

# The Oldham College

Inspection report

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

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

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

#### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

## Description of the provider

1. The Oldham College is a medium sized general further education (GFE) college. It is the largest FE provider in the metropolitan borough of Oldham and operates from one town centre site and an adjacent construction centre. The college's mission is "a great place to learn; training for work, learning for life; working in partnership with communities and employers".
2. Oldham is the fifth largest borough in Greater Manchester with a population of 217,000. It is one of the most deprived local authorities in England. At the time of the inspection, over a half of all learners at the college came from areas categorised as being disadvantaged. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSE grades at A\* to C in the area is well below the national average.
3. The college has over 8,000 students, the majority of whom are adults. Approximately 81% of college provision is full-time and around 82% of full-time learners are aged 16-18. Approximately 23% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds; a higher proportion than that found in the local population. Most of the college's students are recruited from Oldham.
4. The college provides an extensive range of courses in most vocational areas, with full-time learner numbers being highest in visual arts, hair and beauty, hospitality, and sport and travel. Most students study on courses from entry level to level 3. There is a substantial work-based learning (WBL) programme that currently includes 620 apprentices. Links with local schools enable 290 Key Stage 4 students to study vocational courses at the college. Provision for disengaged learners through the Entry to Employment training has grown to 168. In partnership with 14 providers, the college offers Train to Gain (T2G) opportunities for 1,400 learners. In 2006/07, adult and community learning represented 3% of the college's provision. The college is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in financial services and is a partner in four other CoVE's.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: Contributory Grade 1</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. The Oldham College is an outstanding vocational college. Success rates for learners on full-time courses are very high. The achievement of work-based learners has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. Success rates for a very small number of adult learners on short courses are low. Overall success rates for learners aged 14-16 are high. Retention has improved for adults at levels 1 and 2. Attendance is good.
6. There is much good teaching and learning. The college has evaluated teaching and learning accurately and has taken effective steps to ensure continuous improvement. Most lessons are well planned to meet the differing needs of learners. Students enjoy their lessons, produce work of a high standard and achieve well. Resources to support learning are good and outstanding in performing arts.
7. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of students and to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. Vocational pathways are available from entry level to level 3 in most curriculum areas. The college's exceptional work with partners, including local schools and communities, is responsive and highly successful in reducing barriers to learning and encouraging under-represented groups into education or training. Cultural differences are recognised and celebrated.
8. Learners receive outstanding personal, vocational and academic support. Initial assessments are comprehensive and lead to prompt and effective support. Learners with additional needs achieve very high success rates and make outstanding progress. Extensive transition arrangements ensure students settle quickly into college life, higher education courses or employment.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. Leadership is inspirational and promotes a culture of high aspiration and a strong sense of a learning community. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and robust. Self-assessment is rigorous and leads to significant improvements. Governance is outstanding. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of all the college's work. Financial management is good. Value for money is outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. The progress the college has made in tackling the weaknesses identified at the last inspection and the substantial improvements in success rates demonstrate that the college has outstanding capacity to improve. Inspirational leadership is well supported by a strong senior and middle management team. Well founded strategies and operational plans are in place to promote further and sustained improvement.

11. Quality assurance arrangements are robust and are used effectively to drive further improvements. Inspectors agree that the college's self-assessment report is accurate. Performance is monitored thoroughly and the college has a good record in meeting its targets.

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

12. The college has made outstanding progress in tackling the key issues raised in the last inspection report. Strengths noted in that report have been maintained and many have improved. Success rates have improved in almost all areas. Retention rates for adult learners on courses at levels 1 and 2 have improved. The proportion of students gaining key skills qualifications has increased substantially. The achievement of modern apprenticeships are now good. The quality of teaching provided by agency staff has substantially improved as has the quality of individual learning plans.

