

Weston 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.

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); 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. Weston College is a large general further education college located in Weston-super-Mare in the unitary authority of North Somerset. The town has a population of 71,758. Although North Somerset is a generally prosperous area, key wards served by the college are in the top 10% of most deprived areas in England. Many employment opportunities in the area are seasonal and there is consequently a significant transient population. The town has the highest concentration of drug rehabilitation units in the country.
2. The town and surrounding area is served by four non-selective 11-16 schools located in Weston-super-Mare and six 11-18 schools and two community special schools in North Somerset. The proportion of young people in North Somerset

achieving 5 or more GCSEs grades A*-C in 2007 was just below the England average but attainment of young people in Weston-super-Mare schools is well below average. The participation of young people in education or training at age 17 is at the national average. Only 5% of 16-18 year olds in North Somerset are not in education, employment or training which is below the national average of 8%.

3. The college offers provision in all 15 sector subject areas as well as higher education programmes. The number of full-time equivalent learners in 2005/06 was 4,087. Of these, 54% were aged 19 and over. Over 18,000 learners are on roll and account for 37,000 enrolments. Of those on roll, 61% are female. Almost 96% of learners are white but the proportion of learners at the college from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the local population level of 1.4%. Most learners come from North Somerset but the college also attracts learners from the surrounding local authority areas. For learners aged 16-18, 50% study at level 3, 30% at level 2 and 20% at level 1. For adults, the proportion is 42% at level 1, 35% at level 2 and 23% at level 3. Courses are provided for over 400 pupils aged 14-16 from local schools in 10 subject areas. In 2006/07, there were 198 learners aged 16-18 and 59 adults in 6 sector areas following work-based learning programmes. Some 230 learners follow Train to Gain programmes and 16 young people are catered for through Education to Employment programmes. There were 1,978 adult and community learning enrolments in 2006/07.
4. The college operates from two main sites, Knightstone Campus near the town centre and a newly constructed University Campus. Provision is also offered from a smaller centre at Nailsea, a Multi-Skills Centre, three information and communication (ICT) centres and 23 community based venues. The mission statement of the college is 'Quality learning for future success'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: Contributory Grade 2</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The effectiveness of provision is good. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates have improved since the last inspection and are above average for the majority of the college's provision, although the rate of improvement was lower than average until 2006/07. Success rates for work-based learning and key skills have also improved and are above the national average. Attendance rates are high and most students produce work of a good standard.
6. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use a broad range of activities to motivate learners but the extent to which teachers check that learning is taking place is more variable. Informal sharing of good practice between teachers is well established but formal mechanisms are less well developed. Procedures for observing lessons are well established but feedback focuses more on teaching than learning and there is insufficient cross-college analysis of the outcomes of observations. Additional learning support is very effective and assessment meets awarding body requirements.
7. The college's response to the needs and interests of learners, employers and the community is outstanding as is the promotion of social and educational inclusion. The curriculum is rich and varied. Partnership working with employers and schools is strong and the programmes offered complement the achievement of pupils in the area well. The college is very good at engaging underachieving and hard to reach groups. Progression rates from level 1 to higher level programmes are high. A broad enrichment programme is available and take up is good. Learners are encouraged well to make a positive contribution to the life of the college and the local community.
8. Guidance and support are outstanding. Initial advice and guidance procedures are thorough. Additional learning needs are identified promptly and almost all learners take up the support provided. Tutorial arrangements are excellent and are used well to set challenging targets and monitor learners' progress. Actions to improve retention rates are having an impact. Careers advice and guidance are good although the quality of advice for those wishing to gain employment is more variable.
9. Leadership and management are good. Strategic planning is very effective and the principal, senior managers and governors set a clear direction for the college. Success rates have improved and are mostly good. Links with employers, schools and other partners are excellent. Governance and financial management are good. Course reviews are rigorous and self-assessment is generally accurate in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Lesson observation procedures are not sufficiently rigorous to drive up standards further. The college provides a safe and welcoming environment for learners and equality of opportunity is good.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college's capacity to make further improvements is good. The college has a good track record of achieving improvement and aspects of provision are already outstanding. Progress in addressing areas for improvement from the last inspection has been good although the college did not raise learners' retention rates successfully until 2006/07. College plans for development are realistic, well communicated and supported by staff. Self-assessment is comprehensive and accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement, although the college's overview of the quality of teaching and learning is not sufficiently secure. Lesson observation and subsequent action planning are not yet sufficiently rigorous and systematic to support the college's ambition of providing outstanding teaching and learning.

