



Portsmouth College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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130706

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Basic information about the college

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Name of college: | Portsmouth College |
| Type of college: | Sixth Form College |
| Principal: | Steve Frampton |
| Address of college: | Tangier Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire, PO3 6PZ |
| Telephone number: | 02392667521 |
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| Chair of governors: | David Newman |
| Unique reference number: | 130706 |
| Name of lead inspector: | Lauren Ovenden, HMI |
| Dates of inspection: | 24-28 April 2006 |

Background of the organisation

1. Portsmouth College is a sixth form college located on a single site on the eastern edge of Portsea Island. There are four other further education colleges locally and one maintained school sixth form. The college's mission promotes an inclusive, community sixth form college with an emphasis on widening participation.
2. The college has approximately 700 full-time learners aged 16-18 and over 3,500 adult learners who study part-time at the college and at a number of community venues within the city. Over 60% of the college's full-time 16-18 year old learners are studying at level 3. Approximately a quarter of 16-18 year old learners take level 2 courses and 15% study at level 1. Most of the adult provision is at levels 1 and 2, with significant numbers on essential skills and ESOL courses. Approximately a quarter of adult learners are on level 3 programmes. The college delivers a small amount of provision for 14-16 year olds.
3. The majority of the college's learners come from within Portsmouth city boundaries. The proportion of learners at the college from minority ethnic groups is greater than in the local community. Levels of social and economic deprivation vary significantly across the area served by the college, with a quarter of Portsmouth being identified as having some of the most deprived areas nationally. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSE subjects at grades A*-C in Portsmouth is 46%, which is below the national average for England. The college caters for learners with a wide range of prior achievement, with many learners achieving significantly below average at GCSE.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate 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

5. Inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of provision as good. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. This is reflected in its curriculum, which offers a wide range of courses to meet community needs, such as the increasing level 1 provision. The college has highly effective strategic partnerships with local schools and the nearby college. It attracts learners from a diverse range of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Many of the college's 16-18 year old learners come from families with little experience of higher education, yet successfully gain university places.
6. Achievement and standards are good. Learners aged 16-18 join the college with significantly lower than average prior attainment. Value added data indicate that they make very good progress. Success rates have significantly improved for 16-18 year old learners since the last inspection and are now about the national average for sixth form colleges. Success rates have also improved for adult learners at level 1 and level 3. Retention rates for the majority of learners have improved since the last inspection. However, retention rates on a minority of courses have declined, especially at level 2 and on some adult provision. While learners develop key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, achievement of formal accreditation remains low.
7. Teaching and learning are good. The college's self-assessment report identifies the strengths and weaknesses in teaching accurately. Good lessons are characterised by knowledgeable and varied teaching that challenges all learners to succeed. In the less effective lessons, assessment does not sufficiently inform the planning of teaching and learning. Guidance and support for learners is good. There is a wide range of opportunities for enrichment and the active student union plays an important role in college life.
8. Leadership and management are good. The new principal and the senior management team have set a clear strategic direction that has been communicated to all staff. The college has improved its lesson observation scheme and its analysis of the quality of teaching and learning is more robust. Governors monitor closely the overall performance of the college and the self-assessment report is largely accurate. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

9. The college's capacity to improve is good. It has strengthened its quality assurance system and lesson observation outcomes are used as part of staff appraisals. The college's self-assessment report is mainly accurate.

Achievement of full-time learners has improved and they make good progress. More rigorous monitoring has led to improved student attendance. At the time of the inspection, the in-year retention rates on courses for adult learners showed significant improvements over previous years. Success rate targets have been met. However, a few of the retention and recruitment targets have not been met. College managers are well supported by governors, who set and monitor carefully the college's strategic objectives. The college has a clear strategic direction which is supported by staff at all levels.

