

INSPECTION REPORT

Hillcroft College

02 November 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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Hillcroft College

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Hillcroft College is a charity and a company limited by guarantee, based in Surbiton, southwest London. It is a small residential college for women, which provides full-time and part-time learning programmes for women who are disadvantaged educationally or socially or who have otherwise not had the opportunity to fulfil their educational potential. Programmes support progress into vocational training, further and higher education, employment and promotion at work. Just over 64 per cent of learners are aged between 19 and 44 and just over 50 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Almost 20 per cent of learners have a disability and half have no formal qualifications at level 2 or above.

2. Hillcroft College recruits nationally and attracts learners from across the country, as well as from London. The college has 50 study bedrooms, a learning resource centre and up to 25 childcare places. In 2005-06, 663 learners made 1,450 enrolments. In the current year, 213 learners have enrolled on courses at the college.

3. Hillcroft College organises its provision into four programme areas of skills for life, language and learning development, employability and community, further and higher study and ways into learning and personal development. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. The college offers courses in business enterprise and management, access to higher education, information technology (IT) and preparation for life and work, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and literacy. The college also delivers a range of courses for women who work or volunteer in the community and voluntary sector and women returning to learning or to paid employment. It offers a range of learning experiences from one-day taster courses and single weekends, to long courses involving linked attendance throughout the year and full-time courses. Most of its courses, apart from taster days and some off-site provision, are residential. The college has a contract with London South Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for its core provision and draws additional funding for specific projects from sources such as the European Social Fund. In 2005-06, the local LSC accounted for 74 per cent of Hillcroft College's income. A further 6 per cent came from tuition fees and 20 per cent from other sources. There are no subcontracting arrangements.

4. The college is managed by a principal and four directors, who make up the senior management team. The directors are responsible for human resources, finance and information, resources and support services and student learning. The principal and senior management team report directly to the board of governors, which determines the college's strategic direction.

5. The college changed its arrangements for curriculum management in 2005-06, creating two management posts within the directorate of student learning. Two new heads of programme who are responsible for operational management and the support of curriculum specialists have been appointed. The heads of programme report to the director of student learning and manage teams of lead or senior tutors who are each responsible for an area of learning. There are 34 part-time specialist teaching staff who work regularly for the college. The director of resources and support services is

responsible for technical and maintenance support staff and a team of staff who support the residential provision.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

6. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Leadership and management, equality of opportunity and quality improvement are good. The quality of provision in social sciences, preparation for life and work, and business administration and law is good.

7. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates have improved steadily over the past three years and are now good at 82 per cent. Success rates for learners from minority ethnic groups are very good at 88 per cent. During the three-year period to 2005-06, retention rates have been consistently high. The retention rate in 2005-06 was 98 per cent overall, and 86 per cent on long courses. Most learners progress well and there are many examples of learners who have progressed from taster courses to level 3 qualifications. Attendance is good for almost all courses. Learners develop good personal and learning skills in all areas of learning. They enjoy learning and make significant gains in confidence and self-esteem. Standards of work are good in all areas of learning.

8. The quality of provision is good. Most standards of teaching and learning are good. Schemes of work are detailed and lessons are well planned with clear aims and objectives. In the best classes, information and communications technology (ICT) is used very well. Tutors use learners' experiences very effectively in lessons and provide good individual coaching. Tutors and learners use a good range of resources. Learners have good access to computers and particularly good access to the learning resource centre, which is open 24 hours a day. There is insufficient planning to meet the individual needs of learners in some lessons. Assessment is satisfactory. Hillcroft College has made satisfactory progress in implementing the process of recognising and recording progress and achievement in different curriculum areas. On longer courses records are generally good, but initial assessment and recording of progress are not sufficiently developed on some short courses.

9. The range of programmes to meet the needs of the college's target groups is good. Hillcroft College works well with community organisations to plan residential learning opportunities for women from disadvantaged groups. The college designs and schedules its courses flexibly to accommodate learners' work and family commitments, and to enable learners to join programmes throughout the year. The range of imaginative taster courses is particularly effective in widening participation and in supporting progression to further learning. Courses are responsive to the needs of learners and of the college's partners. However, the programme of enrichment activities on access courses is not well developed and there are insufficient opportunities for women to improve their numeracy skills.

10. Support for learners is very good. Learners receive particularly effective practical and personal support. Extensive childcare, welfare advice, a counselling service and additional financial support are available to learners. Initial and on-course advice and guidance is good for learners on long courses and helps them make well-informed choices about their course of study. Support for learners who have dyslexia is good.

