

# Liverpool Community 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. Liverpool Community college is a large further education FE college with six main sites in central Liverpool and 12 drop-in community centres located in areas of the highest deprivation. It is the only FE college in Liverpool. Of the 10 Greater Merseyside colleges, seven are general FE colleges and three are sixth form colleges. Liverpool schools work in formal collaborative arrangements for 16 to 18 provision: the college is a partner in these collaborative arrangements. There is provision in all areas of learning, funded by the LSC. The college had approximately 6,700 full-time enrolments and 10,400 part-time enrolments in 2007/08. Sixty per cent of both the 16 to 18 and 19+ cohorts study below level 3. Eighty per cent of college learners are from areas with a high widening participation factor. Fifteen per cent of part-time and 22% of full-time learners are from ethnic minority groups against a city profile of 8%. The college has re-focused much provision on those 16 to 18 year olds and adults who have no or minimal qualifications.
2. Liverpool is ranked as the most deprived local authority in England. Fifty six per cent of the population live in the most deprived 10% of wards nationally; 42% of the population are income deprived and 57% employment deprived. Unemployment rates are twice the national average. One third of children live in households dependent on benefit. Twenty six per cent of adults have no qualifications. The percentage of young people who achieve five GCSEs A\* to C including English and mathematics is 39.6% compared to a national average of 48%. Sixty two per cent of schools have unauthorised absence rates above the national average. Eleven per cent of young people are in the not in education, employment and training (NEET) which is higher than the regional average. Liverpool has experienced regeneration to its centre in recent years, and economic growth above that of the North West with significant growth to the construction and leisure sectors. European Year of Culture status has acted as a catalyst for change. Recently Liverpool City Council awarded the college 'Freedom Roll of Association' in recognition of its contribution to the city.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
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

3. This is an outstanding college. The college has been successfully steered through a period of transition during which the bulk of provision has changed from level 2 and 3 adult courses to 16 to 18 year olds on entry, level 1 and 2 courses and adult Skills for Life programmes. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates demonstrate sustained improvement to or above national rates. Pass rates are high. The college recognises that retention rates are low on a number of courses. Teaching is outstanding. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of good and better teaching. Improvements to the monitoring of teaching and learning have helped teachers to develop their skills. A greater emphasis is now placed on active learning. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college has woven an intricate web of learning opportunities and support throughout the diverse communities of Liverpool. It is strongly and energetically represented in the heart of the regenerated and vibrant centre but has an equally strong presence in the most deprived and socially challenging communities. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The very effective work of the learning support faculty is based on a clear rationale. Priorities include the early identification of learners' needs and effective targeting of specific groups and individuals, as well as a clear entitlement for all learners. Leadership and management are outstanding. Strong strategic leadership is provided by the principal and senior managers. Effective quality assurance systems are embedded across all college provision. The management of the curriculum at all levels is sharply focused on the needs of learners. There are some inconsistencies in self-assessment. Governance is outstanding. The college provides outstanding value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The college has been successfully steered through a period of significant change to its learner profile. Success rates are improving and pass rates are high. Collaborative partnerships that respond to local learning needs are outstanding. Quality assurance systems are robust. Effective strategies have promoted further and sustained improvement. Self-assessment is generally accurate and self-critical. Performance is monitored thoroughly. There is strong leadership from governors and senior management. Governors and managers make an effective contribution to the promotion of high quality outcomes and links with the wider community. Numerous strategies have been implemented to tackle low retention and rates are improving. The college is making a crucial and substantive impact on promoting the self-confidence, skills and improved life chances for learners from across the city of Liverpool.

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

5. The college has made outstanding progress in tackling the key issues raised in the last inspection report. Strengths noted have been maintained and many have been improved. The college has successfully managed change. The proportion of outstanding teaching has increased significantly reflecting improvements in the lesson observation process and professional development opportunities. Success rates are improving. Pass rates are high. Much accommodation has been improved. The application of information and learning technology has been developed to embrace all aspects of the curriculum.

### Key strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- outstanding teaching and learning
- innovative and high quality partnership working
- exemplary responsiveness to the needs of the local community
- outstanding support for learners
- outstanding management of change by the principal and senior leaders
- outstanding curriculum management
- outstanding approach to equality of opportunity and inclusion
- outstanding governance.

### Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- low retention rates
- inconsistencies in self-assessment.

