

Halesowen College

Inspection report

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Contents

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded.....	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	8

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. Halesowen College is a tertiary college located in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley eight miles West of Birmingham. It operates from three sites close to the centre of Halesowen. The main campus consists of the premises of the former college of further education (FE) and eight blocks constructed since 1982. The college also operates from a number of outreach centres.

2. The college serves a local population from surrounding townships in the Boroughs of Dudley and Sandwell and West Birmingham. The area served by the college is primarily urban in character and includes wards with a high index of deprivation. The number of full-time learners aged 16 to 18 has increased from 2,780 in 2004/05 to 3,524 in 2007/08. In addition, there are 291 part-time LSC-funded learners aged 16 to 18. In 2007/08, 253 adults studied full time and 1,481 studied part time.
3. The college offers programmes in 11 sector subject areas, higher education in partnership with three local higher education institutions (HEIs), community learning, Train to Gain and work-based learning. It has a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in Professional Accountancy Support Services.
4. The college provides places for about 950 young people aged 14 to 16 on a variety of programmes. It is the lead partner in the Halesowen Education Consortium which includes local secondary schools through the Halesowen Education Trust and plays a lead role in township developments for shared services with the local authority. These links support the college's mission 'to strive for excellence in delivering opportunities for education and training in Halesowen and the surrounding area'. The proportion of learners from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds attending college is 22%. About two thirds of the college's learners are female. The proportion of pupils in Dudley and Sandwell gaining five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics in 2008, was 46% and 31% respectively, compared to the national average of 47%.

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 college's overall effectiveness is good as are achievement and standards. The overall success rates are well above the national average and are outstanding at levels 1 and 2 for all learners, including those aged 14 to 16. The substantial level 3 provision is satisfactory, with improving high grades at General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A levels and learners achieving as expected. Train to Gain and work-based learning success rates are good and improving. Learners develop very good workplace skills.
6. Teaching and learning are good. The college has increased the proportion of good or better teaching substantially. Learners enjoy their lessons although they are not always sufficiently challenged. Learners with additional learning needs receive excellent support. The college's observation of teaching and learning is accurate in its judgements but errs on the side of generosity in its grading of outstanding lessons.
7. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners and employers and its approach to educational and social inclusion are outstanding. The very good range of courses includes an increasing amount of relevant vocational courses and Train to Gain provision. Many learners from areas of high deprivation progress well within the college and to higher education (HE).
8. Guidance and support are good. The college has comprehensive and effective arrangements covering recruitment, induction and advice and guidance. Tutorials are effective at maintaining attendance and retention at high levels but have had less effect on improving learners' progress compared with their prior levels of attainment.
9. Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers provide open and consultative management. Strategic planning is very good and accountability is strong. Morale throughout the college is high. Quality assurance supports improvements in provision but some curriculum action plans lack rigour. Self-assessment identifies most main strengths and weaknesses. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good but some aspects of monitoring arrangements are underdeveloped. Governance is good. Financial management and value for money are outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college's capacity to improve is good. Staff have confidence in managers. The improvement in learners' achievement demonstrates the positive impact of quality improvement strategies. Procedures for lesson observation are rigorous. Self-assessment is well established and inclusive. The resulting report is accurate, although some strengths have been overstated, resulting in the overgrading of some aspects of provision. Resources are well targeted on

learners' needs and governors monitor the work of the college effectively. Financial management is outstanding.

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

11. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, whilst successfully adding a significant vocational dimension to its range of courses. The proportion of good and better teaching has improved significantly and links with employers are a key strength of the college. The take-up of additional support by learners is exceptionally good and the success rates of learners who receive this support are very high. Improvements to provision are now more consistent between sector subject areas and the changes to the curriculum are now firmly embedded. Retention rates have improved substantially to above the national averages.

Key strengths

- outstanding success rates at levels 1 and 2
- outstanding 14 to 16 provision
- good development of practical and professional skills
- excellent additional learning support
- extremely good links with schools and local employers
- very responsive range of provision
- excellent arrangements for strategic management
- open and consultative management and high morale
- outstanding financial management and value for money.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- improving learners' progress compared with their prior levels of attainment and improving high grades
- improving the challenge learners receive in some lessons
- the underdeveloped monitoring arrangements for some aspects of equality and diversity
- the rigour of curriculum action plans.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Learners aged 14 to 16