11. The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment

process. Managers and most staff are involved in the process and contribute to the judgements. The views of learners and partners are analysed and used well to make judgements in the self-assessment report. Judgements are based on a good range of evidence and relate closely to the key questions in the Common Inspection Framework. However, some of curriculum area reports do not deal with all aspects of the learners' experience well. The most recent report is critical and evaluative, and reflects the judgements of the inspection. At the time of the inspection, action was being taken to resolve many of the weaknesses in this report.

12. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.

Since the previous inspection, the quality of provision in business management and the social sciences had improved. Changes to management structures and the high priority given to quality improvement have brought about significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the management of the curriculum. Hillcroft College fully understands its weaknesses. The self-assessment report and detailed development plans provide a firm foundation for further improvements.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR HILLCROFT COLLEGE:

- maintain the good strategic direction
- continue to improve retention and achievement
- complete the overall co-ordination of support services to fully support all aspects of the learner's journey
- improve planning to meet individual needs in ESOL and literacy classes
- further develop accreditation opportunities
- extend enrichment opportunities

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		2

Social sciences			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Sociology and social policy</i>		2	
Adult and community learning	29	2	

Preparation for life and work		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Literacy Adult and community learning	32	2
ESOL Adult and community learning	36	2

Business administration and law		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business management Adult and community learning	40	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

13. Hillcroft College was first inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in February 2003, and received a quality monitoring visit in September 2005. Four inspectors visited Hillcroft College over six days at the end of October 2006. A two-day visit before the main inspection week, was made to observe weekend literacy and ESOL provision. The contributory areas of sociology and social policy, business management, literacy and ESOL were all inspected and graded. None of the personal development provision, known as ways into learning, was available for inspection.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	19
Number of learners interviewed	61
Number of staff interviewed	22
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of visits	2

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- good strategic development
- particularly good support arrangements for learners
- very effective promotion of social inclusion
- very effective measures to improve quality

Weaknesses

- inadequate access for learners with restricted mobility
- insufficient sharing of good practice

Social sciences

Sociology and social policy

Strengths

- good retention and achievement on most courses
- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- innovative independent study project
- very good welfare support
- good organisation and management of courses

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of learning skills in some lessons
- insufficiently developed enrichment activities

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good development of skills and confidence
- good achievement on ESOL summer programme
- good integration of ICT on the ESOL programmes
- imaginative programmes to widen participation in learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning to meet individual needs in some lessons
- insufficient sharing of good practice

Business administration and law

Business management

Strengths

- very good development of personal and learning skills and knowledge of business and management practice
- good achievement rates on most courses
- good teaching and learning
- good range and use of learning resources
- very effective personal support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and management of in-class additional learning support
- insufficiently rigorous internal moderation procedures

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT HILLCROFT COLLEGE:

- the very helpful teachers
- the individual support
- the secure, safe, relaxed environment 'it feels like a second home'
- meeting women from many different backgrounds
- 'it's like a magnet, you want to do more'
- 'it helps you to make life-changing decisions'
- 'staying here gives us more time to work away from other responsibilities'
- 'brilliant childcare, the children enjoy coming and are learning too'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK HILLCROFT COLLEGE COULD IMPROVE:

- the food, especially for day learners
- indoor and outdoor play areas for children
- a recreational area for learners
- more longer courses
- more basic mathematics and IT courses
- the amount of detail in pre-course information

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic development
- particularly good support arrangements for learners
- very effective promotion of social inclusion
- very effective measures to improve quality

Weaknesses

- inadequate access for learners with restricted mobility
- insufficient sharing of good practice

14. Strategic development is good. The board of governors, the principal and senior managers of Hillcroft College have clear objectives for the organisation, and provide strong strategic leadership. These objectives are shared by all staff who clearly understand the college's mission and values and contribute their views through staff meetings. The college's key objectives are set out in the three-year strategic plan against a sound rationale and a good analysis of risk factors. The plan contributes well to local and regional priorities identified by the governing body and the local LSC, with its focus on skills for life, employer engagement and capacity building for the voluntary and community sector. It provides a comprehensive framework within which Hillcroft College can respond and adapt to the changing needs of learners and external partners. Managers and curriculum leaders contribute to the plan and fully understand its relevance to their own areas of learning. Individual members of the governing body champion key strategic objectives and review the progress of these objectives regularly.

15. Hillcroft College has made good progress in developing its management function to reflect strategic priorities more accurately. The management structure has been substantially revised since the previous inspection, including several new posts and appointments. The management team has been strengthened through the appointment of a director of student learning, responsible for quality improvement and curriculum development and two heads of programme each responsible for the day-to-day management of specific programme areas. The changes to the structure were managed effectively. Staff and managers fully understand the new structure which provides an effective operating framework. The college has recently created an operations team responsible for a range of administrative support. This is at an early stage of development but is beginning to provide a more responsive and better co-ordinated service for learners and staff.