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

6. Achievement and standards are good and this agrees with the college's self-assessment. The proportion of learners who complete their courses and pass their qualifications has improved significantly. Long course success rates are satisfactory overall and good for adult learners on level 3 courses. The success rate for adults on level 1 courses declined in 2006/07 but recovered to national average levels in 2007/08. Pass rates have risen and at most levels are high. Many of the learners on General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level programmes have low levels of prior attainment. Pass rates for this qualification are high and in a significant number of subjects, they are outstanding.
7. The college is a major provider of provision for young people from Merseyside who are NEET. To meet the needs of this cohort, specialised courses at entry and level 1 have been introduced. Pass rates on these courses are high and the progress made by the majority of learners is very good. Learners aged 16 to 18 from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as their peers. Similarly there are good pass rates for those adults engaged in Skills for Life courses at drop-in community centres. For work-based learning programmes, college data for 2007/08 indicate learners' success rates have improved markedly to above the national average. Timely success rates for advanced apprentices are also high. Train to Gain is at an early stage of development; current success rates are satisfactory.
8. The college recognises that low retention has been an issue on many courses and is working hard to overcome this. It has been largely successful in this endeavour; the pace of improvement in retention is accelerating and is now around the national average. The college recognises that retention rates are still not good enough and has applied additional strategies to promote further improvement.

### Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. The quality of provision is outstanding. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. The lesson observation process is rigorous. There is a clear focus on supporting teachers and improving teaching and learning through a wide range of well-planned and focused staff development activities. The college has invested energy, resources and time to extend the teachers' repertoire of teaching styles. A greater emphasis is now placed on the different ways students learn. Good practice is shared extensively. The college strategy is to improve satisfactory teaching to good and the good to outstanding. A high proportion of teaching is outstanding. Learners are well motivated and enthusiastic; they speak highly of their teachers and the college. Learners at the community centres spoke of the transformational impact of learning on their lives. Diagnostic and additional learning support for learners is strong. The punctuality policy is rigorously



enforced. Assessment is thorough and learners are provided with constructive feedback on their work. The virtual learning environment Moodle system is extensively used by staff and learners.

10. The range and quality of programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners are outstanding. The college has a strong widening participation agenda and has introduced appropriate provision to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Comprehensive and coherent curriculum pathways allow good progression between levels and to higher education. Enrichment opportunities are extensive and innovative. Skills for Life provision is a strong feature at the 12 drop-in community centres. Partnership links are excellent and the college has extensive representation on strategic groups both within Liverpool and Greater Merseyside. Links with schools are excellent. The college works closely with the local authority to provide a highly successful alternative curriculum for young people experiencing acute difficulties at school. Working through the Liverpool Compact, the college leads on the Increased Flexibility Project which has been nationally recognised for the exemplary involvement of employers and work-based learning providers. The college responds well to the needs of local employers who appreciate the rapid, innovative response to their needs and the high quality training provided. Six vocational areas have COVE status. Links with Higher Education institutions are very good.
11. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Prospective learners benefit from clear and detailed information about the college and its courses. Open evenings and other events raise awareness of provision. Pre-course advice and guidance are effective. Initial assessment is well-organised. Induction to college and courses is thorough. The college identifies and provides well for a wide range of 'at risk' learners. Support for learners with additional learning needs is excellent. The distinctive contributions of learning mentors, group learning assistants, education support workers and others are appreciated by learners. The college ensures that good guidance is available on all sites by providing essential learner services on each and by specialist staff visiting individual learners. The performance of learners receiving support is monitored closely. The steadily evolving tutorial programme is comprehensive in its coverage and in its guarantee of sufficient one-to-one interviews at key stages. Guidance on transition to higher education, training and employment is excellent. The progress of all learners is monitored systematically and targets are realistic and detailed. The college is seeking to increase learners' participation in the very good programme of college-wide and course-based enrichment activities and there is extensive involvement of learners in the local community. The college has increased the role of the learners' voice through learner surveys, focus groups and the contributions of course representatives and student governors.

