



Priestley College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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130624

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	5
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Overall judgement	6
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Priestley College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Michael Southworth
Address of college:	Loushers Lane Warrington Cheshire WA4 6RD
Telephone number:	01925 633591
Fax number:	01925 413887
Chair of governors:	Bill Bettley
Unique reference number:	130624
Name of lead inspector:	Ruth James, HMI
Dates of inspection:	12 – 16 March 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Priestley College was established as a sixth form college in 1979. The main site is located just south of Warrington town centre. Most learners come from the Warrington area, but a small number travel from further afield. The number of learners in 2004/5 was 2,588. Of these, 1,273 were aged 16-18, almost all full-time. 58% were female. The vast majority of learners were white British, with about 5% of minority ethnic heritage. The majority of learners aged 16-18 study level 3 courses, with a small proportion studying at level 2, and a few at level 1. The college offers courses in most curriculum areas, including health and social care, science, mathematics, information and communication technology, humanities, social sciences, arts, languages, sports and business. Of the 1,315 adult learners in 2004/05, 78% were female and most were part-time.
2. The college mission is: 'With the aim of being the very best in the field, and in responsible partnership with the local community, Priestley College is committed to providing the highest quality education and training for all its students.'

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 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	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

4. Priestley College is an outstanding college where every learner really does matter. It does everything in its power to maximise the life chances of its learners in a friendly, caring learning environment that encourages and enables them to do their best and achieve their potential. Learners make excellent progress; they are safe and well supported, and the college is extremely well led and managed. A huge range of opportunities is on offer, including many study visits to overseas destinations such as Kenya, New York, Poland and Lanzarote. The learner voice is given exceptional prominence at Priestley College through the student/college council, focus groups with the principal, and work with the board of governors. Learners make significant contributions both to the college community and more widely. During inspection week this included an infamous sumo wrestling match between staff and learners to raise money for Comic Relief.
5. Learners' achievements are outstanding. For learners aged 16-18 success rates are very high. Value added data show that advanced level learners generally achieve better grades than would be predicted from their GCSE results. Success rates for level 1 and 2 courses are exceptional. For a small minority of courses, success rates, or value added, are lower. Learners develop extremely well in terms of personal skills, aided by college staff and the many opportunities to participate in new activities as they mature. Attendance is outstanding. Behaviour is impeccable and learners display a respect for adults and each other alike. Adult success rates are generally good, particularly for Skills for Life provision.
6. The quality of provision is outstanding overall. Teaching and learning are good. In most lessons, learners are engaged in a range of stimulating activities and expectations are high. Learning materials are very good. Assessment practices are very effective, and excellent use is made of individual target grades in monitoring progress. In a minority of lessons there is insufficient differentiation. The college offers an outstanding range of courses and activities. The arrangements for identifying particular combinations of courses to suit individual needs are very flexible and the number of learners combining academic and vocational courses is high. In the community, adult skills for life provision provides good opportunities for improving basic skills. Personal and subject support is outstanding. All aspects of advice and guidance are excellent, ensuring that learners are placed on suitable courses, achieve well and progress to further or higher education or employment.
7. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds reflects the

proportion in the local population. These learners do better than is the case nationally. Female learners outnumber male, but the college is beginning to recruit more males. Success rates for male learners aged 16-18 have shown a particularly notable rise in recent years. Statutory requirements are met, and equality and diversity are covered in the tutorial curriculum. The new building and refurbishments already completed will ensure that learners with physical disabilities are not excluded from any course offered.

8. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and vice principal, set a clear direction for the college. There are strong and productive links with local high schools and employers. The college makes a valuable contribution to local 14-19 plans and works closely with the local further education college and local authority. The impact of leadership and management and quality assurance arrangements are clearly demonstrated by the very significant improvements in attendance, retention and pass rates in recent years. The learner voice has been given increasing prominence. Staff are well qualified and much accommodation is good. The capital building programme will provide additional high quality accommodation. Financial management is good, but staff costs are high. Governors' monitoring is rigorous.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

9. The college demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve. There has been a very significant improvement in success rates since the last inspection and value added is high. There is a strong culture of continuous improvement with a focus on supporting the learner to achieve. College managers monitor key performance indicators rigorously. Action plans resulting from the self-assessment and strategic planning process are implemented effectively and learner feedback is used extremely well to make improvements. The lesson observation system is effective and forms one of a range of methods to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report is good. Judgements are accurate and strengths are recognised, although the report does not always clearly identify all areas for development. Governors and senior managers are clear about the strategic direction of the college and focus closely on the learner experience.

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

10. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Both retention and pass rates have improved significantly. The curriculum has been reviewed and the courses now offered have been carefully selected to meet learner needs. The range of enrichment opportunities, including study visits abroad, has been extended enormously. Learning support arrangements are more extensive and take up has improved. Quality assurance processes are now rigorous.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- caring and supportive learning environment
- excellent range of courses
- high pass rates for most courses
- high retention rates for most courses
- excellent learner progress and high value added scores
- much good teaching and learning
- good resources in many areas
- strong focus on the learner voice
- excellent participation in a wide range of enrichment activities
- outstanding learner support
- outstanding leadership and management
- strong external and community links.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low retention and pass rates for a small minority of courses
- low value added scores for a minority of courses
- lack of differentiation and challenge in a minority of lessons, particularly for more able learners.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

Contributory grades:

Adult and community learning

Good: grade 2

11. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that achievements and standards are outstanding. Overall, success rates for learners aged 16-18 have improved significantly to 86% in 2006, which is well above the national average for sixth form colleges. A rapid rise in retention rates is a significant contributor to improved success rates. Pass rates have also improved significantly at levels 1 and 2 and remain good at level 3.
12. The overall pass rate for GCE A levels in 2006 was over 99%, with 34 out of 38 subjects having a pass rate of 100%. The proportion of learners gaining the highest grades was similar to national average. GCE AS level examination results were also very good. Learners make excellent progress. Value added analyses shows that learners on advanced level courses, gain generally grades which are better than those which would be expected, given their GCSE results. Level 3 vocational courses also had very high pass rates in 2006.
13. For level 2 vocational courses, the pass rate was 98% in 2006, and for level 1, it was 100%. Learners who resit GCSE English also do particularly well, with about 70% of learners gaining A*-C grades. In GCSE mathematics, the proportion of learners gaining A*-C is about average at 50%.
14. For the small minority of learners of minority ethnic background, success rates are generally better than national averages. Success rates for male learners have risen rapidly and are now above national averages. Results for adult long courses are generally good but for some short courses they are more variable.
15. For a minority of courses, including key skills communications at level 3, retention or pass rates are low. A small number of courses also have a low value added score.
16. Progression from levels 1 and 2 courses to higher level courses is very good. There are many examples of learners who embarked on level 2 courses at the college going on to achieve level 3 qualifications and gaining university places. A high proportion of advanced level learners' progress to higher education. Progression from vocational courses to employment and higher education is also very good.
17. As well as formal academic qualifications, learners achieve extremely well in other ways. There are numerous examples of learners excelling in other ways, such as sporting achievements. Behaviour is excellent. Attendance is very good.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

Contributory grades:

Adult and community learning

Good: grade 2

18. Inspectors agree with the college judgement that teaching and learning are good. Learners enjoy learning. Effort and achievement are acknowledged. Learners rise to the teachers' high expectations of them and enjoy being challenged. Teachers are enthusiastic, motivating, engaging and have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well prepared, maintain a brisk pace, and provide a variety of activities. Learners respond and do well. Some good use of group and presentational formats coupled with skilful questioning elicits from learners sustained enthusiasm, concentration and excellent progress. In one observed lesson, a group of sport learners delivered presentations on the planning and risk assessment for a residential excursion to the Lake District. Group work was energetic, well planned and focused. The presentations were delivered with skill and confidence, and all were comprehensive and well researched. Learners demonstrated very good organisation and oral skills.
19. Learning materials are good. The college has made good progress in embedding the use of information and learning technology (ILT) into curriculum activities. The college virtual learning environment (VLE) offers a valued and excellent learning facility for learners. A few lessons lack sufficient challenge and learners are not fully included in questioning or group activities. These lessons lack pace and are too teacher-centred. In a minority of lessons, the good variety of activities and pace found at the beginning of the lessons are not sustained throughout, and more challenge and demand is needed, especially for the more able.
20. Assessment is good and work is regularly monitored. Teachers set homework regularly. Work is thoroughly marked and returned promptly, often with useful comments to direct learners to make improvements in future work. In a minority of assessed work, comments are less helpful and not directed towards improvement or sufficiently differentiated to enable progress. Target setting and progress reviews are used very effectively. Monitoring of learners progress is excellent. Learners are very well supported by teachers and encouraged to aspire to a 'can do' culture of ambition and improvement. They are very well prepared for examinations. There is a strong culture of sharing good practice which is supported through well planned staff development activities. An effective lesson observation system is linked to appraisal, action plans and staff training.
21. For learners aged 16-18, there is a very broad and expanding range of GCE AS and A level courses, and a wide range of vocational courses are offered at levels 2 and 3, with limited options at level 1. Choice of courses is particularly flexible and many learners on level 3 vocational courses also take one or more

- GCE AS or A level subjects. There are very good opportunities for internal progression, with a high proportion of learners who complete level 2 courses going on to level 3. There is very strong partnership working with local schools, the further education college and local authority to ensure that the curriculum offered best meets the needs of learners. Adult provision includes effective Skills for Life courses in the community.
22. Many learners benefit from the very wide choice of enrichment activities which includes flying lessons, a variety of sports, conferences, visiting speakers and an outstanding range of trips and visits both in the UK and abroad. Drama learners recently visited New York and sports learners attended a specialised warm weather training camp in Lanzarote. The college works well with local employers to provide valuable work experience for learners on health, early years and sports courses. Excellent use is made of projects for local employers for art and design learners. 3D design learners work on designing and making trophies for local newspaper awards, while art learners design wrapping paper for a local retail outlet. Learners benefit from the meetings with business clients and the need to meet industry standards. The comprehensive group tutorial curriculum includes healthy living, study skills and progression. Resources are very good and include a weekly news sheet for learners.
23. Guidance and support are outstanding. Extremely effective links with 11-16 partner schools ensure that these prospective learners are well informed about the college. The proportion of these learners progressing to the college has increased significantly over the last five years. Great care is taken to ensure that learners are placed on the right programme. There are rigorous interview and admissions processes and there is early identification of learners potentially at risk of not completing their courses. These learners are closely monitored and very well supported. Learners have clear individual progress targets and regular reviews, and this process is well informed by a centrally managed data system. Parents are well informed about learner progress.
24. Teachers are fully committed to learners and provide excellent subject support, both in and out of lessons. Individual learning support needs are identified via comprehensive initial assessment processes and on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Support is put in place promptly and is very effective. The number taking up support has increased significantly over the last three years and a recently introduced initiative for whole class support for level 3 learners is proving very effective.
25. Advice and guidance on progression to higher education and employment or further training are excellent. The student services centre is well located near the refectory and social areas and provides a responsive one-stop-shop facility for the majority of learner enquiries.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

