



# Alton College



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

Better  
education  
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## Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published July 2006	Provider reference 130691
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## Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Alton College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Jane Machell
Address of college:	Old Odiham Road, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 2LX
Telephone number:	01420 592 200
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Chair of governors:	Mrs Merry Frankel
Unique reference number:	130691
Name of lead inspector:	Gloria Dolan, HMI
Dates of inspection:	15-19 May 2006

## Background of the organisation

1. Alton College is a sixth form college located in rural Hampshire. It has one main campus but courses are also offered at a wide range of other locations in the community.
2. Most students live within 20 miles of the college. There are 1,608 students aged 16-18 and 24 students aged over 19 who study full-time at the college. There are 122 students aged 16-18 and 1,619 adults who study on a part-time basis. Most full-time students study courses at level 3 and most adults study courses at level 1.
3. Sixty-three per cent of pupils in east Hampshire attained at least 5 grade A\*-C passes at GCSE in 2005 compared with 56.3% for England as a whole. Over 90% of students are of white, European origin. Six per cent of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds which is a far higher proportion than in the local population. In 2001, there were 110,200 residents in east Hampshire and the unemployment rate was 3.1%.
4. The college received a Beacon Award in 2004 for inclusive learning, sponsored by Mencap and the RNIB, in recognition of its strong partnership work with Treloar College, a specialist college. Thirty students from Treloar College, with a range of severe disabilities, attend Alton College each year and study advanced level courses.
5. The college provides courses in 11 sector subject areas. The numbers of full-time equivalent students are highest in science and mathematics, arts, media and publishing and languages, literature and culture.
6. The college's mission is "To provide high quality sixth form and adult education in an inclusive, supportive and challenging environment, enabling people within our community to achieve their potential".

## 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](http://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 students' 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	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1

*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

Outstanding: grade 1

8. Achievements and standards are outstanding. Success rates are high on nearly all courses. Value-added scores on level 3 courses show that students make significantly better progress than expected based on their prior achievement. Students of all backgrounds, including those of minority ethnic heritage, those with disabilities, male and female students and those studying on a full- or part-time basis, achieve very well. Attendance rates are excellent.
9. The quality of teaching is good and learning is very effective. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a range of strategies effectively to develop students' knowledge and understanding of complex topics. Very good use of information and learning technology (ILT) is evident throughout the college and enhances learning. Assessment and feedback on students' work is thorough and helpful. Support for additional learning needs is generally very effective but its effectiveness is not monitored consistently across the college.
10. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of students and to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. A wide range of courses is provided for students of all ages and backgrounds, including school pupils, students with learning difficulties and disabilities and employers. Progression opportunities are available from entry level to level 3. The enrichment programme is popular and extensive.
11. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Well focused guidance ensures that students are on courses appropriate to their needs. Information and guidance for higher education are excellent and careers advice is effective. The monitoring of students' progress is thorough, frequent and highly effective.
12. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and governors set a clear strategic direction for the college. There is a strong culture of promoting achievement and the development of rounded young people. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and robust. Self-assessment of teaching departments and cross-college functions is accurate and leads to improvement. The college engages in excellent partnership working to meet the needs of a broad range of students. Financial management is sound and expenditure is controlled prudently.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

13. The college sets challenging targets and consistently achieves high standards. Performance is monitored closely and continuously, using very effective quality assurance procedures. Lesson observation procedures have been strengthened

since the last inspection. These have helped to improve the already good level of teaching. Self-assessment is rigorous and effective in identifying areas for improvement. Staff at all levels are committed to ensuring students achieve their potential. The support provided for students is excellent. Governors and senior managers are clear about the strategic direction of the college. They recognise the challenges of maintaining current enrolment levels and income against a background of falling numbers of pupils in partner schools.

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

14. Progress made since the last inspection has been outstanding. The college has gone considerably further than addressing the relatively minor weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Accommodation and teaching resources have been improved. Information technology is now used very well to support teaching and to monitor students' progress. The curriculum has been broadened in response to local needs. Success rates and attendance have improved from already high to outstanding levels. The quality of teaching has improved and appropriate steps have been taken to achieve further improvement. The financial position of the college continues to be strong.

Key strengths of the college

*Strengths*

- high success rates for students of all ages on nearly all courses
- very effective learning
- highly responsive provision to meet local needs
- outstanding academic, welfare and pastoral support
- very good attendance by students in lessons
- outstanding social and educational inclusion
- highly effective leadership, management and governance
- excellent partnership working

Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- some low success rates on a small number of level 2 courses for 16-18 year old students and for adult students on a few level 3 courses
- ineffective monitoring of additional learning support provision

## Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

*Contributory grades:*

*Adult and community learning*

*Good: grade 2*

15. Inspectors' findings agree with the college's self-assessment that achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates are high or very high for most courses. Students from all backgrounds do well. There are no significant differences between the achievement rates of male and female students, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, students with disabilities or those who have additional learning needs.
16. The proportion of 16-18 year old students who complete their courses and pass their qualifications at level 3 is consistently much higher than the national average. Success rates for the much smaller number of students aged 19 plus at level 3 are variable and in 2004/05 they were three per cent below the national average. Fourteen to sixteen year old students studying GCE AS level critical thinking have high success rates.
17. Students of all ages have high success rates at level 1. They are consistently very high for adults and they are high in three of the last four years for 16-18 year old students. At level 2, the success rate for students aged 16-18 declined by four per cent to the national average in 2004/05. The proportion of A\*-C grade passes in most GCSE subjects is consistently much higher than the national average. Adults do well on level 2 courses, with a high proportion of them successfully completing their courses and achieving their qualifications. Success rates on short courses are well above the national average for students of all ages in almost all years.
18. Pass rates on GCE A and AS courses are high. The A-level pass rate was 98.8% in 2004/05 and 21 subjects had pass rates of 100%. A high proportion of A or B grades are attained by students. Progress made by students taking graded level 3 qualifications has improved over the last three years. There is some variability between subjects but, overall, students make significantly better progress than expected based on their previous attainment at GCSE.
19. Large numbers of students successfully complete their level 3 key skill information technology. Students also perform well in the key skill of application of number at levels 1 and 2. However, the success rate for the very small number of students taking communication at level 2 was low.
20. A very high proportion of students progress into higher education, further education or employment. Average attendance is high and has increased from



90% to 94% over the last year. Student retention rates this year have shown considerable improvement at all levels and for students of all ages. The in-year retention rate is high at 94.6%.

21. Students enjoy their learning and show courtesy and respect for one another. They are articulate, confident and knowledgeable about their subjects. Complex topics are dealt with very effectively by students and most of their written work is of a very high standard.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

22. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that the overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In most lessons, teachers use a range of learning strategies effectively to extend students' knowledge and build on previous experience. In advanced level lessons, students are challenged successfully to critically analyse complex concepts. Lessons are well structured and students work diligently and enjoy their work. Effective use is made of information and learning technology to enhance learning. Teachers frequently use and refer students to additional resources available on the college's virtual learning environment. The development of skills and knowledge for the information technology key skill at level 3 is well organised and effective.
23. In a very few lessons teaching is uninspiring. Learning in these lessons lacks sufficient challenge and not all students are fully included in questioning or group activities. The college has identified this as an area for improvement.
24. The range of support to meet students' additional learning needs is very good. Students' needs are assessed and identified on joining the college. Most students take up the support offered and all students benefit from extra support from subject specialists. Progress made by individual students is monitored rigorously and those receiving support do at least as well as other students. However, monitoring of the effectiveness of additional support is not consistent or comprehensive. Learning support assistants are not used effectively in some lessons.
25. Assignments are well prepared and of a consistently high standard. They challenge students well and meet the requirements of awarding bodies. Teachers mark work accurately and there is a rigorous system of internal moderation to ensure that standards are consistent and maintained. Teachers provide detailed and helpful feedback to students on the quality of their work. The assessment of adults on work-based vocational courses is rigorous.
26. Feedback to parents or carers of 16-18 year old students is regular and very effective. Detailed progress reports are produced termly. Parents and carers are contacted quickly if students fail to attend lessons or if their progress is causing concern.

27. Most teaching accommodation and learning resources are of a high standard. New accommodation, including the science block and learning resource centre (LRC), is outstanding. Materials on the college intranet and the LRC are used frequently and ICT resources are of high quality. Student social facilities are being extended and improved.
28. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students and social and educational inclusion is outstanding. A wide range of courses and good progression opportunities are offered from entry-level to level 3 for students of all ages and backgrounds. The range of provision is particularly wide at level 3. Successful courses in language, literacy and numeracy are provided in the college and at a range of venues in the community.
29. Students participate in an extensive enrichment programme. Social diversity is widely explored and celebrated through the curriculum. Students make a positive contribution to the community through a variety of creative, sporting, personal and community development activities.
30. The college is responsive to meeting the needs of 14-16 year old pupils through increased flexibility and gifted and talented programmes. High success rates are achieved by school pupils, students from minority ethnic backgrounds and by students with disabilities. Many students with severe physical disabilities are fully integrated into the college.
31. Many adults, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities in residential care, attend courses throughout the area. The college works particularly effectively with a targeted range of employers and community organisations to identify and meet training needs. Highly focused marketing has substantially increased the number of applications from pupils at a school in a disadvantaged area. There is a good nursery available for students' children to attend.
32. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment that guidance and support for students are outstanding. Information and guidance to potential students are highly effective. Strong links with parents or carers of students under 18 years old are established at an early stage. Students make informed choices and enrol on appropriate courses which meet their needs. Effective induction programmes help them to settle quickly into their courses and college life.
33. Personal and welfare support are outstanding. Very good extra academic support is provided by subject specialists to supplement lessons. Financial and careers support are highly effective. Advice and guidance on progression to higher education is excellent. There are strong partnerships with external agencies, including Connexions, and work-related guidance is effective. The college consults students frequently and systematically on a range of issues and responds well to any concerns they raise.