16. Hillcroft College continues to collect a wide range of data and uses it effectively to make management decisions. Targets are set and closely monitored by senior managers and governors. The college collects and analyses management information which it compares with data from similar institutions. Data on learners' retention, achievement and success rates is collected and monitored systematically. Recruitment data is analysed

carefully to ensure that the college's mission to work with particular groups is achieved. Staff receive reports through the weekly briefing meetings and other communication. Targets are agreed with managers and course team leaders and are monitored at senior management meetings and individual review meetings.

17. Management arrangements for meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language support needs are satisfactory overall. The college has improved its arrangements for assessing learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. Where needs are identified, specialist staff provide regular individual support and also support learners using the learning resource centre in the evenings for independent study. In addition, the college provides appropriate diagnostic assessment and a good range of support for learners with dyslexia, including specialist software and bursaries for equipment. Learning support assistants work alongside tutors in some classes. However, there is insufficient planning and management of in-class additional support.

18. Management arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning are mostly satisfactory. The process is being used appropriately on longer non-accredited programmes, but it is not being used consistently on all short weekend courses. The college is working to develop more effective ways of identifying learners' starting points and of recording progress on these courses.

19. A satisfactory range of development opportunities are available to staff. Management support for individual and corporate staff training is good. Part-time tutors are paid to attend staff development events that take place in non-teaching weeks during the year. The college has clear targets for tutors to achieve teaching qualifications. All staff, including visiting tutors, have an annual appraisal where they identify development needs and agree individual targets. These targets are now also linked to the college's strategic objectives. Targets and any training needs are monitored closely and are evaluated at review meetings which take place every six months. The college attracts and retains high-calibre part-time tutors. Staff are well qualified and have extensive experience of working in the adult and community sector.

20. Resources for teaching are satisfactory overall. The college has sufficient computers and an appropriate range of software. Staff have received training in using electronic whiteboards and these are being used effectively by some tutors. The learning resource centre has an adequate stock of books, periodicals and audiovisual materials. The centre is open 24 hours each day and resources are well used. Many teaching rooms have limited space for storage and display. Hillcroft College has a small dining room but does not have sufficient recreational areas where learners can meet informally.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

21. Hillcroft College promotes social inclusion very well. It has developed very effective partnerships with community groups, voluntary organisations and agencies to offer learning opportunities to disadvantaged and vulnerable women. It works with a wide range of organisations including probation services, women's refuges, mental health recovery units, and carers' groups to attract women with diverse needs and barriers to learning who would not normally participate in further education. These include minority ethnic groups, older learners and women recovering from abuse and drug or substance misuse. The residential provision continues to offer a supportive and secure environment for the learners and they appreciate the college's welcoming environment and the

opportunities to concentrate on their own learning, often for the first time. Hillcroft College supports community-capacity building well through a range of programmes designed for women who work in voluntary and community organisations, and also through the employability programmes and skills for life courses.

22. Minority ethnic groups continue to be well represented among the college's staff, who have extensive experience of working with disadvantaged women. The management information system is used well to analyse the participation, retention and achievement of learners by age, ethnic background, disability and disadvantage. This information is used to monitor how well the college is meeting its targets. Over 80 per cent of learners are unemployed when they enrol. The representation of learners from minority ethnic groups has increased since the previous inspection from 42 per cent to just over 50 per cent for 2005-06. In addition, the proportion of women who have declared a disability has increased from 6 per cent to 19 per cent. Success rates among minority ethnic groups are high.

23. Support arrangements for learners are particularly good. Hillcroft College has put in place an extensive range of measures to support learners. The college provides a creche on site and also arranges childminding facilities to enable women to study during the day and in the evening. It offers welfare advice and counselling services to learners who have a wide range of experience and backgrounds, including refugees and asylum seekers. Learners who use the provision have often experienced emotional and social difficulties and value the opportunity to access specialist services through the college. A range of financial support is available for learners including support for travel and bursaries. A mentoring scheme provides additional support for learners on business management programmes.

24. The learning resource centre provides good support for learners to extend their learning experiences and is open 24 hours each day. The centre has specialist equipment and staff are trained to meet the additional needs of learners. Learners receive a range of appropriate support, including specific learning aids and specialist software.