Adult and community learning

Good: grade 2

26. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and vice principal provide strong clear direction, and the college is focused on the learner experience and high achievement. Leadership and management are very effective at all levels, based upon shared values. The college has improved success rates which are now well above the national average in most areas, and attendance is outstanding. Communications are very good and staff value the weekly briefings given by the principal.
27. Governance is very strong. Governors have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses and what has been done to secure improvements. They work closely with learners and share the college values.
28. Quality assurance is extremely effective. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. There is a strong focus on continuous improvement. Managers and teachers have a detailed knowledge of the performance of their areas and appreciate the good quality of the management information available to them. Graded lesson observations are analysed to direct necessary improvements. The performance management group gives a cross-college focus to improvement. Development planning and self-assessment are linked and embedded in the college's operations. Key strategies have been identified and these have had a positive impact on success rates. However, the self-assessment report does not explicitly identify all areas for improvement and the college has not yet been successful in improving the outcomes for key skills at level 3.
29. There is a very good response to learner feedback at all levels. Learners report that issues raised have been addressed positively. Partnership work with local high schools is extremely effective, including shared professional development, the planning of the 14-19 entitlement and gifted and talented activities.
30. There is a highly effective programme of professional development focused on teaching and learning and the learner experience. The staff induction programme helps staff settle in quickly and lesson observations help ensure that teaching is high quality. Staff review processes are comprehensive.
31. Staff understand their responsibilities regarding child protection. Board members have been trained and the college has appropriate child protection arrangements. The college is compliant with recent legislation regarding race and disability. Trends show that the college is succeeding in attracting more male learners.
32. At the time of the inspection the college was in the middle of a capital building programme to improve accommodation. Resources are deployed well and

existing accommodation is well maintained. Financial management is good, but staff costs have increased in recent years. Value for money is good.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, 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	03/04	108	78	67	11	121	75	57	18
	04/05	43	86	64	22	62	76	56	20
	05/06	*	na	**	na	94	80	**	Na
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	*	na	na	na	0	na	na	Na
	04/05	16	94	74	20	0	na	na	Na
	05/06	*	na	**	na	0	na	**	Na
NVQs	03/04	0	na	na	na	0	na	na	Na
	04/05	0	na	na	na	0	na	na	Na
	05/06	0	na	**	na	0	na	**	Na
Other	03/04	94	77	66	11	121	75	58	18
	04/05	27	82	63	19	62	76	56	20
	05/06	*	na	**	na	94	80	**	na

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, 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	03/04	452	66	74	-8	117	60	55	5
	04/05	450	82	73	9	111	68	55	13
	05/06	486	85	**	na	51	78	**	na
GCSEs	03/04	269	70	77	-7	41	66	63	3
	04/05	259	83	78	5	41	68	65	3
	05/06	262	85	**	na	20	85	**	na
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	74	68	73	-5	0	na	na	na
	04/05	91	77	74	3	0	na	na	na
	05/06	55	82	**	na	0	na	**	na
NVQs	03/04	*	na	na	na	41	59	58	1
	04/05	*	na	na	na	34	65	55	10
	05/06	0	na	**	na	18	72	**	na
Other	03/04	108	58	68	-10	35	54	52	2
	04/05	99	86	62	24	35	69	51	18
	05/06	169	86	**	na	*	na	**	na

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, 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	03/04	2828	76	80	-4	217	64	57	7
	04/05	2966	84	82	2	162	57	59	-2
	05/06	3081	86	**	na	80	59	**	Na
A/A2 Levels	03/04	739	89	91	-2	17	71	75	-4
	04/05	682	94	92	2	18	78	76	2
	05/06	892	96	**	na	16	38	**	na
AS Levels	03/04	1781	70	76	-6	37	68	52	16
	04/05	1844	81	77	4	23	70	54	16
	05/06	1815	82	**	na	32	63	**	na
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	173	74	68	6	*	na	na	na
	04/05	253	80	75	5	*	na	na	na
	05/06	93	96	**	na	*	na	**	na
NVQs	03/04	*	na	na	na	110	72	51	21
	04/05	0	na	na	na	111	48	49	-1
	05/06	*	na	**	na	16	50	**	na
Other	03/04	0	na	na	na	49	41	52	-11
	04/05	0	na	na	na	*	na	na	na
	05/06	280	78	**	na	*	na	**	na

*: fewer than 15 starts

** : national rate not available

na: not applicable