

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Joanna Gaukroger  
Principal  
Tower Hamlets College  
Poplar High Street  
London  
E14 0AF

Dear Ms Gaukroger

Ofsted survey inspection programme – a comparison of the effectiveness of post 16 providers

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 December 2007 to look at work in level 3 provision.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with managers, teachers and tutorial support officers and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils'/students' work during lessons and observation of three parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of level 3 provision was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory but improving. Standards and success rates over the last three years have been broadly in line with national averages. Retention rates are satisfactory. The college has responded to the need to raise retention further, and improve attendance and punctuality. A college wide retention strategy is in place since March 2007 and tutorial support officers, previously recruited under an ESF project, have now been funded through mainstream funding. Student achievement is broadly satisfactory at GCE A2 with most students making the progress expected of them in achieving their targets and in a few subjects, exceeding their targets. The college is aware of the need to raise achievement further for students who have low attainment on entry to level three courses. Many

students also achieve additional qualifications, including English and mathematics at Levels one and two, where appropriate. The college is successfully raising students' aspirations. As a result, a steadily increasing proportion continue their education at university. The college reports that many students take up employment through the excellent range of opportunities for work placements and mentoring initiatives located with private companies and in the public sector.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning at Level 3, including support and guidance is good. Strengths lie in teachers' good subject knowledge, provision of well structured tasks facilitated through group work and excellent relationships between students and teachers. Students demonstrate high levels of interactive learning, and enjoyment through the group work. Most are encouraged to develop independent thinking and critical skills. Most students are confident speakers and able to engage well in their learning, with girls more so than boys. In some instances, less able or less confident learners are not always given the opportunity to contribute. Standards of students' written work are very variable. The college is aware of the need to help students who are advanced bilingual learners overcome literacy and language difficulties in their written work and to achieve higher standards in their examinations and course work. Good individual support already meets the needs of many students through the provision of additional language, key skills and subject specialist support workshops. The tracking and monitoring of individual student progress is good. All students have individual learning plans and regular review meetings that help them to manage their work responsibly, set targets, discuss progress and through better structuring of their learning, identify what else they need to do to help them achieve their learning and career goals.

### Quality of curriculum

The extent to which programmes and activities meet students' needs and interests is outstanding. Students' placement on the most suitable course is followed by a sound induction to level three courses, which is much appreciated by Year One and Two students. The college works well with its local schools by offering taster sessions and guidance to prospective students. Collaboration with employers is excellent and results in students benefiting from work opportunities and professional updates for staff. Students have a wide choice of courses and extensive opportunities to study additional qualifications relating to their vocational area. In this respect, the college has responded very well to students who need to bridge the gap between level 2 and 3 courses in vocational and Skills for Life qualifications. Flexible part-time courses cater for those students who are unable to sustain the longer commitment of full time courses and are potentially at risk of dropping out. Students have high levels of satisfaction with the good range of trips and visits on offer. These opportunities enhance students' understanding of the world around them, broadening their horizons and giving them greater insight into professions and careers.

## Leadership and management of level three provision

Leadership and management are good. Communication between senior and middle managers is good and the college vision and key aims are shared. Good collaboration with employers and local communities, including the schools, has benefited students significantly. It has led to improvements in the curriculum, improved student access to work placements and has enabled a better understanding of skill needs. The college is part of a central 14-19 Hub partnership that has prioritised the need to progress more young people at sixteen into education, employment or training. Self-evaluation is effective and is well supported through good monitoring and evaluation. Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in provision, and take action to tackle the weaknesses. The college is constantly seeking to improve achievement and progression for students through the good support and monitoring systems, and has improved the accuracy of the value added data used in tracking students.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good. Recruitment to level 3 provision is highly inclusive, reflecting the wide range of students' prior attainment. Students and staff say support is well focused and contextualised to meet course needs. Teachers monitor and track individual students' progress extremely well and take timely action to address under-achievement. The college provides students with excellent extra curricular opportunities to enhance their learning and awareness.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving support for advanced bilingual learners
- developing more rigorous evaluation and monitoring processes for initiatives linked to achievement and retention, to better assess the impact of college strategies
- publicising case studies of 'student success stories'.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop level three courses in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Learning Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood  
Her Majesty's Inspector