



Stafford College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience	Published	Provider reference
Post-sixteen	April 2006	130813

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	5

Summary of grades awarded	6
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Overall judgement	7
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Stafford College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Mr Stephen Willis
Address of college:	Earl Street, Stafford, ST16 2QR
Telephone number:	01785 223800
Fax number:	01785 259953
Chair of governors:	Dr Jennifer Sorrell
Unique reference number:	130813
Name of lead inspector:	Melanie Kavanagh, HMI
Dates of inspection:	27 February – 3 March 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Stafford College is a large general further education college in Stafford. It has one main site and one smaller site, both in the town centre. Whilst the college primarily serves the town and a large part of mid and south Staffordshire, the catchment area is large and extends to the edges of Wolverhampton and into Shropshire. Unemployment in Stafford, at 1.8%, is below regional and national levels. The staying on rate of 79% is above regional and national levels. The overwhelming majority of the local population is white (approximately 97%) with a broad range of other ethnic backgrounds represented in the remaining percentage. The college ethnicity profile for 2004/05 shows that approximately 87% of learners identified themselves as white, with the remaining percentage again representing a broad range of other ethnic backgrounds. There are slightly more female learners than male in both full- and part-time courses.
2. There are six high schools in Stafford and several others in the catchment area, all with sixth forms. The Chetwynd Centre, a school consortium post-16 centre funded by the LEA, operates close to the college's main site. In September 2005, the college, the local high schools and Chetwynd Centre established the Stafford Collegiate for the joint delivery of GCE A-levels. The college delivers higher education (HE) courses in association with Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF).
3. The college offers vocational and general education programmes from foundation to higher education in 14 out of 15 sector subject areas (SSAs). Vocational subjects are offered in most of these areas. Most learners aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on full-time courses. The majority of adult learners are enrolled on part-time courses. The college is a Centre for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for Early Years Care and Education.
4. The college runs a Junior College Programme on Saturdays for pre-16 learners. There are growing numbers of learners aged 14 to 16. In 2004/05 there were approximately 500 young people taking part in the college's Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP).
5. There are two high street information technology (IT) centres offering flexible delivery of mainly basic IT skills. These centres had approximately 3,300 enrolments in 2004/05. Literacy and numeracy courses are offered at community venues as well as at the college's main sites. Work-based learning programmes (WBL) include Modern Apprenticeships and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).
6. The college's mission is to 'meet learner needs and aspirations through excellence in education and training'.

Scope of the inspection

7. 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 annual assessment 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.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

8. Overall, learners' achievements are satisfactory and some aspects are good. There has been a trend of improvement in success rates at all levels. In 2004/05, success rates on long courses were all broadly at the national average. Retention rates have improved and are now at, or above national averages. Learners achieve particularly well on short courses. The college has succeeded in improving attendance rates to above the average for colleges of a similar type. Key skills pass rates, achievement in construction and the achievement of apprenticeship frameworks remain areas for improvement.
9. The quality of provision is good. Lessons are well planned to meet the needs of individual learners. Communication technologies are used well to enliven and promote learning. Initial assessment is thorough and the take-up of additional learning support is good. The teaching of key skills has improved and is effective in engaging learners' interest.
10. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. There are no underperforming groups of learners. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. The curriculum reflects local employment needs and national priorities. There is a wide range of progression opportunities for learners.
11. Guidance and support are good. There are comprehensive pre-entry information, advice and guidance arrangements and good levels of personal support for learners. Tutorials are of variable quality and are insufficiently monitored. Learners are not given sufficiently clear advice about the nature of bullying and harassment or about their rights and responsibilities to others.
12. Leadership and management are good. Governors and managers provide strong leadership and monitor closely all aspects of the performance of the college. There is a strong focus on raising standards. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

13. The college demonstrates a good capacity to improve. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and rigorous. The self-assessment report for 2004/05 is accurate. The college's quality assurance arrangements are generally effective in monitoring and improving performance. Many of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed. Success rates have improved at most levels and for most age groups to be in line with national averages. The college has a well managed and effective lesson

observation system that promotes improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Financial and performance data are very good. They are used well by managers at all levels to monitor provision and promote improvements.