### Key strengths

- outstanding leadership and management
- strong learning ethos and shared values
- outstanding success rates
- good provision in work-based learning and Train to Gain
- outstanding educational and social inclusion and the promotion of equality and diversity
- much good teaching
- outstanding support for learners
- outstanding responsiveness to the needs of learners, schools, local communities, employers and those under-represented in education
- strong culture of quality improvements
- high quality strategic planning
- outstanding governance.

### Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- low success rates on adult short courses
- the proportion of outstanding teaching
- the inconsistency in tutorial arrangements.

## Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grades:*

*WBL*

*Train to Gain*

*Good : Grade 2*

*Satisfactory: Grade 3*

13. The standards achieved by learners are outstanding. Oldham has some of the highest levels of deprivation and lowest levels of educational attainment in England. Most learners aged 16-18 come from secondary schools where standards in English and mathematics are significantly below the national average. Learners from these backgrounds make outstanding progress, especially at level 1 and level 2.
14. There has been substantial improvement on long course success rates for learners aged 16-18 since the last inspection, from 68% in 2004 to 84% in 2007. Students of minority ethnic heritage and those receiving additional learning support achieve at least as well as their peers. The achievement of work-based learners is good. Improving retention on a few level 3 courses across the curriculum was correctly identified by the college as a key area for improvement in 2006/07. Actions are in place to tackle this issue and they are beginning to have a positive impact.
15. Adult success rates on long courses have improved by 12% since the last inspection and are high at all levels. Weaknesses in retention on level 1 and level 2 courses have been addressed and are slightly above sector average. Overall success rates for learners on Train to Gain programmes are satisfactory. Success rates for a very small number of adults on short courses of more than 15 weeks are low.
16. Achievement for learners aged 14-16, often from very disadvantaged backgrounds, is high. In 2006/07, 92% of school pupils progressed to further education courses, employment or training.
17. Results for key skills qualifications improved markedly in 2006/07. Pass rates in key skills and basic skills are high, especially for learners aged 16-18. The proportion of learners who gain a GCSE grade A\* to C in English is significantly above the national average. Pass rates in GSCE mathematics are average.
18. The college sets challenging yet achievable targets for learners. Students study in a safe environment, achieve well and clearly enjoy their work. Learners develop very good personal and highly relevant vocational skills which prepare them well for their economic well-being. Standards of work are high. Progression to other courses in further or higher education, to employment or training is outstanding.



19. Attendance rates are good overall. Monitoring of attendance and punctuality is thorough and follow-up of non attendance is immediate.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: Grade 2*

20. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that teaching and learning are good. The college's process for monitoring the quality of lessons is robust; a team of specialist observers have been trained, moderation is comprehensive and modifications have been made to further improve the system for 2007/08. Inspectors completed joint observations with college staff and there was broad agreement on the strengths and areas for development. There is much good teaching and inspectors observed some outstanding practical lessons. However, the college's internal lesson observation system found a higher proportion of outstanding lessons than those sampled by inspectors.
21. Teachers receive detailed feedback from lesson observations and the outcomes are closely linked to their personal development. A team of teaching and learning coaches are linked to curriculum areas and provide teachers with very good support. Whole college training days provide good opportunities to share best practice. Weaknesses, identified in the college's self-assessment report as requiring improvement, have been addressed.
22. Teachers have good vocational expertise, are enthusiastic and have a good rapport with learners. Lessons are well planned and teachers have high expectations of their students and clearly set good professional standards. Teachers make good use of the data available to them about the students in their classes to provide a range of learning activities. Learning is supported by high quality resources and the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). Students appreciate the good support provided in class and they enjoy their lessons. In some lessons teachers do not use effective questioning techniques to check on individual students learning. Planning and monitoring of apprentices' training and assessment is good.
23. Initial assessment of learners' literacy, language and numeracy is thorough. Learning support needs are identified quickly and highly effective support is provided. The monitoring of effectiveness of additional support is comprehensive. Key skills levels are identified and recorded on an electronic individual learning plan (ILP). The college's VLE is used to provide interactive learning resources for key skills and to assess and track students' progress. Key skills delivery has improved and there are some innovative examples of integrating them into vocational areas. However, this is not yet embedded across all areas.