Outstanding: grade 1

12. Achievement and standards are good. The overall success rates are well above the national average and long success rates continue to be high. Success rates are outstanding at levels 1 and 2 for all learners and are exceptionally high for adults at level 1. Success rates for the majority of the college's enrolments, for learners aged 16 to 18 at level 3, are broadly satisfactory. The success rate for the significant vocational element within the level 3 provision is slightly above sector averages. High grades at GCE AS and A level have improved substantially in the past year, with AS high grades in line with the sector average but A-level high grades below the average. Learners on level 3 programmes make the progress expected given their prior qualifications and attainment. Success rates for the majority of sector subject areas (SSAs) are above average. Over the past year, the SSAs of health and social care, information and communication technology (ICT), retailing, sports and business administration have improved their success rates markedly. Levels of progression to further study within the college are high, particularly from level 1 to 2. Progression to higher education from level 3 programmes is also good. Retention remains above the national average and continues to improve. Attendance is high and learners' behaviour is exemplary.
13. Success rates on the Train to Gain programme are high and improving. Data from the college for the first eight months of 2008/09 indicate that framework achievement on work-based learning programmes has improved significantly from a low base and is now high. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are outstanding with good progression to college provision. Key skills success rates are satisfactory. Success rates for most minority ethnic learners are generally high but success rates for black Caribbean learners are well below the college average. Success rates for those in receipt of additional learning support are high. The standard of learners' work is good. Learners produce high standards of practical work and have good opportunities to develop workplace skills, which help them achieve good economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

14. The quality of provision is good, which is lower than the college's self-assessed judgement. Teaching and learning are good. The proportion of lessons which are good or better has increased substantially since the last inspection. A very effective staff development programme has been instrumental in improving teaching and learning and has successfully targeted satisfactory and inadequate teaching. In the large majority of good lessons, teachers plan a wide range of interesting activities making full use of different teaching strategies. Most teachers use questioning techniques well to check learners' understanding.

Learners enjoy lessons and relationships between staff and learners are good. Teachers have good levels of subject and vocational expertise and learners develop good practical and professional skills in vocational areas. The use of information learning technology (ILT) to enhance learning in lessons is satisfactory. Examples of the creative use of ILT are not widespread. Teachers and learners increasingly use the well-populated virtual learning environment. In a few lessons, teachers do not challenge learners sufficiently or provide them with tasks and resources which stretch their ability levels. Therefore, some learners do not make fast enough progress. Assessment is good. Work is marked promptly and written feedback is clear and helpful so that learners understand how they can improve their work. The on-line tracking system used in ICT is excellent and provides learners with a very good overview of progress. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure assessment is accurate. Assessment in the workplace is flexible in approach.

15. Learners diagnosed with additional learning needs receive outstanding support. Initial assessment is thorough and support is provided swiftly. The Personal Skills Development team provides a diverse range of classroom and one-to-one support. Support is very effective in helping learners make good progress. The involvement of parents and carers is satisfactory.
16. The college's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is accurate but the grading of outstanding lessons is generous. The quality of judgements on written observation records does not give a strong enough evaluation of the extent of learning taking place in the lesson. Promotion of equality and diversity within lessons is mostly good but in some cases teachers do not make good use of opportunities in lessons to reinforce equality themes. The observation of teaching and learning does not sufficiently evaluate equality and diversity.
17. The response to meeting the needs and interests of learners and local employers is outstanding, which agrees with the self-assessment report. The extremely relevant range of provision takes particularly effective account of government priorities. Since the last inspection, the range of vocational courses has increased significantly. The college offers a very successful programme for learners aged 14 to 16 and a growing and particularly useful range of Train to Gain and HE provision. The range of curriculum enrichment activities for learners is good and gives them outstanding opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community.
18. Educational and social inclusion are outstanding. Very responsive provision for those under-represented in education includes programmes for communities located in areas of deprivation and with particular faith requirements. An extremely useful range of courses is in place for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whose first language is not English, or who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The extensive college bus service collects substantial numbers of learners from areas of deprivation to study at the college. Of the learners progressing to HE, many are from areas of high deprivation. Managers have been quick to arrange programmes for those affected by changes in local economic conditions.

19. Guidance and support are good, which is lower than the self-assessment report grade. Comprehensive and effective recruitment arrangements are in place. The thorough interview process ensures that learners are on the most appropriate course. Induction settles learners on to their courses quickly and effectively. Learners receive comprehensive advice and guidance on careers, whether related to higher education, employment or further training and education.
20. The improved tutorial arrangements have a greater focus on individual tutorials to enhance learners' performance. Group tutorials are relevant and topical. Individual tutorials review learners' performance thoroughly and maintain high levels of attendance, punctuality and retention. However, their impact on success rates and improving learners' progress, compared with their prior levels of attainment, is mixed. A minority of learning targets to improve learners' work is too general to be effective. Reviews of progress for work-based learners are inconsistent.
21. Counselling, welfare, personal support and health promotion services are strong. Learners have particularly high awareness of the importance of good sexual health. Links with external support agencies are well established. Learners speak very positively of the support they receive from staff.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