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

14. The college has made good progress in addressing most areas for improvement identified during the last inspection. Retention rates have improved; there is more rigorous monitoring of attendance and the attendance rate is now above the national average for colleges of a similar type. The teaching of key skills has also improved significantly. The take up of additional learning support is now good. The completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks has increased, but is still low. The promotion of equality of opportunity in work-based learning, and for learners on many other courses, also remains an area for further improvement.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths:

- Strong and successful leadership and management
- Effective action to improve achievement
- Well planned and effective teaching
- Partnerships that promote learners' achievements and opportunities
- Well developed self-assessment leading to improvements
- Particularly good staff development and training.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- Some aspects of learners' achievements
- Quality monitoring of tutorial provision
- Learners' awareness of equality and diversity and their rights and responsibilities.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Satisfactory: grade 3

15. Overall achievement is satisfactory, and some aspects are good. Most learners enter the college with average or below average prior attainment, and reach standards that are broadly at the national average. There has been a trend of improvement in success rates at all levels. College data show that in 2004/05, success rates at all levels for learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners had improved to around the national average. Learners achieved well on short courses in 2004/05. In particular, learners aged 16 to 18 achieved success rates on short courses that were significantly above the national average.
16. Retention on many courses was identified at the last inspection as a key area for improvement. In 2004/05, retention improved at most levels to around, or slightly above, national averages. However, retention for learners studying level 1 courses declined from their previously high standard to the national average. College data for current retention rates suggest that the improvements in retention rates have been maintained or improved in all curriculum areas. The college has improved the attendance rate since the last inspection and it is now above the average for colleges of a similar type.
17. Current achievement data shows that there are no underperforming groups of learners. Male and female learners achieve similar results as do those from different ethnic groups. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and achieve well.
18. Achievement in construction has been recognised by the college as unsatisfactory. Managers have taken action to address this issue, although it is too early to judge its impact.
19. Overall, key skills pass rates improved in 2004/05, particularly on one year courses where they were significantly above national averages. However, some key skills pass rates on two year courses remain low and a minority have declined. There is low achievement of apprenticeship frameworks.
20. Learners are generally well motivated and participate effectively in their lessons. The standard of their written and practical work is often good. Most learners respond well to teachers' questions, exercises involving teamwork and presentations.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

21. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Most lessons are well planned. Teachers use a variety of activities to match the needs of individual learners. Communication technologies, such as interactive white boards and powerpoint, are used appropriately as tools to enliven the presentation of information and to encourage learner participation in activities. The virtual learning environment is a new and developing resource. In the best lessons it is used well to provide either extension work or support for learners, according to their needs.
22. The college has identified accurately areas for development in teaching and learning. These include: further development of questions to check learning; more activities to meet the individual needs of learners; and an increased focus on measurable learning outcomes in lessons.
23. The majority of learners undergo thorough initial assessment for their literacy and numeracy needs. For many, this assessment takes place before they start their course, and is used well to guide learners on to appropriate programmes. Initial assessment and support are clearly promoted to adult learners on part-time courses.
24. Teachers are well trained in assessment strategies. Regular verification of assignments takes place. Learners' progress is tracked thoroughly. However, teachers do not always provide enough feedback to learners on how well they are doing. Skills for life assessment is clearly based on individual aims, and gives effective guidance for improvement. Key skills teaching is integrated within curriculum areas and maintains learners' interest effectively.
25. Staff are appropriately qualified. Learners benefit from a well resourced library and learning centres.
26. Learners who need more intensive support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills can attend workshops. Additional learning support is offered to learners on an individual basis and included in many entry and level one classes. Transition arrangements from schools and on to more advanced courses are carefully planned. Specialist help is readily available for dyslexic learners and those on the autistic spectrum. Staff are trained to identify these learners' needs.
27. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. The needs and interests of learners are met well. The curriculum reflects local employment needs and national priorities; it offers a wide range of opportunities for learners to progress into HE, employment and, for the 500 learners aged 14 to 16, on to appropriate post-16 routes. Many learners progress well from one level to the next. The college has well advanced plans to increase its range of foundation courses. Although the college has no entry to employment provision, it has good links with local providers, to whom it refers learners.