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 issues from the last inspection report. The college's new management structure has helped to improve internal communication and clarify lines of responsibility. Success rates for full-time learners have improved substantially, particularly at level 3. Overall, retention rates and learners' attendance have improved. The college has strengthened its working partnerships with local schools and with the local general further education (GFE) college. It has instigated a training programme for governors. Managers use the outcomes from lesson observations effectively to inform self-assessment and staff appraisal. The college's self-assessment report is now clearly linked to its development plan. However, the targets in improvement plans are not always appropriate for specific courses.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good progress by learners and the achievement of higher grades than predicted from their attainment on entry
- high progression rates to higher education
- highly productive partnerships meeting the needs of the local community
- wide range of courses and enrichment activities, particularly at level 3
- clear strategic direction from the governors and senior management team.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low retention rates on part-time courses for adults and 16-18 year old learners at level 2
- low pass rates on level 2 courses
- low key skills accreditation
- use of assessment in planning teaching and learning.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

11. Overall, achievements and standards are good. Learners aged 16-18 make very good progress during their studies, despite many of them joining the college with prior attainment significantly below average. Success rates for the majority of 16-18 year old learners are about the national average for sixth form colleges. Achievements and standards for 19+ learners are satisfactory, with success rates at national averages for levels 1 and 3. The college assesses achievements and standards accurately and uses the information effectively to plan for improvement.
12. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 on level 1 and level 3 courses have improved considerably over the last three years. Retention rates have also improved. Value added data indicate that learners make much better progress than can be expected given their very low prior attainment. Value added scores for AS and GCE A level courses have risen significantly in the past two years. At GCSE, the proportion of learners achieving A*-C grades is below the national average.
13. On courses for adult learners, success rates have improved at levels 1 and 3 and are about the national average, but have declined at level 2. Retention rates have improved but are below average on level 1 courses and have declined to below average for the small number of learners at levels 2 and 3. However, the college has taken effective action to address this weakness and, at the time of the inspection, in-year retention data indicated a significant improvement.
14. During their courses, learners acquire a range of skills to help them achieve economic wellbeing. Many progress to higher level courses in the college or to higher education. Students on vocational courses have adequate opportunity to develop workplace skills through work experience placements. Attendance has improved and is in line with the national average.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

15. The overall quality of provision is good. The college's self-assessment report is generally accurate, identifying the key strengths and areas for improvement. Overall, inspectors judged the quality of teaching and learning to be good. In the better lessons, the teachers know their learners well and use a variety of activities to suit their needs and learning styles. Teachers set challenging tasks and useful revision activities. Learners enjoy practical activities that are closely matched to the vocational area. Teachers provide appropriate feedback on assignments to help learners improve the quality of their written work. Learners actively participate in lessons and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers.

16. Less effective lessons are characterised by too much teacher exposition, insufficient checking of learners' understanding and a lack of pace and challenge. Some tasks and activities are not sufficiently adapted to differing levels of ability. Assessment strategies meet the requirements of awarding bodies. However, there is not enough use of assessment to structure learning plans and develop learners' self-confidence.
17. Full-time learners who have not achieved A*-C in GCSE English or mathematics receive an initial diagnostic assessment which identifies their additional learning support needs and levels of literacy and numeracy. All full-time learners complete a writing exercise to assess their writing skills. Where support needs are identified, learning support is provided promptly and is valued by learners. Initial assessment and support for learners on ESOL and Essential Skills courses are good.
18. The results of initial assessments are available to teachers but insufficient use is made of this information in planning lessons and designing activities to support the learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. The communication between teachers and the learning support assistants is under-developed.
19. The college's response to the needs and interests of learners is good. There are highly effective partnerships with city schools and a local FE college. The college offers a wide range of courses at level 3 and an increasing range of vocational courses at level 2. It recognises that provision at level 1 has been insufficient to meet the needs of learners in the area, and is developing new courses. The college works with local employers to provide ICT and essential skills courses for adults in the workplace and the local community. Managers acknowledge that key skills provision is not developed consistently across the college and have put in place strategies to improve the quality of the provision.
20. A varied enrichment programme and themed activity weeks contribute to learners' ability to lead healthy lifestyles and help them to make a positive contribution to college life and the local community. Arrangements to safeguard the health and safety of learners are appropriate. The student union is actively involved in all aspects of college life and learner representatives attend college committee and full corporation meetings. There is a clear mechanism for learners to make their voice heard and the college responds well to their concerns.
21. The college's response to social and educational inclusion is good. Issues relating to equality and diversity are actively promoted, for example, through themed diversity weeks, and through curriculum materials in many subjects.
22. Guidance and support are good. Learners receive good advice and guidance before joining the college and the well organised induction helps them to settle

