on mathematics and science courses.

Strengths

- High pass rate on vocational science and GCE A level mathematics in 2005
- High quality laboratories and well used learning resources
- Good support for students on their academic courses
- Good development of quality assurance procedures
- Much improved course management
- Good range of courses meeting student needs

Areas for improvement

- Low A-C grade success rates on GCSE Mathematics
- Very low success rates on most AS science courses
- Low retention rates on many courses

- Poor achievement relative to students' prior attainment on A and AS courses
- Ineffective teaching in some science lessons

Achievement and standards

Success rates have not improved significantly since the inspection in 2004 and remain unsatisfactory overall. In 2005 the pass rates on the GNVQ, Access and AVCE science courses were good although the retention rate on the AVCE course was poor. The pass rate on the A level mathematics course has improved steadily and reached 100% in 2005. However, there are too many academic courses with low pass rates. These include AS and A2 chemistry and AS human biology, all of which are over 13 percentage points below national averages.

Retention is low on GCSE maths, AS biology, AS human biology, AS mathematics, AVCE science, and AS physics. In 2005 only 29% of students who enrolled on GCSE Maths achieved an A-C grade. At the time of the re-inspection, retention on the AS and A2 courses was significantly better than compared with the same time the previous year. Attendance had also improved and was now satisfactory.

Overall, on AS and A level programmes, students do not achieve the grades that would be expected based on their GCSE achievement on entry.

Quality of provision

Since the last inspection there have been many initiatives aimed at improving teaching and learning. However this has not lead to improvements in student achievement in the academic year 2004/05. Problems with the timetable caused a significant delay to the start of teaching and a strategy to teach the academic subjects through the use of lead lectures, reduced time with teachers, and unsupported private study sessions proved very ineffective.

From September 2005, additional teaching hours have been allocated and students have been better supported by staff during the study sessions. This is most successful in mathematics but in science, students have difficulty making full use of the unsupervised sessions. Teaching has been improved, particularly in mathematics, by a comprehensive programme of staff development provided by the college of St. Mark and St. John and by the introduction of standards unit teaching materials. The quality of lessons seen during the re-inspection is consistent with the college's own view that while much teaching in maths is good, there is still some inadequate teaching in science. The weaker lessons seen were far too teacher-centred or were hampered by the material being pitched at too high a level for the students.

Science teaching takes place in attractive, well equipped and well organised laboratories. Students benefit from good access to equipment and computers and good use is made of interactive whiteboards in lessons.

Support for students is good. Each student has a specialist tutor who is easily available and tracks their progress and attendance carefully. Subject reports are regular and an online system allows teachers to record each student's progress against their target grade. This information is accessible to both students and managers but actions agreed between the tutor and the student are too vague and do not help students know what to do to improve.

Leadership and management

A new management team has been in place this academic year and they are having a positive impact on attendance, support for students, retention, staff development, teachers' morale and the organisation of courses and timetables. In recent months, new procedures have been introduced to judge the quality of teaching and learning and managers are now aware of strengths and weaknesses in the teaching. There are good strategies in place to improve teaching and learning and plans to develop vocational science courses appear sound.

The SAR is largely accurate although weaknesses in GCSE achievement and value added are understated.

Curriculum	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Construction	4	3
Contributory grade for WBL	4	3

Context

The college offers a wide range of full and part-time construction courses from foundation to advanced and higher level.

Full-time learners can study for a technical certificate in one of six major trades or take a national diploma in construction. For part-time learners, NVQ awards and their technical certificates are available up to level 3 in seven construction occupations.

At the time of inspection there were 261 16-18 year olds and 1039 adult learners, with 194 apprentices on work-based learning programmes. In addition, 98 pupils attend the schools link programme.

Strengths

- High success rates on most programmes
- Good development of practical skills
- Broad provision, well matched to employer needs

Areas for improvement

- Weak target setting
- Insufficient written feedback to help the learners progress

Achievement and standards

Success rates on most programmes improved to significantly better national averages in 2004/05. For example, the one year level 2 construction award improved for the third successive year to better the national success rate by 41%. Key skill achievements improved significantly in 2004/05. The development of learners' practical skills is good, with high standards of student work observed during the re-inspection. Achievement of apprenticeship frameworks has improved and is now satisfactory. NVQ completions for apprentices at level 2 also showed significant improvements, increasing from 3% to 83% in 2004/05.

Quality of provision

Teaching is satisfactory. Practical sessions promote goods skills development. Assessment is accurate but there is too little written feedback to guide learners' improvement.

Reviews of work-based learners encourage good learner and employer participation and contributions. Target setting, however, is weak. Previously-set targets are not followed up well enough while new targets lack specific actions and clear deadlines. In tutorials too, targets lack well-defined actions to challenge learners and encourage progress.

Resources are satisfactory, with some particularly spacious external areas for brickwork and carpentry. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and hold or are working towards teaching and assessing qualifications.

The construction provision is well matched to the needs of employers and offers a particularly wide range of appropriate craft and technician programmes.

Leadership and management

The new leadership and management team is highly effective. Closer staff cooperation and better monitoring of learners on work-based learning has been successful in raising achievement. Quality improvement measures are followed closely and lesson observations result in improvements actions being identified. Internal verification is now robust. Evaluation of the provision as a whole is now rigorous and a thorough and accurate self-assessment process now involves staff at all levels.

Curriculum	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Hairdressing & Beauty Therapy	4	3

Context

The college offers a range of full-time and part-time programmes in hairdressing and beauty and holistic therapies from level 1 to level 3. At the time of inspection there were 197 students aged 16 to 18 and 90 adults on full-time programmes. 35 students aged 16 to 18 and 215 adults attend part-time. There are also 58 learners on hairdressing work-based learning.

Strengths

- High pass rates on beauty therapy programmes
- Good retention rates on most beauty therapy programmes
- Good achievement in modern apprenticeship frameworks
- Good leadership and management in beauty therapy

Areas for improvement

- Low retention rates on level 2 hairdressing
- Low pass rates on level 1 hairdressing

Achievement and standards

Retention rates on most beauty therapy programmes are high, whereas retention on level 2 hairdressing 2004/05 was 18 percentage points below national average.

Pass rates on all beauty therapy programmes and hairdressing level 2 are high. There are good achievements in modern apprenticeship frameworks. However, pass rates on hairdressing level 1 are poor at 11 percentage points below national averages.

Attendance is good on most programmes and students progress at a satisfactory pace. Their practical work is good; many learners demonstrate

advanced practical skills in both hairdressing and beauty therapy whilst displaying a highly professional image and attitude. Students produce written work to a good standard.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are now satisfactory with significant improvements made. Most lessons are well planned and teachers use a range of teaching and learning styles to maintain the interest of their learners. Many of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning are identified accurately through the comprehensive lesson observation process. However, insufficient focus is given to learning in the reporting and feedback. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Teachers provide constructive feedback on written work and after practical assessment, which helps students to improve their work.

Beauty salons are modern and reflect professional standards. Hairdressing salons are satisfactory. There are good IT facilities within the section; these are used effectively to promote learning.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in beauty therapy are good. The new management team, although in its infancy, is already having a positive effect on hairdressing, which is now satisfactory. Many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been addressed through effective leadership and management and effective quality assurance procedures. The system of lesson observation is rigorous and identifies areas for improvement in teaching and learning. Staff are well supported by their managers who involve them positively in self-assessment process.