22. Leadership and management are good, which is lower than the college's judgement. Improvements in success rates and the quality of teaching and learning have been secured through the wholehearted commitment of staff at all levels in the organisation. The college has met or exceeded recruitment targets during each of the last three years. The principal and senior managers provide open and consultative management, which is characterised by clear communication and highly effective teamwork. Accountability is strong, so that managers at all levels are clear about their responsibilities, yet are encouraged to take an initiative. Staff and governors support the college's values fully. Morale throughout the college is high.
23. Strategic planning is very good and has at its heart the college's drive to improve participation, achievement and the quality of learners' experiences. The concise strategic plan is supported by sophisticated functional plans and risk analysis. Links between business and operational planning are articulated clearly and provide a secure basis for planning throughout the college. Curriculum management is good; the variability in the performance of different curriculum areas identified at the last inspection has been remedied.
24. Quality assurance supports improvements in provision, although in some aspects, such as the proportion of high grades and success rates at level 3, improvements since the last inspection have been slower to achieve than the college intended. Accurate management information is used effectively to

support the detailed analysis of all aspects of the college's performance. Lesson observation procedures are rigorous and have underpinned the improvement in teaching and learning. The quality improvement plan provides an excellent range of well-considered actions to promote further improvement. Curriculum plans are satisfactory but they lack the rigour of the full college plan. Self-assessment is an inclusive and comprehensive process which identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement. However, the report overestimates the significance of some of the college's strengths and gives an over-optimistic assessment of some aspects of provision.

25. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good. The college complies with current government requirements for child protection and provides a safe and welcoming environment for learning. Accessibility for learners with restricted mobility across all college sites is very good. The college complies with the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. A single equality scheme is in place and the performance of different groups of learners is analysed carefully at curriculum and college level. However, the equality and diversity monitoring arrangements are underdeveloped. The recruitment of minority ethnic learners has increased and is well above the local average. The college has successfully increased the proportion of staff from minority ethnic heritages, and of those declaring a disability, to well above the local average.
26. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. They benefit from the extensive training opportunities available to them, particularly in relation to improving teaching and learning. The accommodation is very good and college sites are maintained well. Resources to support learning are excellent, with particularly impressive ILT provision that is used well by learners.
27. Governance is good. Governors are highly experienced and provide a very good level of support and challenge. They act decisively to ensure learners' best interests receive the highest priority. Financial management and the deployment of resources are outstanding. 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	1013	81	69	12	1272	88	65	23
	06/07	527	85	74	11	961	90	70	20
	07/08*	416	87			739	97		
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	6	50	73	-23	-	-	-	-
	06/07	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
	07/08*	-	-			-	-		
NVOs	05/06	43	60	72	-12	10	50	74	-24
	06/07	70	70	75	-5	1	100	75	25
	07/08*	42	93			3	100		
Other	05/06	839	81	69	12	1262	89	65	24
	06/07	457	88	74	14	959	90	70	20
	07/08*	374	87			736	97		

* 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	1316	69	66	3	262	69	66	3
	06/07	965	74	70	4	210	70	69	1
	07/08*	1142	81			199	84		
GCSEs	05/06	302	71	68	3	54	63	67	-4
	06/07	288	80	71	9	48	75	70	5
	07/08*	472	81			46	87		
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	24	50	69	-19	-	-	-	-
	06/07	1	100	73	27	-	-	-	-
	07/08*	12	100			1	100		
NVOs	05/06	59	54	65	-11	47	36	68	-32
	06/07	188	71	68	3	66	62	69	-7
	07/08*	211	81			85	84		
Other	05/06	925	70	66	4	161	81	65	16
	06/07	487	71	70	1	96	73	69	4
	07/08*	447	82			67	92		

* 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	05/06	4484	75	71	4	597	73	64	9
	06/07	5039	75	73	2	602	74	68	6
	07/08*	4823	78			492	74		
A/A2 Levels	05/06	963	90	87	3	33	91	72	19
	06/07	1299	91	87	4	35	74	76	-2
	07/08*	1316	92			11	91		
AS Levels	05/06	2577	73	67	6	31	71	55	16
	06/07	2866	70	69	1	46	57	59	-2
	07/08*	2338	71			14	93		
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	170	61	66	-5	5	20	57	-37
	06/07	-	-	-		-	-	-	
	07/08*	-	-	-		-	-	-	
NVQs	05/06	29	72	71	1	19	84	63	21
	06/07	66	77	74	3	42	67	69	-2
	07/08*	58	93			41	90		
Other	05/06	745	68	65	3	509	72	64	8
	06/07	808	69	70	-1	479	76	69	7
	07/08*	1111	77			426	71		

* college data

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by the college 2006 to 2008.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	College NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	College framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	05/06	overall	13	85	52	62	43
		timely	14	57	34	43	27
	06/07	overall	14	57	63	57	56
		timely	13	38	43	38	38
	07/08	overall	10	80	68	80	63
		timely	10	50	48	50	44
Apprenticeships	05/06	overall	48	56	57	42	51
		timely	55	35	37	27	33
	06/07	overall	54	59	64	56	60
		timely	54	31	47	30	45
	07/08	Overall	52	54	67	38	64
		timely	42	48	53	33	50

* 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 (ILR)

Table 5a

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes managed by the college 2007 to 2009.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	185	69
		timely	16	13
	2007/08	overall	163	81
		timely	82	62
	2008/09 (8 months)	overall	158	86
		timely	128	94

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three months or greater of the LSC contract year

* 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

** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college prior to inspection