25. The college has a clear and detailed policy for equal opportunities, a race equality policy, policies on bullying and harassment, a complaints procedure and a disability statement. However, the policies have not been presented in a format that is easily accessible for learners with reading difficulties. There is no specific equality and diversity action plan. There are satisfactory arrangements for dealing with complaints. Procedures are understood by staff and learners and complaints are dealt with promptly. Formal complaints are recorded, as are the actions taken to resolve complaints.

26. Good use is made of images representing women from different cultural backgrounds in promotional materials. There are many positive images of members of different groups and cultures on display throughout the college. Most tutors work effectively to promote equality and diversity. Learners from different cultural backgrounds, minority ethnic groups, age groups and ability levels work well together in lessons. However, the promotion of cultural diversity is not sufficiently active in some lessons and it is not a feature throughout the provision.

27. Access to the college for people with restricted mobility remains inadequate. The building has many narrow corridors and different levels joined by stairs, and many areas of

the college remain unsuitable or inaccessible for those with restricted mobility. The college makes careful arrangements for learners with restricted mobility and is committed to meeting their needs wherever possible. Since the previous inspection, the college has purchased an electric mobility scooter to enable learners with restricted mobility to move around the campus. Two computer desks in the learning resource centre are adjustable for use by wheelchair users.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

28. Quality improvement is good. The quality of provision has improved substantially since quality assurance arrangements were strengthened after the previous inspection. Managers and staff now have a good understanding of the need for continuous improvement. Quality improvement is planned effectively to support Hillcroft College's key strategic and operational objectives, and activity focuses strongly on improving key aspects of the learners' experience.

29. The college has good arrangements for consulting with learners and staff and for acting on this feedback. Learners welcome the college's swift response in dealing with their immediate concerns. The college has introduced substantial changes to staffing to ensure that services at the weekend match those offered during the week. Advice and guidance arrangements for learners on the access programme have been changed after feedback from learners. New courses such as the national test weekends and writing courses have been developed in response to feedback from learners.

30. The college has used classroom observations effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. All new staff are observed within their first term of teaching and all staff are now observed annually. Guidelines and documents to support the observation of teaching and learning are clearly written and comprehensive. Extensive feedback is given to staff, and this feedback is used as the basis for clearly focused professional development activities. A well-structured staff training programme has been developed to support the further development of teaching and learning skills, and to deal with quality issues such as course planning and reviews. The outcomes of classroom observations are also used in the appraisal process, curriculum review and evaluation, and the self-assessment process. The profile of grades given in internal observations has improved annually in the past two years. The grades given to tutors through internal observations largely matched those given by inspectors.

31. Hillcroft College has effectively strengthened its quality assurance through revised quality improvement structures and policies. A senior manager is responsible for quality improvement and the quality and standards committee has overall responsibility for the quality monitoring of programmes. At operational level, heads of programme, curriculum leaders and senior tutors now have clearly defined responsibilities for the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and teaching activities, and for providing support for staff. Course reviews are used well to identify areas for improvement. Changes have been made in the recruitment process and detailed initial assessment on management and employability programmes have been introduced to ensure that learners are enrolled on an appropriate programme.

32. Timekeeping and attendance are monitored closely and action is taken promptly to resolve problems. The college's quality assurance and improvement policies have been thoroughly reviewed and updated and are available to staff on the college intranet.

33. Self-assessment and action-planning continue to be thorough and are now fully integrated with the overall quality improvement cycle. Academic, administrative and support staff and learners are fully involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report for each area. Catering, childcare and cleaning services are not yet fully included in the process. Course teams use a range of evidence, including course reviews, evaluation and feedback from learners, to evaluate their programmes well. Programme area reports are used effectively to build the overall self-assessment report. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the draft self-assessment report, which was produced in September 2006, matched most of the inspectors' findings. The development plan provides a clear direction for improvement.

34. Internal moderation procedures for externally accredited courses are satisfactory overall. These courses are thoroughly evaluated and staff respond appropriately to recommendations made by external moderators. However, there is insufficient independent internal moderation of some business management courses.

35. Much good practice is developing within the college, but this is not being shared sufficiently within or between programme areas. There has been a strong focus on teaching and learning in the staff development plan, but particularly good practice is not being shared sufficiently with all tutors. For example, some tutors use learning materials and approaches which have been adapted to support learners with dyslexia, while others do not. Individual learning plans vary in quality and examples of good use of information from initial assessment and effective target-setting are not shared sufficiently by tutors.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Social sciences

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Sociology and social policy</i>		2
Adult and community learning	29	2

36. The college offers full-time courses which lead to an access to higher education certificate and an externally accredited independent research programme for women over 55 years of age who have not previously benefited from higher education. This is full time for 10 weeks. There are a number of short courses, but none were running at the time of the inspection.