Leadership and management Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grade:*

*Equality of opportunity Outstanding: grade 1*

12. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and senior management team provide strong strategic leadership. The leadership of the principal is highly effective and consultative. The strategic direction, mission and values are exceptionally clear and meet the national agenda and the priorities of the City of Liverpool. Managers, teachers and staff have brought about significant improvements to teaching and learning and the quality of provision. The college has very highly effective partnerships with a broad range of organisations. Curriculum leadership and management are outstanding. Managers are well informed, self-critical and identify areas for improvement. They work effectively to bring about improvement. They are well supported by very effective course leaders. Curriculum leaders work very well as a team and individually to successfully implement change. Managers provide leadership for many initiatives and bodies in the region and their contribution and success is nationally recognised. Staff are well managed and their morale is high. Employer engagement is good and work-based learning is well managed.
13. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding and the central focus of the college's vision and mission in meeting the needs of learners in Liverpool. The college provides a harmonious multi-cultural environment with a strong focus on mutual respect and learner success. There are appropriate arrangements in place for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The college meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2002. The college has successfully increased the focus on the needs of young working class white learners. The college enjoys a very good reputation with key stakeholders such as employers. Employer engagement is good.
14. Quality assurance procedures are well-established and have secured significant improvements across the college. Success rates have risen year-on-year. Procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are robust and reliable and understood well by staff. Data are accurate and accessible to staff at all levels to judge the progress and outcomes of their courses. Where underperformance is identified, improvement plans are instigated and appropriate support is given. Self-assessment is inclusive and involves all staff. While the self-assessment report (SAR) identifies key strengths and areas for improvement there are some inconsistencies in judgements. Criteria for identifying underperforming courses are not always sufficiently challenging. Some judgements are not adequately supported by evidence and there is insufficient emphasis on low retention rates in some curriculum areas. Other internal reports scrutinized, address these inconsistencies and the lack of clarity in parts of the self-assessment report (SAR).
15. Governance is outstanding. Governors monitor college performance closely and provide a suitable degree of challenge to senior managers. They bring a wide

range of skills and experience which are used effectively in contributing to the college's strategic development and monitoring of performance. Financial management is strong. Buildings and the estate are well-managed with high standards of equipment and accommodation for learners. 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 2006 to 2008, 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	05/06	1975	62	68	-6	6717	69	67	2
	06/07	2082	67	73	-6	4873	63	71	-8
	07/08*	2434	72	N/A		3810	70	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	30	63	71	-8	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
NVQs	05/06	114	76	70	6	117	68	71	-3
	06/07	147	78	73	5	112	70	77	-7
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
Other	05/06	1831	61	67	-6	6600	69	67	2
	06/07	1935	66	73	-7	4761	63	70	-7
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	

\* college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2006 to 2008, 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	05/06	1976	60	65	-5	3004	64	66	-2
	06/07	2096	66	69	-3	3287	67	70	-3
	07/08*	2287	70	N/A		2692	67	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	677	65	69	-4	388	70	67	3
	06/07	646	68	71	-3	333	65	70	-5
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	94	60	67	-7	18	72	65	7
	06/07	13	69	70	-1	...	...	63	...
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
NVQs	05/06	284	71	64	7	636	64	69	-5
	06/07	387	66	66	0	491	67	71	-4
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
Other	05/06	921	54	63	-9	1962	63	65	-2
	06/07	1050	65	69	-4	2463	67	70	-3
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	

\* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2006 to 2008, 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
3 Long	05/06	2750	63	68	-5	2641	67	62	5
	06/07	2869	69	70	-1	2672	72	67	5
	07/08*	3143	70	N/A		2449	76	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	489	80	86	-6	257	71	74	-3
	06/07	568	80	84	-4	252	78	77	1
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	1446	58	64	-6	468	59	57	2
	06/07	1498	64	64	0	409	61	59	2
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	118	55	67	-12	30	43	54	-11
	06/07	15	53	...	...	4	25	...	...
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
NVQs	05/06	55	75	66	9	333	74	65	9
	06/07	88	76	75	1	460	75	71	4
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	
Other	05/06	642	64	62	2	1553	68	62	6
	06/07	700	71	68	3	1547	73	66	7
	07/08*			N/A				N/A	

\* college data

Table 4

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

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	05-06	overall	55	53	53	42	44
		timely	58	45	34	34	27
	06-07	overall	69	51	64	68	58
		timely	89	36	43	40	37
Apprenticeships	05-06	overall	155	42	58	36	52
		timely	161	38	38	32	34
	06-07	overall	143	60	65	62	61
		timely	147	54	47	54	44

\* 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/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the ‘Individual Learning Record’

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