



Hartlepool Sixth Form College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published July 2006	Provider reference 130568
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Hartlepool Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Rick Wells
Address of college:	Brinkburn Blakelock Road Hartlepool TS25 5PF
Telephone number:	01429 294444
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Chair of governors:	Neil Midgeley
Unique reference number:	130568
Name of lead inspector:	Ruth James, HMI
Dates of inspection:	22-26 May 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Hartlepool Sixth Form College was established in 1985 and is situated close to the town centre. The locality includes areas which are disadvantaged, and the proportion of unemployed is higher than that in the north east or nationally. The college occupies a single site with several buildings. Most of the students come from Hartlepool and the surrounding area, but a few travel greater distances. At the time of the inspection there were 713 students aged 16-18, almost all of them full-time. Most were studying on advanced level courses. There were also 132 part-time adult students. Just over half the students were female. The vast majority of students are of white British origin. The college offers GCE AS, A level and vocational courses at level 3 and a small number of courses at level 2, as well as a few part-time adult courses.
2. The college mission states: 'Hartlepool Sixth Form College is a leading provider of high quality educational opportunities for the community enabling individuals to enjoy and challenge themselves academically, recreationally and socially. The College exists to develop and enhance their abilities and skills so that students can fulfil their potential in a secure, caring, supportive and stimulating environment.'

Scope of the inspection

3. 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; 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	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

4. Hartlepool Sixth Form College is a good college which provides a supportive, friendly, caring learning environment. Pass and success rates for most advanced level courses and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses are high and learners make good progress. Students benefit from participating in a wide range of enrichment activities. Retention rates are satisfactory overall, but for a few courses they are low. Students develop well in terms of personal skills. Attendance is good and behaviour is excellent.
5. The quality of provision is good overall. Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, learners are engaged in a range of stimulating activities and expectations are high. In some lessons, the pace is too slow, activities are not differentiated and more able learners are not sufficiently challenged. Assessment practices are effective and good use is made of individual target grades in monitoring progress.
6. The college offers a good range of courses and activities which meet the needs and interests of learners. The arrangements for identifying particular combinations of courses to suit individual needs are flexible. Provision is made for a small number of adult students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. Insufficient attention is given to equality and diversity, and progress in making buildings accessible has been slow.
7. The arrangements for personal and subject support are very good. Students receive very good advice and guidance before they join the college. Careers education and support for entry into higher education are excellent.
8. Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers set a clear direction for the college and quality assurance arrangements contribute to the improving performance of the college. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate but action planning to address weaknesses is not always sufficiently rigorous. The college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

9. The college demonstrates a good capacity to improve. Enrolments have increased substantially since 2001 and accommodation has been improved. The college's quality assurance arrangements are good and have led to improvements in many areas. There is a strong focus on raising achievement. Success rates for general certificate of education (GCE) A level courses have improved to above national averages for sixth form colleges. The college's

self-assessment report is generally accurate, although a number of the strengths are normal practice. Good use is made of value added analyses in arriving at judgements. Students' views are considered carefully and acted upon. Strategies have resulted in improvements in pass rates for many subjects but action planning does not always effectively address all weaknesses. The internal lesson observation arrangements are extensive but there is insufficient analysis of the strengths and weaknesses across the college.

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

10. The college has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The range of teaching strategies has been extended considerably. Students demonstrate sound oral and study skills. There has been much improvement in sharing of good practice both within and between curriculum areas. The use of information technology within lessons has increased considerably and students use the virtual learning environment outside lessons. There have been major improvements in accommodation and more are planned. The college's financial position remains vulnerable, although it moved out of financial recovery earlier than planned, with significant improvements due to a tight control of costs. The college identifies a large number of academic targets within curriculum areas and progress towards these is monitored regularly.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- friendly, caring, safe learning environment
- high pass and success rates for most advanced level courses
- good progress for advanced level students
- high retention and pass rates at A*-C grades for GCSE courses
- much good teaching and learning
- excellent learner participation in a wide range of enrichment activities
- very good personal and subject support
- effective leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low retention rates for a few courses
- insufficient attention to and promotion of equality and diversity
- insufficient differentiation to meet individual needs in some lessons
- weaknesses in self-assessment action planning.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

11. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that achievement and standards are good overall. The majority of the college's students are following long level 3 courses including GCE AS, A level and advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) courses. Success and pass rates for GCE A level courses have improved to above national averages and are good. Success and pass rates for GCE AS level courses have also improved and many are now good. One exception to this was GCE AS level general studies in 2005. This course had low retention and pass rates which had a very significant impact on overall success rates, resulting in a figure for all level 3 courses that is below national average and well below that achieved in 2004. Overall success rates are similar for males and females.
12. Value added analysis shows that for most subjects, learners who complete their courses gain grades at least in line with those which would be expected given their prior attainment, and in several subjects, grades are significantly better than this. In a few subjects learners tend to achieve lower grades than would be expected. Overall, the value added analysis shows that learners make better than expected progress.
13. In 2005, all GCSE subjects had good A*-C pass rates except for social studies. This represents an improvement on the previous year. The achievement of key skills qualifications is good overall. More than two thirds of those entered were successful in achieving the level 2 key skills in information technology.
14. Retention rates at level 3 are satisfactory and broadly in line with national averages. Overall retention fell slightly in 2004/05 but there are indications that in-year retention in 2005/06 is better. Retention rates for level 2 courses improved significantly in 2004/05 and were well above average. A few courses have below average retention rates.
15. Progression to higher education from advanced level courses is good and the proportion of applicants who gain places at university has increased. Progression from childcare courses to relevant higher education or employment is good. Progression from level 2 courses is also good.
16. As well as formal academic qualifications, students achieve well in other ways. The enrichment programme offers many opportunities for accreditation such as sports qualifications and the Duke of Edinburgh's award. Learners' personal development is very good, helped by the wide range of opportunities and their behaviour is excellent. Attendance rates are good, but punctuality in some lessons is poor.

17. The quality of provision is good overall. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Students are highly motivated and enjoy their lessons. Teachers have been well supported in developing the use of electronic whiteboards. Good progress has been made with the college's virtual learning environment. Very good relationships between teachers and students promote effective learning.
18. At the time of the inspection, most lessons covered either revision for the forthcoming examinations or finalisation of coursework. In the best lessons, a range of interesting and challenging activities engages learners and tests their understanding. Teachers have high expectations and provide positive encouragement to improve further. In a sociology lesson, the teacher used quizzes, prompt cards and a bingo game to test students' knowledge and understanding of sociological perspectives and develop their examination technique.
19. In some lessons, the pace is too slow and there is a lack of a sense of urgency. Teachers rely too much on open and general questions and spend too much of the time explaining students' responses to the rest of the class. In a number of lessons, all students completed the same task. More able learners were not sufficiently challenged and more difficult examination questions were not given sufficient attention.
20. All teachers are observed and the college encourages peer observations to share good practice. The college has not used the information from lesson observations to formally identify areas for development to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Good progress has been made in addressing some of the weaknesses in teaching identified at the last inspection. Inspectors found an increased range of teaching strategies across subjects and an improvement in the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support learning, although this is not consistent across all subjects. Inspectors found that some weaknesses, such as a lack of differentiated activities and poor questioning techniques, were still evident in lessons.
21. Key skills are delivered through subjects and schemes of work identify where students will develop their key skills, but the quality of this signposting is variable.
22. Assessment of learners' work is effective in monitoring their progress. Teachers' feedback helps learners to improve the standard of their work. Students are aware of how well they are doing in relation to their target grades. Parents are kept well informed and receive regular written progress and attendance reports.
23. The range of curriculum opportunities provided is good. It includes GCSE courses at level 2 and GCE AS and A level courses and a few vocational

courses at level 3. These meet the needs of learners. Internal progression from level 2 to level 3 is good. Links with local schools are extensive but there is little provision for 14-16 year olds. There are good links with local childcare employers. The range of enrichment opportunities is excellent and includes sporting activities, drama productions and work experience. Many activities are accredited. Participation is good. Visiting speakers and educational visits enhance subject work. For example, a well known film director was invited to speak to media students. The tutorial programme includes study skills but does not provide sufficient opportunity for learners to consider healthy lifestyles and staying safe. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is satisfactory. The college is flexible in its approach to enrolment on different combinations of courses to meet individual needs. There is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity.

24. Guidance and support for learners are good. Subject support is very good and teachers give freely of their time. Individual support from personal tutors is highly valued by learners. Pre-course advice and guidance are excellent and help students make informed choices. Many learners attend a bridging course and effective induction ensures a smooth transition to college. Careers advice and the arrangements for supporting learners applying to university are outstanding. Learners' progress towards minimum target grades based on GCSE results is monitored closely. Recently introduced individual learning plans are not yet fully effective. For example, in health and social care the targets in the plans are all the same rather than negotiated specifically for individuals. Initial and diagnostic testing for additional learner support is comprehensive. Appropriate support is offered and systems are in place to track those who do not take it up. Attendance monitoring is rigorous. The group tutorial programme helps to develop study skills but it is not consistently of high quality. The college has effective links with other agencies, including local universities, which benefit learners.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