37. There are 23 learners on the access to higher education course and six on the independent research programme. Of these learners, 31 per cent are from minority ethnic groups, and 41 per cent have a disability. Nineteen learners have progressed from other courses in the college. The access course is full time over 24 weeks, with September and January start dates and the option of continuing for a further 12 weeks. It is a modular programme with a number of pathways, including health studies, social science and humanities. Learning skills is a mandatory module for all new learners. The course also includes English, mathematics and IT. Each learner on the independent research programme carries out research in an area of personal interest, with tutorial support and research and study skills. The full-time access course and the research project are each managed by a senior tutor. There are up to 15 staff involved in the courses, depending on the modules offered.

Sociology and social policy

Strengths

- good retention and achievement on most courses
- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- innovative independent study project
- very good welfare support
- good organisation and management of courses

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of learning skills in some lessons
- insufficiently developed enrichment activities

Achievement and standards

38. Retention rates have been consistently high in the past three years. The overall retention rate for 2005-06 was 94 per cent. In 2004-05, all the learners who started the independent research programme completed the course and achieved the qualification.

Retention and success rates on the access programme declined to 80 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively, in 2005-06. There was also a decline in the performance of the first intake of learners to the restructured programme. The college recognised this and swiftly dealt with the problem. The second group, which started in January 2006, has good retention at 93 per cent and success rates of 85 per cent.

39. Learners develop good critical, evaluative and academic skills at an early stage in the access programme. Individual learners significantly increase their personal confidence and develop good independent research skills. They become skilled in taking responsibility for managing their own learning and make good use of the college's resource centre. Learners become increasingly confident in their use of ICT. Their assignments are well researched, organised and presented. Learners make good contributions in lessons and work collaboratively and co-operatively in groups.

The quality of provision

40. The college offers a well-planned and innovative independent study project for learners aged over 55 called the 'ransackers' programme. Following careful selection procedures, learners follow a course of study which includes induction, individual and group tutorials, independent research, classes and individual support in the development of research and study skills. They are encouraged to become self-critical through the use of a reflective log. Individual tuition is used effectively to support learners throughout the programme. Learners complete research projects in an area of personal interest which includes historical, social and medical issues. Standards of work are high. Learners enjoy learning for its own sake, and fully appreciate the opportunity to do so at this stage in their lives.

41. Learners benefit from very good welfare support. Often faced with a variety of socio-economic pressures, they receive good information, advice and financial support which helps them to make good progress and to participate fully in their programmes. College staff have extensive knowledge of the welfare and benefit systems, together with good links with specialist referral agencies. They are active in finding possible sources of additional funding. Support for childcare, additional bursaries and a hardship fund are available to learners, and are highly valued. Staff give freely of their time and provide academic and personal support for learners.

42. Access learners complete a thorough induction which includes good initial advice and guidance which helps them make well-informed choices about their course of study. Initial diagnostic assessment is satisfactory. Support needs are quickly identified and satisfactory arrangements for meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are put in place. Many learners receive individual learning support to help them achieve their qualification. Individual support is carefully targeted and learners can point to improvements in particular skills, such as mathematical operations, or reading for comprehension, in a very short time. Support for learners who have dyslexia is good.

43. Most teaching and learning is good. Lessons are generally well planned and have clear aims and objectives. They include planning to meet the needs of individual learners. Most lessons use an appropriate variety of activities and learners are fully involved in the learning process. Tutors draw on examples or material from a variety of cultures where appropriate. Some tutors make good use of adapted learning materials to support

learners with dyslexia. Learners are highly motivated and work productively in lessons. In some lessons, learning skills and general strategies for learning are insufficiently incorporated into the teaching. In these lessons, opportunities for learners to acquire general academic skills or specialist vocabulary are not sufficiently developed.

44. Teaching accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory, with some good and well produced materials. Learners have good access to computers and particularly value the 24-hour access to the learning resources centre and the computer room. They also benefit from the support provided by staff in the learning resources centre. Staff are well qualified and experienced and have appropriate subject expertise. Most staff have recognised teaching qualifications.

45. Assessment and internal moderation processes are satisfactory. Assignments are set regularly and returned in good time. Learners receive written feedback about their assignments. Most feedback is satisfactory but some does not provide sufficient specific guidance to help learners improve their performance.

46. Advice and guidance on progression has been strengthened since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. The access course includes a planned programme of activities to support learners making applications to higher education institutions. These include visiting speakers and advice about financial aspects.

47. The programme of enrichment activities which is designed to enhance learning is not well developed. This is identified in the self-assessment report. A limited range of recreational classes is available and some visits or visiting speakers are arranged, linked to specific course modules. Learners do not yet take responsibility for organising activities and insufficient advantage is taken of the college location and its proximity to a broad range of cultural opportunities.