28. The college works hard to build and maintain very productive links with local employers, other education providers and community organisations. As a result, work placement and employment opportunities for learners have increased, and several groups, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners, elderly people, disengaged young people and those in remote rural locations have been able to gain access to learning. The college adopts a very flexible approach with its partners, which ensures that learners benefit from an efficient sharing of expertise and resources.
29. Learners take part in a wide variety of extra-curricula activities, including residentials, community projects, vocational competitions and work placements. Financial support ensures that no learners, including adults and those in the 14 to 16 age group, are prevented from taking part. The college complies with child protection legislation. It has many links with outside organisations, as well as internal counselling services. However, learners are not given clear advice about the nature of bullying and harassment, or about their rights and responsibilities to others.
30. Guidance and support arrangements are good. Comprehensive pre-entry information advice and guidance arrangements are followed up with thorough interview, enrolment and induction procedures. Learners have a good awareness of the extensive range of support services available to them. Effective specialist support arrangements ensure that personal and financial support is readily available to learners. These include a college counselling service, additional learning support, nursery facilities, referrals to specialist agencies and details of relevant websites. Financial support is well managed. Appropriate support is also provided by tutors and the students' union. Learners benefit from effective arrangements for progression, careers and HE advice.
31. Group tutorial arrangements vary across the college, and do not always include personal and social development. The college has identified this as an area for improvement, and a tutoring co-ordinator has recently been appointed. Full-time learners are entitled to at least six individual progress tutorials a year. Learners value these tutorials. However, the quality of the tutorials varies. Targets are set but some are not sufficiently specific or measurable and learners do not always receive a written copy of them. The effectiveness of the tutorial process is not monitored sufficiently. Additional tutorials are now used to support learners in danger of not completing their course. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this new procedure.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

32. Leadership and management are good. The principal and governors provide strong leadership and monitor closely all aspects of the performance of the college. Strategic planning is robust and effective communications support the implementation of operational plans. There is a strong focus on raising standards with clear management accountability for learners' attendance and

success rates. Overall success rates improved in 2004/05 and are now similar to the national averages on most courses. However, they remain low on a minority of courses. The leadership and management of work-based learning are satisfactory.

33. Quality assurance arrangements are well established and generally effective in bringing about improvements. There are well managed and particularly rigorous procedures for the observation of teaching and learning. Strong links are in place between lesson observations, staff appraisal and professional development. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the effectiveness of tutorials. Self-assessment is thorough and the self-assessment report is accurate. The college maintains very good financial and performance data. These are used effectively by managers at all levels to monitor provision and promote improvements.
34. The college has appropriate policies on equality and diversity. The statutory requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the Disability Discrimination Act are met. An appropriate equality and diversity action plan is in place, although it does not contain sufficient measurable indicators to fully evaluate its implementation. The college has identified the need to raise learners' awareness of equality and diversity. Data are used well to monitor participation and success according to characteristics such as gender and ethnicity. The proportion of learners from a minority ethnic background in the college is greater than that in the local community. The college is seeking to increase the diversity of staff and governors to more closely reflect that of the learner profile. Access for learners with restricted mobility is good. The college is a safe and secure environment for learners and staff.
35. Staff development is particularly good. Training needs are identified through appraisal and the observation of teaching and learning. Staff are also encouraged to extend and develop their skills through a wide range of additional development activities. Senior managers identify key training needs throughout the college and encourage all staff to participate in training by offering financial incentives. Recent training has included equality and diversity, health and safety, and a wide range of short courses related to teaching and learning. Staff morale is good.
36. The management of resources is good. The college's financial position has been strong for the last four years. There has been substantial investment in accommodation. Learners have good access to ICT and other learning resources. The college has a range of adaptive technologies and good links with external agencies to provide specialist equipment for learners with disabilities. Value for money is good.
37. The college has a number of very effective partnerships that provide good opportunities for learners to gain access to a broad and inclusive curriculum. For example, the college has worked successfully with local schools to establish the Stafford Collegiate. The Collegiate provides GCE AS and A-levels to around