in quickly. The tutorial programme is comprehensive and well delivered. The college has begun to adapt materials to meet the needs of learners on different levels of courses. Full-time learners attend tutorials twice weekly. Group tutorials cover topics linked to healthy lifestyles, staying safe and progression to higher education and employment. Tutors monitor attendance closely and attendance in lessons and group tutorials has improved. Learners have access to a good range of support services, including welfare, counselling, and financial support. The college works with a wide range of external agencies, such as the youth forum, to provide additional support and advice for learners. Careers education and guidance is effective and learners value the support they receive to help them move smoothly into higher education or employment.

23. Full-time learners are set minimum target grades based on their prior attainment and their progress towards achieving them is monitored by teachers and tutors and shared with parents. The college does not formally analyse the impact of learning support on learners' performance, a weakness identified at the last inspection. Most curriculum self-assessment reports do not evaluate the quality of support and tutorials, although tutorials are observed as part of the college's quality assurance procedure.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

24. Leadership and management are good. Significant changes to the college's management structure by the new principal have been very well received by staff. Communication is good, roles and accountabilities are clearly defined and senior managers are seen as accessible by staff. Governors and the senior management team have set a clear strategic direction for the college, which is supported by staff at all levels. The college has made good use of its strategic partnerships with employers and the community to develop provision that supports the progression and aspirations of learners in the local area. Governors have participated in appropriate training and monitor closely the college's performance. College finances are well managed and the college provides good value for money.
25. Since the last inspection, the quality assurance process has been strengthened. Self-assessment reports are moderated by a panel of senior staff and governors and are largely accurate. Findings from lesson observations inform the college's staff development plan and staff appraisals. Curriculum self-assessment reports are completed consistently across the college, but sometimes over-emphasise aspects that are the norm. Few curricular self-assessments address the college's equal opportunities policy. Targets in improvement plans are not always appropriate.
26. Success rates for 16-18 year old learners have improved substantially, and overall are higher than for adult learners. Senior managers have provided training for teachers of adults to help them improve their teaching techniques. This has been well received by teachers. Retention rates remain low for adult

learners and for learners aged 16-18 on level 2 courses. Teaching and learning are good. The college has correctly identified areas for improvement and implemented appropriate action.

27. Teachers are well qualified. They all have a teaching qualification and around a third of them are qualified as assessors or verifiers. Overall, resources are satisfactory and improving. The college has a detailed and costed plan to upgrade key social and sporting areas by December 2006.
28. The college has responded appropriately to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RRA). College-wide retention and achievement data are analysed by gender, ethnicity and disability and used to inform strategic planning. The data is not used consistently at departmental level to inform curriculum development and teaching.
29. There is a clear child protection policy but it does not cover vulnerable adults. Governors are aware of child protection issues and review the child protection, the equal opportunities and race equality and diversity policies. A senior manager has overall responsibility for the child protection policy and its implementation. However, there is no specific committee to oversee and evaluate the implementation. Arrangements for covering child protection during work experience are not fully in place yet.

