



# West Middlesex College



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published January 2007	Provider reference 50054
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## Basic information about the college

Name of college:	West Middlesex College
Type of college:	Independent, specialist, day college
Principal:	Sunny Knight
Address of college:	Colne Lodge, Longbridge Way, Uxbridge, UB8 2YG
Telephone number:	01895 619700
College Director:	Anna Kennedy
Unique reference number:	50054
Name of lead inspector:	Joyce Deere, ALI
Dates of inspection:	14-17 November 2006

## Background of the organisation

1. West Middlesex College was established in 2000 by Autism Consultants Ltd as part of their strategic development plan to provide high quality provision for adults aged 18 and over, with a high functioning autistic spectrum disorder. The college is located on an industrial estate in West London. The college first received LSC funding in 2004 and currently has nine learners, all of whom are male, and eight of whom are white. The learners are taught in groups alongside social-services funded learners, who are attending 'day services' provision.
2. A key feature of the provision is the focus on supporting learners to become more aware of their interpersonal behaviour and how to manage it appropriately. The subjects provided include home management, shopping, drama, ICT, sport and fitness, literacy, numeracy, social skills and relaxation. Work placements for a few learners have just started.
3. The college mission is to 'guide adults with an autistic spectrum disorder to develop their academic, vocational and life skills, through a creative, stimulating and personalised educational programme, that promotes enhanced wellbeing and social inclusion'.

## Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); and reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits. This is the first inspection of the college. 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	Inadequate: grade 4
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: grade 3
Achievements and standards	Inadequate: grade 4
Quality of provision	Inadequate: grade 4
Leadership and management	Inadequate: grade 4

*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

Inadequate: grade 4

5. Achievements and standards are inadequate. Learners develop a good awareness of the skills they need to behave more appropriately in social situations, but they do not develop vocational skills adequately. Many have difficulty translating theoretical skills into real-life situations. Too few learners develop work related skills in realistic settings and learners who could benefit are not offered access to national awards.
6. Teaching and learning are inadequate. Although the teaching in small groups is satisfactory, too many activities are provided in large groups, where learners do not learn effectively. Too much is taught in a classroom, with an emphasis on conceptual learning and too little opportunity to transfer skills to realistic community or work-related settings. Teaching accommodation is inappropriately used. ICT skills are not adequately reinforced through other activities.
7. The curriculum does not meet the needs and interests of learners in a further education context. The activities provided do not place sufficient emphasis on learning in realistic settings and the college does not provide accredited learning opportunities or work-based opportunities for those who could benefit. The transition programme is underdeveloped and few enrichment activities are provided. The college's approach to social inclusion is satisfactory in enabling learners with autistic spectrum disorder to become aware of what they need to do to engage more effectively in social settings. The individual support provided for this is very good and parents comment on the improvement made by learners in this respect.
8. Support for learners is satisfactory. The support provided by personal tutors to enable learners to reflect on their experience and behaviour is particularly good. Learners feel safe and individual risk assessments are very good. However, the provision for speech and language specialist interventions is insufficient.
9. Leadership and management are inadequate. No performance indicators are provided by directors and the college has not made the transition from being a day centre to establishing an appropriate further education curriculum. The accommodation is not used appropriately, and the directors have been slow in ensuring the college is implementing its contractual responsibilities satisfactorily. Financial management is unsatisfactory and the college does not provide adequate value for money.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: grade 3

10. The college has satisfactory capacity to improve. The annual assessment visit (AAV) in November 2005 was the first inspection visit since the college opened.

The staff understand very well the possible impact of autistic spectrum disorder on behaviour, and are skilled at providing support to enable learners to understand their behaviour better. Using the processes in the framework for 'Recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning' (RARPA), the college has started to provide a more individualised programme for learners. Progress is being monitored more effectively. However, the context for learning is not yet adequate. The college recognises that much still needs to be done. The self-assessment report is evaluative. It identifies many of the weaknesses, although the grading is over-optimistic.

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

11. The steps taken to promote improvement since the AAV have started to impact on the provision. The college has a detailed quality improvement plan which has been rigorously monitored. Key issues such as statutory requirements in health and safety have been effectively addressed. Quality improvement procedures have been developed. Improvements have been made to the accommodation and the college recognises that it needs to provide a curriculum that is more realistic for adult learners. Work placements have been recently introduced as a step in that direction. However, although the steps taken to improve are satisfactory, more time is needed for them to impact fully.

Key strengths of the college

*Strengths*

- good development of learners' self-awareness in relation to autistic spectrum disorder
- very good personal support provided by personal tutors
- good attention paid to creating a safe and secure environment.

Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- the lack of opportunities to develop skills in work-related and realistic contexts
- the effectiveness of planning to meet individual needs in group settings
- insufficient specialist speech and language support
- lack of rigour in teaching observations
- insufficient promotion of equality and diversity
- inappropriate use of accommodation
- unsatisfactory financial management.

## Main findings

### Achievements and standards

Inadequate: grade 4

12. Achievements and standards are inadequate. Achievements in numeracy are limited. Although learners demonstrate the use of numeracy skills during practical activities such as working out measurements to create a flower bed in gardening, they are not always able to transfer classroom activities to real-life situations in other contexts. Learners do not develop communication skills effectively. There is insufficient specialist speech and language intervention.
13. Learners develop few work-related and vocational skills, and opportunities to gain qualifications where appropriate are minimal. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Learners' awareness of health and safety issues in relation to the activities they undertake is good. Learners develop ICT skills within discrete lessons and during independent study. However, these skills are rarely reinforced during other activities.
14. Learners successfully develop their self-awareness. They are able to identify the social and personal skills they need to improve to form better personal and working relationships at the college, and to behave more appropriately within social situations. Learners are more able to organise their work to help with the completion of tasks, especially when working independently.
15. Although overall attendance at the college is satisfactory, there are examples where individual students' attendance and punctuality is unsatisfactory. This is monitored. However, too many learners are opting out of activities for too long during the day.