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

11. Progress since the last inspection has been good. The college has successfully addressed almost all areas for development from the last inspection. The quality of accommodation and resources is much improved and teachers make better use of ICT during lessons. Retention rates are improving but continue to be low at level 1. The achievement of work-based learning frameworks is now good. Additional learning support for learners is now excellent and targets are used well to help learners achieve. Course reviews have improved considerably and are rigorous. Construction was re-inspected in 2007 and judged good.

Key strengths

- strong leadership and effective strategic planning
- excellent partnership working
- outstanding educational and social inclusion
- rich and varied curriculum meeting learner, employer and community needs
- outstanding arrangements to support learners
- good teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- retention rates, particularly at level 1
- the use of lesson observation procedures to drive up the standards further.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

12. As identified by the college in its self-assessment, achievement and standards are good. Success rates have improved for both young people and adults enrolled on long courses since the last inspection, although the rate of improvement was slower than the national rate of improvement for similar colleges until 2006/07. Success rates are good for young people at levels 2 and 3 and for adults at levels 1 and 3. These groups constitute the majority of learners at the college. Following significant improvement in 2006/07, success rates for 16-18 year olds at level 1 are just above the 2005/06 national average. For adults, rates are also just above the 2005/06 average at level 2. Young people aged 14-16 achieve well and progress to further study at 16 with over 70% choosing to remain at the college. The progress young people make relative to their attainment at enrolment is satisfactory overall. Achievement on work-based learning programmes has improved significantly since the last inspection and is well above the national average. Success rates on short courses are high and, taking all courses into consideration, the overall college success rate is above the national rate for general further education colleges.
13. Success rates for both young people and adults enrolled on GCE AS and A level courses are above the 2005/06 national average for further education colleges and the proportions of young people achieving high grades are also above average. Large numbers of young people follow other qualification types and success rates were good in 2006/07. For adults, success rates for these courses have improved significantly and are satisfactory. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are followed by many adults and success rates are satisfactory at level 2 and good at level 3. Most young people undertaking NVQs follow programmes at level 2 and success rates are good.
14. Pass rates for long courses have been consistently high at all levels and for all age groups since the last inspection. Retention rates have been more variable, reflecting partly the college's work with transient and hard to reach groups. Whilst retention rates have improved at all levels for 16-18 year olds and were just above the 2005/06 national average at levels 2 and 3 in 2006/07, they continued to be below average at level 1. Retention rates for adults at levels 2 and 3 also improved over the same period and are at the 2005/06 national average. At level 1, however, rates declined and were very low for adults.
15. Attendance rates are high and standards of behaviour are good. Learners enjoy their time at college and mostly produce work of a good standard. Progression rates to higher level courses or training are very good and progression to higher education is satisfactory but improving.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. Quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good although the college had overestimated the quality of teaching and learning in its self-assessment. A broad range of teaching activities motivate learners and support learning well. The extent to which learning is effectively checked by teachers during lessons is, however, variable but generally at least satisfactory. Teachers foster good working relationships with their learners and provide considerable support outside lessons. Teachers are well motivated and informal sharing of good practice within curriculum teams is well established. Formal mechanisms to disseminate good practice across the college are less well developed although targeted activities to raise standards are effective. A recent initiative to improve key skills, for example, has had a significant impact on the teaching of these programmes in most areas of the college.
17. The college has well established procedures for observing lessons although grading and feedback on strengths and areas for improvement are not consistent across the college. Feedback focuses more on teaching than learning and the extent to which timely and specific actions for improvement are identified and recorded is variable and often insufficiently detailed. There is insufficient cross-college analysis and use of information gained through observation to provide a clear overview of the quality of teaching and learning across the college.
18. Accommodation and resources for teaching and learning are good overall and very good at the newly opened University Campus. Although the college is well stocked with information learning technology (ILT) equipment, learners in some areas have insufficient access to computers during lesson time. Staff training and development in the use of ILT has been effective in extending the use of ILT in lessons. The use of computer-based resources to support independent learning is at an early stage of development.
19. Assessment and verification practice meets awarding body standards. Assessment practice is good on vocational courses and students are confident that they understand how to meet assessment criteria. Written assessment feedback is not always sufficiently comprehensive on academic courses. Regular target-setting motivates and challenges students, although targets are not always specific, measurable and time-bound. Students with identified additional learning support needs are supported well through differentiated classroom activities. The use of extension activities to stretch and challenge more able students is less well developed.
20. The college correctly concludes in its self-assessment that its response to the needs and interests of learners and employers is outstanding. The curriculum is rich and varied and the college plays a key role locally in leading developments and in meeting the needs of learners, employers and community groups. A high profile in the community is maintained by a strong presence on key planning and other groups in North Somerset. The college responds very well to government initiatives and employer needs. It has, for example, secured recent growth in learner numbers on the Train to Gain and other initiatives to engage