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 | Diff | Starts – Transfers | College Rate | National Rate | Diff |
| 1 Long | 02/03 | 250 | 49 | 60 | -11 | 537 | 54 | 55 | -1 |
| | 03/04 | 98 | 50 | 67 | -17 | 410 | 63 | 57 | 6 |
| | 04/05 | 128 | 63 | | | 494 | 56 | | |
| GNVQs and precursors | 02/03 | 16 | 31 | 66 | -35 | * | | | |
| | 03/04 | 13 | 54 | 71 | | * | | | |
| | 04/05 | 6 | 67 | | | 1 | 100 | | |
| NVQs | 02/03 | * | | | | * | | | |
| | 03/04 | * | | | | * | | | |
| | 04/05 | 3 | 33 | | | 2 | 50 | | |
| Other | 02/03 | 234 | 50 | 59 | -9 | 537 | 54 | 55 | -1 |
| | 03/04 | 85 | 49 | 66 | -17 | 410 | 63 | 58 | 5 |
| | 04/05 | 119 | 63 | | | 491 | 56 | | |

* 0 enrolments

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 | 1065 | 62 | 70 | -8 | 482 | 60 | 52 | 8 |
| | 03/04 | 941 | 64 | 74 | -10 | 544 | 48 | 55 | -7 |
| | 04/05 | 793 | 65 | | | 546 | 40 | | |
| GCSEs | 02/03 | 920 | 62 | 74 | -12 | 194 | 58 | 58 | 0 |
| | 03/04 | 781 | 65 | 77 | -12 | 249 | 51 | 62 | -11 |
| | 04/05 | 643 | 65 | | | 219 | 57 | | |
| GNVQs and precursors | 02/03 | 81 | 59 | 68 | -9 | 6 | 67 | | |
| | 03/04 | 67 | 60 | 73 | -13 | 2 | 0 | | |
| | 04/05 | 50 | 64 | | | 6 | 50 | | |
| NVQs | 02/03 | 37 | 57 | 61 | -4 | 38 | 68 | 54 | 14 |
| | 03/04 | 25 | 40 | 61 | -21 | 30 | 60 | 58 | 2 |
| | 04/05 | 20 | 45 | | | 38 | 71 | | |
| Other | 02/03 | 27 | 59 | 58 | -1 | 244 | 60 | 49 | 11 |
| | 03/04 | 68 | 66 | 68 | -2 | 263 | 44 | 52 | -8 |
| | 04/05 | 80 | 71 | | | 283 | 22 | | |

• 0 enrolments

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 | 1738 | 70 | 79 | -9 | 247 | 58 | 57 | -1 |
| | 03/04 | 1725 | 75 | 80 | -5 | 429 | 49 | 56 | -7 |
| | 04/05 | 1716 | 77 | | | 309 | 55 | | |
| A/A2 Levels | 02/03 | 522 | 89 | 89 | 0 | 52 | 71 | 73 | -2 |
| | 03/04 | 437 | 86 | 91 | -5 | 140 | 51 | 75 | -24 |
| | 04/05 | 503 | 90 | | | 68 | 57 | | |
| AS Levels | 02/03 | 1089 | 61 | 75 | -14 | 112 | 50 | 55 | -5 |
| | 03/04 | 1176 | 70 | 76 | -5 | 197 | 39 | 52 | -13 |
| | 04/05 | 1063 | 71 | | | 152 | 45 | | |
| GNVQs and precursors | 02/03 | 107 | 68 | 63 | 5 | 3 | 67 | | |
| | 03/04 | 96 | 81 | 68 | 13 | 4 | 25 | | |
| | 04/05 | 98 | 84 | | | 4 | 75 | | |
| NVQs | 02/03 | 20 | 65 | - | - | 24 | 58 | 46 | 12 |
| | 03/04 | 15 | 33 | - | - | 46 | 74 | 48 | 26 |
| | 04/05 | 34 | 65 | | | 61 | 70 | | |
| Other | 02/03 | * | | | | 56 | 63 | 55 | 8 |
| | 03/04 | 1 | 0 | | | 42 | 64 | 52 | 12 |
| | 04/05 | 18 | 78 | | | 24 | 71 | | |

* 0 enrolments