### Quality of provision

Inadequate: grade 4

16. Teaching and learning are inadequate. This is not adequately recognised in the self-assessment report. Too many activities are taught in a classroom context, in large groups that include social services funded learners. These lessons are sometimes chaotic and fail to engage all learners. Individual targets are incorporated into lesson plans and are shared with learners at the start of lessons. However, these are not used sufficiently to plan activities matched to individual student needs and are couched in terms not easily understood. Some learners need support to interpret the language of the targets. This results in learners talking with support staff whilst the tutor tries to focus the group on the task in hand.
17. Teaching and learning methods are not always appropriate, with insufficient opportunity to develop language skills. The emphasis on conceptual rather than practical learning is not appropriate and in some respects contradicts the college's aims and publicity. Learners are asked individual questions to illicit understanding, but due to the large numbers and the difficulty some learners



have in focusing, many fail to follow or understand what is required of them. Too often, teachers or support workers act as intermediaries between learners rather than encouraging open dialogue and student interaction with one another. There is a lack of spontaneous undirected interaction between peers and members of staff.

18. Teaching accommodation on the ground floor is inappropriate, with a large open plan area. Constant comings and goings prevent learners from attending to the task. Learners often opt out of activities, and in some cases spend a significant amount of time in a quiet room. This happens far less in the more successful small group teaching or in practical activities where learners can play an active part. Learners work more effectively in small groups on a given task where they work together co-operatively.
19. Baseline and initial assessments are comprehensive in terms of the identification of learners' personal and social development needs. These inform the development of independent learning plans (ILPs) which clearly identify long and medium term learning objectives and short term targets. The monitoring and tracking of learners' achievements against short term targets has very recently improved through the implementation of RARPA processes. However, baseline assessments have only recently been introduced to establish levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. It has not been possible to monitor progress or to identify learners who might benefit from appropriate accreditation.
20. The curriculum does not adequately meet the needs and interests of learners. The college has yet to make the transition from a 'day centre' to a college, with little sense of an overall curriculum to develop the skills of young adults and prepare them for moving on. Too much work is based in classrooms, and skills taught are not sufficiently translated into practical or realistic situations. Equality and diversity are not adequately promoted through the curriculum. The college does not provide an adequate enrichment curriculum.
21. Learners have a theoretical introduction to the world of work and a few are able to access work placements. However, the college recognises in the self-assessment report that this aspect of the curriculum is in need of further development. Learners are given insufficient opportunities to take courses leading to relevant qualifications. There are limited links with other providers to enable learners to make or progress onto academic or vocational courses where appropriate. The college does not have a transition programme to prepare learners to move on.
22. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is satisfactory in the way that it supports learners to understand more about what they need to do in order to engage more productively in social settings. This is particularly effective. Much has been achieved in making the college a safe place for learners, with very good individual risk assessments. Members of staff demonstrate respect and understanding for learners. The college recognises

that it needs to take steps to attract more female learners and has started to analyse recruitment data.

23. Support and guidance are satisfactory. Personal tutors provide very good individual support to learners. They are pivotal in encouraging learners to reflect on their experiences and on their behaviour. Personal tutors review progress on a weekly basis, and focus on managing social situations, particularly those that learners have found challenging. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Learning support assistants are briefed on a daily basis about the learners and receive a copy of the lesson plan. The learner induction programme is effective and includes information about health and safety and welfare. Contacts with parents/carers are productive. Learners attend meetings in which they can raise any complaints and recommend changes. Behaviour plans are detailed and provide a sound context and rationale for interventions, although they are not updated regularly enough. Specialist interventions to improve speech and language are not sufficient for learners, most of whom have significant oral communication needs.

#### Leadership and management

Inadequate: grade 4

24. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The directors have not set key performance indicators for the college, and have not provided sufficient guidance about the nature of FE provision. Since the last AAV, the college's senior management team have focused their strategic planning on improvements identified in that report.
25. Members of staff have worked hard to implement the quality improvement plan. However, many of the revised arrangements were put in place shortly before the inspection and it is not possible to evaluate them fully. RARPA is in the early stages of development and inspectors found that the scheme for observation for teaching and learning is not sufficiently rigorous. The self-assessment report is evaluative and identifies progress made in relation to the significant number of improvements needed. However, it is over-optimistic in its grading, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and learning.
26. Directors have been slow in ensuring that the college meets its statutory responsibilities. Key health and safety policies have only been introduced over the past year. Policies relating to the protection of vulnerable adults and equalities legislation have only recently been developed to meet requirements. The college does not have a statement showing how it meets its anticipatory duties in line with the requirements of SENDA (2001). The college has recently implemented safeguarding policies that are satisfactory. The college has a central register to record appropriate recruitment and vetting procedures. Risk assessments for individual learners are good and the college pays good attention to the safety of learners. However, one member of agency staff, who has been in the college for several months, has not had training for the protection of vulnerable adults. The college recognises that further training is needed to promote equality and diversity within the curriculum.

27. Teaching staff qualifications are satisfactory overall, but no-one has qualifications in skills for life. Staff have received a significant amount of relevant training this year. Accommodation does not meet the needs of learners. The upper floor is not accessible for wheelchair users. Teaching accommodation on the ground floor is not appropriately used.
28. The finance arrangements are not satisfactory. Funding streams are not adequately separated so that the allocation for LSC learners is transparent. The college budget is only partially devolved and the college is not able to demonstrate how it is meeting the contractual requirements as set out on the learner schedules with the LSC. The college provides inadequate value for money.