34. Students are well supported by their tutors, but some group tutorials are less effective. Health-related matters are covered extensively in tutorials. Good health is promoted through enrichment activities. A healthy range of foods is readily available in the college refectory. The comprehensive tutorial programme includes strong focus on personal and social development and financial literacy. Students develop a range of skills, such as team working, which is useful preparation for future employment.
35. An innovative on-line system monitors and records the progress made by individual students, ongoing throughout the year. Issues of concern about student performance are addressed quickly. Attendance is closely monitored and any absences speedily followed up.

#### Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

36. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and governors set a clear strategic direction for the college. The vocational curriculum has been broadened in response to local needs. Communication is good and staff at all levels are committed to the mission of the college. There is a strong culture of promoting achievement and the development of rounded young people. The progress of individual students is closely monitored and they receive excellent support. Students' attendance and success rates have continued to improve since the last inspection and are outstanding.
37. Governance is strong. Governors are committed and support and challenge the principal and senior managers well. They are well informed about the work of the college and monitor its academic and financial performance carefully. Their expertise in areas such as finance and estate management is used particularly well to support the development of the college.
38. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and robust. Lesson observation procedures have been strengthened since the last inspection and link closely to teachers' appraisals. Inspectors' judgements regarding the quality of teaching largely matched those of the college. Good use is made of value added data to determine the progress made by individuals and groups of students. Surveys of students', staff and parents' opinions are used well to inform decision making although external benchmarking is limited. Self-assessment of teaching departments and cross-college functions is accurate and leads to improvement. Moderation procedures are implemented meticulously. Staff have good opportunities for personal development.
39. In order to implement its strategy for meeting local education and training needs and promoting diversity, the college has developed a range of highly effective links and partnership arrangements. The college plays a lead role in providing education opportunities for 14-16 year olds in the area and, with its partners, is actively engaged in establishing a coherent 14-19 curriculum offer for the area.

40. Resources are very good overall and many facilities have been improved since the last inspection. A new performing arts building is soon to be completed. Students have excellent access to computers. A wide range of learning resources is available through the college virtual learning environment.
41. Financial management is sound and expenditure is controlled prudently. Due to borrowing to improve resources, the college is only projecting modest surpluses for the next two years. Management information is accurate, accessible to staff and is used well to support both financial planning and learning. Resources are deployed very effectively and value for money is excellent.
42. The college is fully accessible to people with limited mobility. The college has made a highly effective response to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The college's arrangements for admissions, assessment and teaching are very effective. A suitable race equality policy and action plan has been prepared and is fully monitored. There are appropriate policies for child protection and for safeguarding young people. Staff are subject to the appropriate checks before they are employed. Staff and governors have been trained but some teachers are not sufficiently aware of child protection procedures or their role within it. Bullying and harassment policies are implemented effectively.

## Students' 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.

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	59	88	60	28	145	58	51	7
	02/03	119	92	60	32	392	84	55	29
	03/04	117	69	67	3	228	71	57	14
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	11	82	69	12	0			
	02/03	11	82	66	16	0			
	03/04	15	67	70	-3	0			
NVQs	01/02	0				0			
	02/03	0				0			
	03/04	0				0			
Other	01/02	48	90	58	31	145	58	52	6
	02/03	108	94	59	34	392	84	55	29
	03/04	102	70	66	3	228	71	58	14

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.

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	272	72	67	5	251	65	50	16
	02/03	205	64	70	-6	329	67	52	16
	03/04	244	78	74	4	362	61	55	6
GCSEs	01/02	149	75	72	3	34	65	56	9
	02/03	115	77	74	3	20	60	58	2
	03/04	149	81	77	4	29	76	62	14
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	82	77	67	10	0			
	02/03	45	71	68	3	0			
	03/04	34	85	73	13	0			
NVQs	01/02	4	25	53		79	49	50	0
	02/03	5	0	61		96	45	54	-9
	03/04	3	67	61		86	48	58	-10
Other	01/02	37	54	49	5	138	75	48	27
	02/03	40	28	58	-30	213	78	49	30
	03/04	58	67	68	-1	247	64	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.

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	4,170	85	78	8	330	63	52	11
	02/03	4,599	84	79	5	355	53	57	-4
	03/04	4,950	85	80	5	298	57	56	1
A\A2 levels	01/02	1,674	95	88	7	1	100	70	
	02/03	1,796	88	89	-1	18	61	73	-11
	03/04	1,942	89	91	-2	1	0	75	
AS levels	01/02	2,220	81	74	7	28	57	50	7
	02/03	2,538	83	75	8	22	68	55	13
	03/04	2,745	84	76	8	10	70	52	18
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	164	63	54	10	0			
	02/03	164	68	63	5	1	100		
	03/04	148	68	68	0	0			
NVQs	01/02	1	0			149	49	48	1
	02-03	1	0			138	25	46	-22
	03/04	3	33			122	52	48	4
Other	01/02	111	61	44	17	152	78	49	29
	02/03	100	50	63	-13	176	73	55	18
	03/04	112	58	63	-5	165	61	52	9