24. Assessments are thorough and students receive regular feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Procedures for internal verification are good.
25. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners and to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The curriculum provides excellent progression opportunities from entry level to level 3 in most vocational areas. Close partnership with the nearby sixth form college extends students' choice of academic and vocational qualifications. The college has excellent links with local schools and provides a highly successful curriculum for 14-16 year olds. Students can choose from 18 vocational options. Progression to other FE courses, employment or training for this cohort of learners is very high.
26. The college's response to the needs of employers is outstanding. Many courses, including a highly successful dental nurse cadet scheme, are developed in liaison with employers and other organisations to meet local employment needs. Courses are often tailored to meet specific requirements. Students benefit from the industry standard resources funded through the college CoVEs. Employers arrange extensive work experience placements for students, provide visiting speakers, act as role models and offer encouragement for learners as they seek employment.
27. Learners enjoy a variety of opportunities that contribute to the life of the community, for example, many students were involved in the Millennium Volunteer programme. Students, acting as role models, attend local school events to give talks and advice on college courses. Many students are successful in raising sums of money for local charities.
28. Learners receive outstanding guidance and support. Information and guidance to potential learners are highly effective. Support for learners is very focused and tailored to individual needs. Arrangements to support learners in the transition from school to college and progression from college to higher education or employment are exemplary. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and play a full role in many activities, including the college choir.
29. Learners of higher ability participate in a wide range of activities to develop their potential. Activities include national competitions and courses to develop their employability skills.
30. Teachers and tutors have a very good understanding of their learners' needs; the support they provide helps motivate students to do their best. Individual learner progress, including that of work-based learners and those on Train to Gain courses, is reviewed regularly. The tutorial programme includes a focus on personal and social development. However, the college acknowledges that there are variations in the quality of tutorials and this is an area for improvement. Good health is promoted widely in the college. Central to this is the excellent work of learning mentors working in close liaison with external health professionals. However, too little is done to

reduce smoking on the campus and to improve the range of healthy food options in the canteen.

## Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

### *Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Outstanding: Grade 1*

31. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal gives outstanding leadership in promoting a culture of improvement, achievement, aspiration and equality of opportunity for students and staff alike. She is ably supported by a strong senior management team. A great strength of the college lies in the clarity of its strategic direction and vision which are widely understood and embraced by staff. The dynamism of that strategic vision forms the foundation for the college's highly successful improvement strategy. Managers and staff share an ethos that places students and their success at the centre of all college activity.
32. Quality assurance is comprehensive, rigorous and of high quality. A self-critical culture has been developed and supported by the effective monitoring and evaluation of student progress. Underperformance is challenged through detailed and practical action plans that lead to improvement. Exemplary collaboration with a group of North West colleges has enabled the college to further embrace and disseminate good practice and fine tune quality assurance processes. Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been fully tackled. Much of middle management is outstanding. Self-assessment reviews at course level are accurate and self-critical. Quality assurance is seamlessly embedded across course and departmental processes. Data are analysed rigorously and action plans are monitored and modified where necessary to ensure that targets are met. The college's self-evaluation demonstrates a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development and is accurate. Managers and staff have been successful in promoting sustained improvement in achievement and standards that are significantly high in most areas, including WBL and Train to Gain.
33. The college demonstrates outstanding responsiveness to local community needs: it is one of the drivers of regeneration through education within the Oldham communities. High quality community partnerships enrich student provision, experience and opportunity. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The college's response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Education Act (safeguarding children) 2002 and the Children Act 2004 are thorough. Policy and practice regarding child protection are excellent. Cultural and individual diversity are promoted strongly. Students understand and respect the cultural traditions of the various ethnic groups within the college. The college provides a harmonious and challenging environment in which students feel safe and enriched. For students aged 16-18 the college experience promotes their enjoyment and

appreciation of education, their development into young professionals and extends their understanding of the wider cultural and social diversity of society.