25. Leadership and management are good. Since his appointment, the principal has improved curriculum management and the use of ILT. Communication is very good. Curriculum management of most areas is good. The quality assurance framework covers all aspects of the college's activity and is well embedded. The self-assessment process is well understood and has led to improvements in overall success rates for A level courses to above the national average for sixth form colleges. Value added analyses indicate that progress is good. Poor management of AS general studies had an adverse impact on overall level 3 success rates in 2005. A number of strengths identified by the college in the self-assessment report are not significant strengths. For example, retention rates which were in line with national averages were reported to be high. Action plans focus on raising achievement but do not always deal effectively with all weaknesses identified. Insufficient use is made of data relating to the quality of teaching and learning.

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26. Management information is accurate and timely and used to inform the target setting process. Partnership links with the local schools are good. Governance is satisfactory. Governors know the key strengths of the college and areas for improvement. They play an active part in the validation of the self-assessment report. Whilst they have had comprehensive training in child protection they are less aware of their responsibilities under the Race Relations Act. The college has produced a race equality policy but there is no implementation plan and there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity.
 27. Physical resources are adequate with very good access to IT facilities. There are insufficient social areas and some accommodation is in need of refurbishment. Teachers are well qualified. They contribute significantly to the safe and supportive environment which makes students feel comfortable and value the experience they have at college.
 28. There is good management of health and safety overall. Child protection arrangements are in place. Risk management at curriculum level is not fully embedded within the overall risk management plan.
 29. Data are collected on learners' achievement by gender, but this analysis is not used in the self-assessment action plan. Some progress has been made to meet the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002, though not all parts of the building are accessible for students with mobility problems. Whilst the financial position of the college is improving, it remains vulnerable. With generally improving success rates, high levels of attendance and effective deployment of resources the college offers good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2003 to 2005, 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	02/03	*	NA	60	NA	43	9	55	-46
	03/04	*	NA	67	NA	87	39	57	-18
	04/05	*	NA	**	NA	*	NA	**	**
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	*	NA	66	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
	03/04	*	NA	70	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	*	NA	**	NA	*	NA	**	**
NVQs	02/03	*	NA	NA	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
	03/04	*	NA	NA	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	*	NA	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA
Other	02/03	*	NA	59	NA	43	9	55	-46
	03/04	*	NA	66	NA	87	39	58	-18
	04/05	*	NA	**	NA	0	NA	**	NA

* fewer than 15 starts

** data not available

NA: not applicable

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream Level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2003 to 2005, 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	02/03	291	70	70	0	36	56	52	4
	03/04	272	71	74	-3	*	NA	55	NA
	04/05	257	86	**	NA	16	44	**	NA
GCSEs	02/03	241	71	74	-2	*	NA	58	NA
	03/04	244	70	77	-7	*	NA	62	NA
	04/05	222	86	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	24	88	68	19	*	NA	NA	NA
	03/04	*	NA	73	NA	*	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	*	NA	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA
NVQs	02/03	*	NA	61	NA	*	NA	54	NA
	03/04	*	NA	61	NA	*	NA	58	NA
	04/05	*	NA	**	NA	8	NA	**	NA
Other	02/03	26	38	58	-19	28	61	49	12
	03/04	21	76	68	8	*	NA	52	NA
	04/05	35	80	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA

* fewer than 15 starts

** data not available

NA: not applicable

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2003 to 2005, 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	02/03	1659	80	79	1	43	72	57	15
	03/04	1643	85	80	4	55	49	56	-7
	04/05	2141	78	**	NA	31	58	**	NA
A/A2 Levels	02/03	414	88	89	-2	*	NA	73	NA
	03/04	509	95	91	4	*	NA	75	NA
	04/05	495	94	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA
AS Levels	02/03	951	82	75	7	*	NA	55	NA
	03/04	896	81	76	5	*	NA	52	NA
	04/05	1408	72	**	NA	0	NA	**	NA
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	123	66	63	3	*	NA	NA	NA
	03/04	146	81	68	13	*	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	175	77	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA
NVQs	02/03	0	NA	NA	NA	*	NA	46	NA
	03/04	0	NA	NA	NA	23	48	48	0
	04/05	0	NA	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA
Other	02/03	171	58	63	-4	28	75	55	20
	03/04	91	70	63	7	*	NA	52	NA
	04/05	64	85	**	NA	*	NA	**	NA

* fewer than 15 starts

** data not available

NA: not applicable