

Esher 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. Esher College is a sixth form college established in 1974 and located in Thames Ditton, Surrey. The college's mission is to aim 'to be the specialist provider of non-selective, open-access sixth form college education for South-West London and North Surrey'. The college is located in an area of high prosperity. However, around two thirds of its students come from outside the county, mainly from south London boroughs. The college draws students from over 100 different schools in a wide catchment area. In 2006/07 there were 1,712 students on roll (6,912 enrolments) of whom 1,507 were aged 16-18 and 205 were adults. All students aged 16-18 were on level 3 courses, a small number of whom followed a combination level 2/3 programme. For adults, some 75% of enrolments were at level 1, with most of the remainder at level

3. Approximately 12% of the students are from minority ethnic groups, a higher proportion than that of the local population. The college offers courses in 12 sector subject areas. In addition to a broad range of A and AS programmes, the college offers courses leading to vocational qualifications, alongside a wide choice of extension study opportunities. It is an active member of the local 14-19 consortium, the 3-19 extended services partnership and the Surrey sixth form colleges consortium.

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

2. The college's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve are outstanding. Students' success rates are very high and most students make very good progress compared with their starting points on entry. Achievement of high grades at General Certificate of Education (GCE) is particularly good. However, there is a small minority of courses, including the key skill of information and communication technology, where achievement is not as high as expected. Success rates of the very small number of adults are low, but suitable actions have been taken and good improvement can already be seen. The quality of provision is outstanding and students' work is of a very high standard. Students enjoy being at college and their academic and social progress are supported by excellent facilities. Their needs and interests are met well and they benefit from an extensive range of enrichment activities. The guidance and support they receive are extremely effective, particularly in the provision of additional support where necessary, and in preparing students for the academic, social and financial challenges of higher education or employment.
3. Leadership and management are outstanding. The promotion of equal opportunities is excellent and the college's response to social and educational inclusion is good. However, it does not yet have a strategy to widen participation. The principal gives clear direction in the college's strategic planning, ably supported by staff, governors, and students, whose 'voice' is readily listened to and acted upon. Very good quality assurance systems enable the college to have an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement, and to take appropriate action when necessary. The college meets its statutory requirements with regard to equality and diversity and safeguarding. It is strong financially and provides excellent value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. Since the last inspection the college has maintained a high standard of performance, particularly in its main work at level 3, whilst increasing student numbers and improving facilities. The college's quality assurance and self-assessment processes are rigorous and managers' knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement is accurate.

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

5. Excellent progress has been made in improving the areas for development identified at the last inspection. The self-assessment report now provides an accurate, evaluative analysis of its strengths and areas for improvement. Accommodation and facilities have improved, particularly with developments to the learning resource centre, art and design studios, and provision of

extensive ICT resources which are used well. The college now analyses, and can demonstrate, the positive impact that learning support has on specific groups of students.

Key strengths

- very high success rates on advanced courses
- very good progress of students relative to their prior levels of attainment
- outstanding teaching and learning
- outstanding extension and enrichment activities
- excellent academic and pastoral support for students
- good strategic planning
- very good facilities and learning resources
- thorough and accurate self-assessment.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low success rates in key skills
- students' achievement in a small minority of courses
- planning to widen participation of students.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. Achievement and standards are outstanding, although those for the small number of adults are satisfactory. Since the last inspection, the college has maintained high success rates, especially in its main work of GCE A and AS level provision for students aged 16-18. For example, in 2006/07 the success rate for GCE A level courses rose to 97%, which is well above the national average for similar colleges. Most students achieve high grades in their examinations and make very good progress compared with their starting points. Although students perform well in many subjects, in a small minority of subjects such as drama and geology, too few students achieve grades appropriate to their ability. The proportion of students taking qualifications at levels 1 and 2 is small. On level 2 courses, success rates are about average, although students make good progress in GCSE mathematics. For learners on courses at level 1, mainly adults, success rates are below the national average. However, the college has implemented a well-defined strategy to address this and evidence of improvement can already be seen. Although the success rate for the key skill in information and communication technology was very low in 2006/07, the college's actions to address this demonstrate very good improvement in the present academic year.
7. Students attend well and retention overall has remained consistently above the national average since the last inspection. The standard of their work is of a high quality in most subjects. The proportion of students that progress to higher or further education is high, with most of the remainder moving to employment.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

8. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are of particular high quality. The lesson observation scheme is thorough and teachers receive detailed constructive feedback. The college judges that 93% of teaching is good or better. However, a small number of observation reports are not sufficiently evaluative to justify the grades awarded to lessons. Lessons are well planned and make good use of a wide range of strategies for learning. Information and learning technologies are readily available and used well in lessons. Teachers pay careful attention to meeting the individual needs of students and effective support is provided where necessary. Teachers are accessible and approachable and respond well to students' requests. Assessment is thorough. Students' work is marked carefully and clearly and in the majority of cases helpful information is provided on what students need to do to improve.
9. The curriculum provision meets the needs and interests of students exceptionally well. In addition to its strong focus on examination success and progression, the college pays careful attention to the development of students' personal and social skills and to preparing them for higher education or

employment. The excellent enrichment programme offers a very wide range of options and is popular with students. The college has good links with local schools and colleges and has a key role in the development of the new diplomas. It attracts students from approximately 100 secondary schools over a wide geographical area. Demand for places is high and recruitment continues to rise. Its approach to educational and social inclusion is good. However, it recognises that it does not yet have a strategy to widen participation further.

10. Students enjoy outstanding guidance and support. Through the college's on-line learning environment, students have a good understanding of their targets, progress towards achieving these, and how to improve. Teachers and tutors take prompt and highly effective action if students fail to meet the standards required of them. Arrangements for diagnosing and providing additional learning support are thorough. Students speak highly of the excellent support they receive from the college and, where appropriate, from external agencies or through the use of adaptive technology. Careers guidance is effective, exploiting the college's strong links with higher education institutions and local employers.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

11. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal sets a clear strategic direction, supported well by staff and governors who are highly committed to their work. Senior and middle managers work very well with teachers to monitor students' performance closely, and take effective action to maintain achievement and standards and the quality of provision at a very high level. Staff are well qualified and benefit from good professional development. Quality assurance systems are clearly defined and effective in bringing about improvements. The college is part of a county-wide consortium of colleges which work well supporting each other to ensure quality improvement. Management information is readily accessible and accurate, and used well in planning and to inform divisional self-assessment. The college's self-assessment process is rigorous and the judgements and grades in the college report are accurate, with strengths and areas for improvement clearly identified.
12. Students speak highly of the outstanding range of resources. Although the main building is becoming old, the facilities for academic and social development are excellent, including the new art and design studios, learning resource centre and a café. Planning has begun for a complete new build on the same campus. Financial management is very good. Given its high success rates and the excellent support for students, the college provides outstanding value for money. The college's approach to equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college goes well beyond meeting the statutory requirements in relation to equality and diversity; respect and tolerance are embedded in

the culture of the college and are promoted well, but sensitively. Procedures for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults are fully in place and the college is a safe environment for students.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with 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	14	71	64	7	8	50	56	-6
	05/06	10	70	71	-1	83	48	56	-8
	06/07*	18	50	N/A		137	45	N/A	
Other	04/05	14	71	63	8	8	50	56	-6
	05/06	10	70	71	-1	83	48	56	-8
	06/07*	18	50	N/A		137	45	N/A	

*Data for 2006/07 have been provided by the college.

**National rates are not available for 2006/07.

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with 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	162	78	73	5	26	38	56	-18
	05/06	167	77	78	-1	8	63	64	-1
	06/07*	132	78	N/A		...	...	N/A	
GCSEs	04/05	103	84	78	6	...	...	...	...
	05/06	98	80	82	-2	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	96	79	N/A		...	...	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	50	64	74	-10	...	...	...	...
	05/06	38	61	77	-16	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	...	...	N/A		...	...	N/A	
NVQs	04/05	...	...	...	...	10	80	58	22
	05/06	...	...	...	...	8	63	68	-5
	06/07*	...	...	N/A		...	...	N/A	
Other	04/05	9	78	62	16	16	13	52	-39
	05/06	31	87	70	17	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	36	75	N/A		...	...	N/A	

*Data for 2006/07 have been provided by the college.

**National rates are not available for 2006/07.

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

16-18						19+				
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate**	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate**	Diff	
3 Long	04/05	4959	86	82	4	12	83	59	24	
	05/06	5231	87	83	4	34	76	65	11	
	06/07*	5459	87	N/A		26	69	N/A		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1812	95	92	3	6	100	76	24	
	05/06	1727	95	93	2	3	100	78	22	
	06/07*	1904	97	N/A		...	...	N/A	
AS Levels	04/05	2989	81	78	3	1	100	54	46	
	05/06	3225	84	79	5	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	3239	82	N/A		...	...	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	158	72	74	-2	...	...	...	...
	05/06	152	74	74	0	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	65	71	N/A		...	...	N/A	
NVQs	04/05	...	...	...	...	5	60	50	10
	05/06	...	...	...	...	6	17	63	-46
	06/07*	...	...	N/A		...	...	N/A	
Other	04/05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05/06	127	81	75	6	25	88	62	26	
	06/07*	251	79	N/A		26	69	N/A		

*Data for 2006/07 have been provided by the college.

**National rates are not available for 2006/07.

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