34. Resources to support teaching and learning are good. Teaching staff are well qualified for their current roles and the induction of new staff is thorough. There is a comprehensive programme of staff development linked to strategic priorities and the outcomes of individual performance reviews. Some of the accommodation currently available for teaching and learning has limitations.
35. Governance is outstanding. Governors offer a wide range of expertise and cultural diversity. They are actively involved in many cross-college and curriculum projects. Above all, they are ambitious for the college, its students and the communities it serves. They suitably challenge college management and provide a visionary template for the college's future direction. Financial management is good. The college provides outstanding value for money.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age for 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

		16-18				19+			
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	04/05	928	63	62	1	1404	56	61	-5
	05/06	1697	76	68	8	1092	59	67	-8
	06/07	2054	88	*	*	983	77	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	68	68	64	4	17	76	64	12
	05/06			*	*			*	*
	06/07			*	*			*	*
NVQs	04/05	100	74	66	8	40	75	71	4
	05/06	111	82	70	12	70	80	72	8
	06/07	122	78	*	*	22	77	*	*
Other	04/05	760	62	61	1	1347	56	61	-5
	05/06	1586	76	67	9	1022	57	67	-10
	06/07	1932	88	*	*	961	76	*	*

\* not available

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age for 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

		16-18				19+			
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	04/05	1103	69	61	8	1316	70	60	10
	05/06	1260	72	65	7	1443	70	66	4
	06/07	1298	83	*	*	1516	76	*	*
GCSEs	04/05	202	49	66	-17	86	67	64	3
	05/06	209	65	69	-4	92	65	67	-2
	06/07	189	79	*	*	67	84	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	119	76	67	9	22	36	65	-29
	05/06	34	32	66	-34	19	26	65	-39
	06/07	21	81	*	*	22	45	*	*
NVQs	04/05	216	68	56	12	622	75	62	13
	05/06	169	72	64	8	574	76	69	7
	06/07	193	77	*	*	864	77	*	*
Other	04/05	566	75	59	16	586	66	58	8
	05/06	848	75	63	12	758	66	65	1
	06/07	895	85	*	*	563	75	*	*

\* not available

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age for 2005 to 2007, 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	04/05	639	71	66	5	853	66	57	9
	05/06	700	67	68	-1	955	72	62	10
	06/07	655	76	*	*	572	72	*	*
AS Levels	04/05	18	78	60	18	1	0	50	-50
	05/06			*	*			*	*
	06/07			*	*			*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	146	77	60	17	32	81	52	29
	05/06	46	83	68	15	20	70	54	16
	06/07			*	*			*	*
NVQs	04/05	29	62	54	8	271	73	55	18
	05/06	35	60	67	-7	242	74	65	9
	06/07	26	73	*	*	121	88	*	*
Other	04/05	464	70	57	13	550	63	57	6
	05/06	619	66	62	4	693	71	62	9
	06/07	629	76	*	*	451	67	*	*

\* not available

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2005 to 2007.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No. of learners *	College NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate **	College framework rate **	National framework rate **
Advanced Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	113	63	48	36	34
		timely	98	46	31	11	21
	05/06	overall	115	81	53	58	44
		timely	125	46	33	20	27
	06/07	overall	128	78	58	63	56
		timely	158	46	35	33	35
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	246	53	50	36	39
		timely	167	31	29	17	21
	05/06	overall	295	60	58	53	53
		timely	269	47	36	29	32
	06/07	overall	307	76	66	71	59
		timely	234	56	43	48	40
Adult training (long courses) ***	04/05	overall	29	62			
		timely	25	20			
	05/06	overall	29	75			
		timely	41	29			
	06/07	overall	256	70			
		timely	256	57			

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Adult training (long courses) includes 'Train to Gain' provision, but not 'Skills for Life'