Leadership and management

48. The organisation and management of courses is good. The curriculum is well managed and is responsive to learners' needs. Staff meetings focus effectively on improving the provision and on the welfare of the learners. Problems are accurately identified and swift action is taken. Examples include the reorganisation of the access course, changes in initial advice and guidance and the introduction of a timetabled period to support applications to higher education. Communications are good and staff are well supported.

49. There is good promotion of equality of opportunity. Learners' understanding of their rights and responsibilities is good. The college provides a welcoming and friendly atmosphere and supports a diverse community.

50. The college's quality improvement procedures are effective in promoting improvements. Staff carry out a thorough evaluation of the provision every year. Learners' views of the certificate programme are sought at the end of each module and at the end of each course, and form part of the course review and evaluation. The observation of teaching and learning is thorough and is used well to plan the appraisal and to identify professional development needs. The self-assessment process is thorough and the report accurately identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. At the inspection, measures to deal with several of the weaknesses were well under way.

HILLCROFT COLLEGE

Inspectors gave a higher grade for the provision than that in the self-assessment report.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Literacy Adult and community learning	32	2
ESOL Adult and community learning	36	2

51. Preparation for life and work programmes at Hillcroft College incorporate two major elements of the college's work. The skills for life, language and learning development programmes include discrete literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses and the provision of additional learning support across the college. The 'Ways into Learning' and personal development programmes are aimed at helping women develop the confidence and skills to return to learning. Most of these courses last between one weekend and a week. They include courses in assertiveness and developing confident behaviour, the visual and performing arts, women's health and nutrition, and courses for carers. Most of these courses are not accredited but the college awards a certificate to learners who have completed a course.

52. At the time of the inspection 36 learners are on ESOL courses and 32 are on literacy courses. The ESOL courses include a residential weekend for a Chinese community group, an intensive five-day course to develop reading and writing skills and the first of three linked one-week ESOL modules. A separate four-week ESOL programme is offered in July and August. Learners on this course take a nationally recognised assessment of spoken English. Some learners on other literacy and ESOL courses take national tests in literacy. Literacy courses aim to help women who want to improve their oral communication skills and their formal writing skills. In 2005-06, 464 learners attended discrete literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes, 212 learners received additional learning support and 422 learners attended personal development courses.

53. A senior tutor is responsible for the 'Ways into Learning' programme. The skills for life programmes are managed by the head of skills for life and four lead tutors who are responsible for literacy, ESOL, additional learning support and ICT. The college employs part-time tutors for each course.

Strengths

- good development of skills and confidence
- good achievement on ESOL summer programme
- good integration of ICT on the ESOL programmes
- imaginative programmes to widen participation in learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning to meet individual needs in some lessons
- insufficient sharing of good practice

Achievement and standards

54. Learners' attainment of skills and confidence is good. They develop skills in reading and writing in different contexts, and quickly develop confidence in their speaking skills and pronunciation. Learners are able to communicate better in social situations and work well in groups. They develop skills to evaluate their own progress. Most learners on literacy and ESOL courses produce good standards of work. On a short weekend ESOL course, learners with a range of language levels used a digital camera to take photographs, inserted these into a piece of writing about themselves and gave an oral presentation to the group. On a short literacy course many learners who were not confident in writing produced well-structured texts. However, some learners do not develop sufficient skills to work independently and require significant coaching to produce their work.

55. Achievement of qualifications from entry level 2 to level 2 in speaking and listening skills is good on the ESOL summer programme and has improved in the past two years. In 2005, 70 per cent of learners on the programme achieved a qualification. This increased to 81 per cent in 2006.

56. Tutors provide good support to learners and many learners who have not participated in learning for a considerable time significantly increase their confidence and progress to further learning. Learners who attend short personal development courses gain the confidence to enrol on skills for life programmes and many progress to general certificate of secondary education and higher-level courses within the college. One learner progressed within a year from the ESOL summer programme to achieve an access to higher education qualification and is now studying for a nursing degree. However, there are insufficient opportunities for women to improve their mathematics and numeracy skills.

The quality of provision

57. Hillcroft College offers a range of imaginative programmes that successfully widen participation in learning. The college continues to develop good links with a wide range of community organisations that support women from disadvantaged groups. Staff work closely with these partners to plan residential learning opportunities, giving careful consideration to the social and development needs of the target group of learners, and the barriers to learning that many of them face. Learners are recruited from women's refuges, through organisations that support women recovering from mental illness and those who are homeless. Short, intensive personal development courses provide a first step into learning for women who may not have the confidence to enrol on more formal or academic programmes. Learners enjoy the residential experience and the opportunity to make substantial progress on an intensive course in a supportive environment. They particularly value the practical and personal support the college provides. Extensive childcare provision enables learners to attend a course and to study without distractions while at the college. Learners benefit from the study support and the opportunities for self-directed learning which are available in the learning resource centre at any time.