employers. In developing new provision, the college takes well managed risks and is very good at engaging underachieving and hard to reach groups who are under represented in further education. The college's promotion of social and educational inclusion is outstanding. Progression rates from level 1 to higher level programmes are high. Partnership working with local schools is strong and the range of courses offered complements the achievement of pupils in the area very well.

21. A broad enrichment programme is available for all learners with a high take-up rate. However, learners based at the new University Campus sometimes have difficulty in travelling to participate in sports activities. Regular learner surveys are used well to improve opportunities and inform curriculum developments. Good use is made of opportunities for learners to express their views through the Students' Union and learner representation on the governing body. Learners are encouraged well to make a positive contribution to the life of the college and the local community. A student ambassador scheme and a mentoring scheme are helping raise educational aspirations in the area.
22. Guidance and support are outstanding for both full-time and part-time learners. These contribute well to learners achieving economic wellbeing. Initial advice and guidance procedures are well established and induction arrangements help learners settle into college life quickly. Additional learning support is very effective. Additional learning needs are identified promptly, take-up rates for offered support are high and support has a significant impact on success rates.
23. Tutorial arrangements are excellent. Tutors and teachers give freely of their time and provide outstanding support. Tutorials are used well to set and monitor challenging targets for individual learners and action plans are effective in raising achievement. Professional advice on welfare, health and social issues is readily available and the college makes a good contribution to helping learners stay healthy. Learners appreciate and are supported well by the firm implementation of clear policies on racism, sexism and bullying/harassment which contribute well to promoting a safe environment for learning.
24. Arrangements for monitoring attendance and following up absences are good and are resulting in improved retention rates for most groups of learners. The college recognises the need to improve retention rates further and actions are having an impact. College data comparing retention at the time of the inspection with the same time the previous year suggest significant improvement across all areas of learning.
25. Careers advice and guidance are good and learners receive sound advice on applying for higher education. The timeliness and consistency of advice for students wanting to apply for employment are more variable.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grade:**Equality of opportunity**Good: Contributory Grade 2*