500 learners in the current year and there are plans to introduce vocational courses in 2006/07.

38. Governance is good. Governors are well informed about the financial and academic performance of the college. They challenge leaders and managers effectively and play an active role in the life of the college.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2002 to 2004, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-1: College success rate for level 1 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

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	851	36	53	-16	4,539	43	50	-7
	02/03	438	49	56	-8	3,116	36	55	-19
	03/04	379	64	60	3	1,514	59	59	0
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	19	16	54	-38	18	22	41	-19
	02/03	6	83	60	24	26	46	47	-1
	03/04	13	85	65	19	10	60	52	8
NVQs	01/02	390	27	52	-25	986	32	49	-17
	02/03	83	37	56	-18	140	36	57	-21
	03/04	37	32	61	-29	10	90	62	28
Other	01/02	442	45	53	-8	3,535	46	50	-4
	02/03	349	51	56	-5	2,950	36	55	-19
	03/04	329	66	60	6	1,494	59	59	0

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream Level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2002 to 2004, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-2: College success rate for level 2 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

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	1,288	53	50	3	2,539	48	48	0
	02/03	1,143	51	52	0	2,493	43	49	-6
	03/04	895	58	56	2	1,576	43	53	-10
GCSEs	01/02	388	61	54	7	176	60	53	6
	02/03	326	62	57	5	177	62	55	7
	03/04	234	61	61	0	125	69	59	10
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	149	70	56	15	27	63	50	13
	02/03	92	48	59	-11	24	50	53	-3
	03/04	60	57	63	-6	21	67	57	10
NVQs	01/02	348	35	43	-8	1,284	46	45	1
	02/03	282	46	42	3	1,242	43	49	-6
	03/04	217	51	52	-1	134	50	53	-3
Other	01/02	403	54	49	5	1,052	49	48	0
	02/03	443	48	50	-3	1,050	40	48	-8
	03/04	384	61	54	7	1,296	40	52	-12

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2002 to 2004, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-3: College success rate for level 3 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

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	1,490	56	60	-3	1,512	56	50	6
	02/03	1,606	57	62	-5	1,101	53	51	2
	03/04	1,487	57	64	-7	971	58	53	5
A\A2 levels	01/02	229	63	80	-17	40	63	57	5
	02/03	286	79	82	-3	69	72	63	9
	03/04	272	71	84	-13	58	74	66	9
AS levels	01/02	711	57	60	-3	103	54	47	8
	02/03	571	57	61	-4	119	50	48	1
	03/04	452	58	63	-5	69	55	50	6
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	364	49	47	3	101	48	43	4
	02/03	504	44	50	-6	85	45	45	-1
	03/04	166	54	52	2	33	52	43	8
NVQs	01/02	26	65	49	17	210	47	41	6
	02-03	40	43	51	-8	198	49	45	5
	03/04	38	63	54	10	214	42	47	-5
Other	01/02	160	57	54	3	1,058	59	54	5
	02/03	205	60	55	4	630	54	54	1
	03/04	559	49	56	-7	597	63	56	8

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2003 year to 2005 year

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	66	24	32	45	47
	Advanced	59	12	31	25	48
2004/05	Apprenticeship	110	17	38	28	50
	Advanced	71	28	34	38	48

* 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	75	11	16	24	24
	Advanced	63	6	19	16	30
2004/05	Apprenticeship	126	13	21	17	29
	Advanced	74	16	21	22	31

* 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'