58. All of the learning sessions observed were at least satisfactory, and over half were good or better. IT skills are particularly well integrated with ESOL lessons. Learners develop good IT skills and use them well to improve their writing and grammar, to check their own learning and to extend their learning using the internet.

59. Tutors are skilled in teaching less-confident learners and use a wide range of teaching strategies to promote learning. Tutors in the better lessons use the outcomes of initial assessment to plan carefully to meet the needs and interests of groups and individual learners. They successfully build on learners' previous experience and knowledge and use a range of techniques to check learning. Tutors set clear targets with learners and regularly review their progress. However, tutors do not plan sufficiently to meet the needs of individual learners in some lessons. In these instances, specific individual targets for learners are not set and in some lessons teaching is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the wide range of individual needs in groups. Some learners struggle to complete tasks, while some are not sufficiently challenged.

60. Resources and accommodation for teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many tutors produce their own learning materials that are relevant and reflect the experience of learners. Information for learners before enrolling on courses is satisfactory. The college prospectus provides clear information on the content and intended outcomes of courses. It does not, however, make clear to learners the potential progression routes within the programme of courses.

Leadership and management

61. New arrangements to manage the skills for life, language and learning development programmes have recently been introduced. These are working well and are supporting more effective curriculum management and the development of a clear strategy for the programme area. New initiatives have begun including a review of the programme offer and the management of additional learning support and measures to improve teaching and learning. Managers make good use of feedback from learners, tutors and external partners to plan new programmes and adapt existing ones.

62. Staff are well qualified and experienced, including those who work part time. Communication with staff, including part-time tutors, is good. Managers support staff well through regular contacts and a planned schedule of meetings. Tutors receive regular information by e-mail and participate in staff development opportunities for which they are paid. The self-assessment process takes account of the views of staff and learners. The report provides evaluative judgements that identify clear priorities for improvement.

63. There is insufficient sharing of good practice in aspects of the learning process. On some courses, tutors use the outcomes of initial assessment effectively to establish learners' starting points and to set specific and relevant individual targets. Learners have regular opportunities to review their progress and receive useful feedback from tutors. However, this good practice is not shared across the programme to support consistency and to deal with instances of insufficient initial assessment and weak target-setting and recording of learners' progress.

Business administration and law**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Business management</i>		2
Adult and community learning	40	2

64. Hillcroft College offers seven certificated courses in management. Most are at level 3 although some modules and team leading courses are offered at level 2. The more comprehensive course for women into management consists of 13 modules which are studied over a period of one year, leading to the certificate in first line management. Learners can join at any time of the year. Courses in understanding management and starting a business take place over three weekends. Courses in team leading, project management and project writing are offered over one week at different times of the year. Two modules, with learners from three different courses, were running at the time of inspection. Twenty-nine of the 40 learners are following women into management programmes and 11 are on courses aimed at women working towards self-employment. Just under half of the learners are from minority ethnic groups and 60 per cent are aged between 35 and 54 years. Twenty-nine per cent of learners have a disability. In 2005-06, 109 learners enrolled on management courses. A full-time curriculum leader co-ordinates this area of learning, supported by six part-time tutors.

Business management***Strengths***

- very good development of personal and learning skills and knowledge of business and management practice
- good achievement rates on most courses
- good teaching and learning
- good range and use of learning resources
- very effective personal support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and management of in-class additional learning support
- insufficiently rigorous internal moderation procedures

Achievement and standards

65. Learners develop very good personal and learning skills and make significant gains in confidence and self-esteem. They demonstrate particularly effective communication skills, make confident contributions to lessons and pose some searching questions. Learners also develop good practical skills in computing to prepare them for work. They are increasingly able to carry out independent research and develop good analytical and evaluative skills. They recognise their strengths and the areas that they need to improve. Learners have a good knowledge of business and management practices and an understanding of key aspects of management such as marketing, finance and managing information. They use this knowledge well to produce appropriate personal business

plans. The standard of learners' work is at least satisfactory and much of it is good.

66. Success rates are high and improving. Success rates for the introductory certificate in management have improved from 67 per cent in 2001-02 to 80 per cent in 2004-05. In 2005-06, all the learners who enrolled on this course and all the learners enrolled on the team leading course have completed their courses successfully and are awaiting formal notification of their results. Seventy-eight per cent of learners who enrolled on the certificate in line management course have achieved the qualification. Achievement of the certificate in business start-up is satisfactory at 72 per cent for 2004-05.