26. Leadership and management are good. The principal, with the support of senior managers and governors, has set an ambitious and dynamic vision for the strategic development of the college that has been shared very effectively with staff. Communication is outstanding and staff value the open and consultative management style that has been established. Governors are well informed and highly committed to the college's success. Excellent links with employers, schools and other partners have been developed to meet the needs of learners and the community.
27. Although success rates on long courses have not risen in line with the national averages since the last inspection, there was a significant improvement in 2006/07 due to strong management action to improve student retention. Long course success rates were above the national average in the majority of the college's provision in 2006/07.
28. Course reviews have improved since the last inspection and are now rigorous and form part of a self-assessment process that is comprehensive and generally accurate in its identification of strengths and areas for improvement. The self-assessment report did not, however, identify a key area for improvement found during the inspection relating to lesson observation. The college is clearly focused on the continuing improvement of teaching and learning and uses performance data well to monitor students' progress. In joint observations conducted with inspectors, college observers were accurate in their identification of strengths and areas for improvement. However, the lesson observation process and subsequent action planning procedures for improvement are not yet rigorous and systematic enough to support the college's ambitions for outstanding teaching and learning for its students. Comprehensive support for new teachers builds on rigorous recruitment procedures. Teachers are appropriately qualified and the college offers good staff training and development opportunities.
29. The college promotes equality of opportunity well. The response of the college to its statutory duties is good as the college moves towards a single equality scheme. Staff and students are trained in all aspects of equality of opportunity. The performance of different groups of learners is monitored effectively and governors receive regular reports on progress. The college provides a safe, welcoming and attractive environment for learning. All staff are trained in child protection procedures. Equality and diversity are well embedded into the curriculum. However, the monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace for learners on Train to Gain is not yet sufficiently formalised or systematic.
30. The college's accommodation strategy is being implemented effectively and accommodation and resources are good. Financial management is good and the college has achieved its funding allocation for the last three years. The college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	837	59	65	-6	4474	63	62	1
	05/06	683	61	69	-8	2334	65	65	0
	06/07	485	72	-	-	1965	73	-	-
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	22	82	68	14	1	100	64	36
	05/06	13	69	72	-3	-	-	-	-
	06/07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	04/05	147	63	68	-5	104	65	66	-1
	05/06	159	65	72	-7	115	69	74	-5
	06/07	94	74	-	-	42	69	-	-
Other	04/05	668	57	64	-7	4,369	62	62	0
	05/06	511	60	69	-9	2,219	65	65	0
	06/07	394	71	-	-	1,923	73	-	-

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	1,045	67	61	6	2,391	59	60	-1
	05/06	951	65	66	-1	1,666	62	66	-4
	06/07	807	73	-	-	1,871	68	-	-
GCSEs	04/05	311	64	64	0	186	63	63	0
	05/06	352	69	68	1	189	70	67	3
	06/07	176	64	-	-	129	71	-	-
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	05/06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	06/07	30	70	-	-	15	73	-	-
NVQs	04/05	181	49	57	-8	399	56	60	-4
	05/06	137	70	65	5	227	54	67	-13
	06/07	162	72	-	-	362	69	-	-
Other	04/05	553	75	61	14	1,806	60	59	1
	05/06	462	61	66	-5	1,250	63	65	-2
	06/07	439	77	-	-	1,401	67	-	-

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 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	1,452	71	68	3	1,099	57	58	-1
	05/06	1,396	73	70	3	993	56	63	-7
	06/07	1,634	76	-	-	1,121	68	-	-
A/A2 Levels	04/05	222	90	86	4	51	53	69	-16
	05/06	261	95	87	8	51	61	72	-11
	06/07	245	93	-	-	38	74	-	-
AS Levels	04/05	622	66	66	0	141	45	52	-7
	05/06	573	68	67	1	153	52	55	-3
	06/07	779	73	-	-	122	64	-	-
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	20	90	61	29	9	78	54	24
	05/06	9	89	66	23	4	50	57	-7
	06/07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	04/05	31	81	63	18	291	55	56	-1
	05/06	17	82	71	11	244	60	63	-3
	06/07	31	58	-	-	296	76	-	-
Other	04/05	553	69	60	9	607	60	59	1
	05/06	530	67	65	2	541	56	64	-8
	06/07	579	73	-	-	621	64	-	-

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	18	61%	48%	50%	34%
		timely	18	44%	31%	33%	21%
	05/06	overall	21	86%	54%	76%	44%
		timely	19	79%	34%	74%	27%
	06/07	overall	22	68%	54%	68%	44%
		timely	26	58%	34%	54%	27%
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	67	54%	50%	37%	38%
		timely	61	38%	29%	25%	22%
	05/06	overall	75	56%	58%	49%	53%
		timely	84	40%	38%	35%	33%
	06/07	overall	90	65%	58%	65%	53%
		timely	99	43%	38%	42%	33%

* 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'

06/07 national benchmarking data not available for apprenticeships/advanced apprenticeships at time of inspection.