The quality of provision

67. There is much good teaching and learning. Course materials are informative and lessons are well planned and take account of learners' needs. Tutors share clear objectives with learners. Lessons contain a good range of often challenging practical activities which are designed to enable learners to develop an understanding of management theory. Tutors use learners' own experiences very effectively in lessons. Tutors are knowledgeable and supportive and make effective use of interactive technology to enhance learning. They also provide good individual coaching. Learners are well motivated and attentive. They enjoy lessons and demonstrate clear evidence of learning within lessons. For example, in one lesson, learners were able to identify the key aspects of marketing, particularly relating to types of primary market research, and were able to use this effectively to develop their business plans. However, in a few lessons, tutors do not confirm that all of the learners understand the concepts they are presenting or give them sufficient opportunities to practise.

68. Tutors and learners use a good range of resources effectively to support learning. Tutors use interactive whiteboards well and learners comment on how much the use of this technology has helped their learning in the classroom. All schemes of work, lessons plans and handouts are available electronically to staff and learners to support in-class and independent study, both on and offsite. A wide variety of free external resources, such as start-up packs from banks for small business, are made available to learners. Tutors use videos well to illustrate the application of theory to real businesses. The learning resource centre provides a good range of up-to-date management books, videos and business journals to support business and management learning as well as personal and study skills. Guest speakers are used effectively to provide good enrichment activities and information about networking opportunities such as the 'Black Women Mean Business' groups.

69. Learners receive particularly good support. Hillcroft College schedules its courses flexibly to meet the differing domestic situations and work commitments of learners. Childcare is available during the day and in the evening and is valued by learners. Arrangements for tutorials are good. Learners have an individual tutorial on the completion of each module and can have additional tutorial sessions, if required, at any point in their programme. On-course advice and guidance is good and helps learners to select modules which are most appropriate to their needs and aims. A mentoring scheme provides effective support for learners while they are not resident. Mentoring for learners on short courses is less well developed, although where staff feel learners would benefit, a mentor is offered.

70. The college has revised its initial assessment procedures to match learners to courses

more appropriately. Most learners now complete an assessment module before starting on their main programme. This identifies learners' starting points, particular needs and career aims. An appropriate individual learning plan is developed during this module. Information, advice and guidance are generally satisfactory, although there is insufficient detailed pre-course information to help them prepare for their course or for a particular module.

71. The recording of learners' progress has improved and is now satisfactory. Individual learning plans and records of tutorials are more comprehensive. A database including electronic progress and monitoring records has recently been developed to enable remote access by part-time course leaders. Learners discuss their progress with tutors regularly and goals are monitored and revised appropriately. Assessment is satisfactory and meets awarding body standards. Learners are given appropriate feedback to help them improve.

72. Learners receive additional individual support for language, literacy and numeracy. However, there is insufficient planning and management of in-class learning support. Tutors and learning support assistants have few opportunities to meet to plan lessons jointly. Lesson plans, learning materials and exercises are not routinely shared with learning support assistants. Learning support assistants are not given sufficient information before lessons to enable them to support learners and tutors effectively.

Leadership and management

73. Hillcroft College successfully restructured this programme area in 2005-06 to provide a more-flexible modular approach to allow learners to develop their skills for employment and community participation. The college has maintained the quality of its provision during this period of change. New courses, such as team leading and project management, have been developed in response to learners' feedback and course evaluations. Staff use data appropriately to monitor retention and achievement and for decision-making, target-setting and evaluation. The promotion of equality of opportunity and social inclusion is good with strong representation of learners from the college's target groups.

74. Staff are well supported and have good access to managers. Communications are generally effective with considerable e-mail contact in addition to formal team meetings and informal discussions when part-time tutors are in college. Tutors are well qualified and are experienced. The arrangements for staff training and development are good and they link appropriately to the lesson observation scheme and appraisals. The team includes two subject learning coaches who support tutors to make improvements in teaching and learning.

75. The self-assessment process is inclusive and involves tutors through course reviews and evaluations and team meetings. The self-assessment report identified the strengths found at inspection, but did not recognise the weaknesses.

76. The college's internal verification procedures are not sufficiently rigorous. The college has a clear policy for internal verification and appropriate procedures are in place to meet awarding body standards. However, tutors who work together delivering common modules are also responsible for the first and second marking of learners' assignments. No further independent internal moderation is carried out. The college recognises this

weakness and is investigating ways to improve its practice.

