

# Blake College

## Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 50743

Name of lead inspector: David Martin HMI

Last day of inspection: 6 November 2009

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: 162 New Cavendish Street, London W1W  
6YS

Telephone number: 0207 6360658

## Information about the provider

1. Blake College is a small independent privately owned specialist art and design college offering a range of courses in arts and media. The college was established in 1986 as a company limited by guarantee. Most learners are privately funded. A minority are government funded through the London Central Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Only the LSC funded provision, with learners following the foundation diploma in art and design and national awards, was in the scope of the inspection.
2. Most learners are aged 19 and over. They come from a wide variety of countries and present a wide range of educational backgrounds. Around two thirds of learners are female and just over two thirds of all learners declare their ethnicity as white.
3. Since the last inspection, the sole director of the company has resumed his role as course director, with overall responsibility for the college. Other new management arrangements have also been introduced to support his work. A full-time registrar reports to the course director and a part-time director of studies manages the 12 part-time teachers, who are practising professionals in art and design.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to18)	12 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	17 full-time learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject area	Grade
Art and design	3

## Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of Blake College's provision is satisfactory. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A new management team has established clear priorities for improvement which are increasingly understood and supported by staff. Academic policies and procedures are being systematically reviewed and revised. The more rigorous, but supportive, culture is beginning to improve the quality of provision, as in teaching and learning. However, there is much still to do to introduce and embed reliable quality improvement systems and equality of opportunity is not yet better than satisfactory.
- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates are satisfactory, as are those for learners aged 19 and above, but they are low for younger learners. Standards of learners' work are often good, but inconsistently so in fashion. Learners make good progress in their work. The quality of provision and of teaching and learning are good. The latter has improved significantly since the last inspection, although there is insufficient use of information learning technologies (ILT) to support teaching and learning. Assessment is good and individual learning plans are well used. Learners' needs are well met and their care, guidance and support are good. Learners enjoy their studies and value the personal care and attention they receive.

6. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. Learners feel very safe. The college ensures that the welfare needs of learners are central to its day-to-day practices.

## Main findings

- Learners often achieve good standards in their creative work. They enjoy their studies. However, standards of learners' work in fashion vary too widely.
- Learners' progress to higher education, further education and employment is good. The diverse range of learners has equally diverse objectives and the college's response to meeting their needs is good.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is challenging, but suitably supportive and accompanied by informative demonstrations and handouts. However, there is too little use of information learning technologies (ILT) to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers are well qualified. They are all practising professionals and demonstrate an impressive range of professional development activities.
- Learners receive good guidance and support. Pastoral support is particularly good. However, advice and guidance for younger learners is not sufficiently effective.
- Assessment of learners' performance is good. The improved use of individual learning plans since the last inspection contributes to improved assessment.
- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates have improved since the last inspection and are satisfactory for learners aged 19 and over. However, in 2008/09 they are low for learners below the age of 19 because of poor retention.
- Blake College's arrangements for safeguarding learners are satisfactory. Learners feel very safe and readily share their problems and concerns with staff.
- Blake College has satisfactory arrangements for the promotion of equality and diversity. Some aspects of policy and procedures are out of date and there is no systematic analysis of equalities related data.
- Blake College provides satisfactory value for money. Accommodation and practical resources are satisfactory, but there is little provision of interactive media technology for teaching and learning.
- Arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement are satisfactory. Management information is insufficiently used to monitor the effectiveness of provision and to inform management decisions. The college's scheme for the observation of teaching and learning was not operational in 2008/09 and formal opportunities for teachers to share good practice are not yet in place.
- Attendance and punctuality in lessons for fashion is poor for too many learners.

## What does Blake College need to do to improve further?

- Improve advice and guidance for learners under the age of 19, in order to increase their retention and success rates.
- Improve ILT resources to enable better support for teaching and learning.
- Ensure the successful reintroduction of the college's scheme for observation of teaching and learning to improve the range of evidence for self-assessment and quality improvement.
- Ensure the better punctuality and attendance of learners in fashion to help improve the standards of their work.

## Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

### What learners like:

- the small friendly environment offered by the college
- being at a college in London
- the very helpful, expert and inspirational teachers
- the practical and current work experience of teachers
- the good amount of one-to-one teaching
- the way that Blake College listens to learners and acts on their views
- feeling safe at the college
- working with other learners from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds

### What learners would like to see improved:

- learners expressed no views on areas for improvement

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

7. Blake College has satisfactory capacity to make and sustain improvement. After an unsettled period, following the last inspection, new management arrangements are now in place. They are clear and well understood by staff, are increasingly effective and have improved the quality of provision. For example, teaching and learning are now good. Overall success rates have improved, especially for learners aged 19 and over, although they remain satisfactory overall. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory, but has insufficiently improved since the last inspection.
8. Quality assurance systems, including self-assessment, are satisfactory, but are insufficiently extensive and systematic. Staff are involved in self-assessment and good use is made of learners' views. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Managers are not yet making the best use of management information to reach judgements about the effectiveness of provision.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

9. Learners' overall success rates are satisfactory. They have improved steadily since the last inspection, rising from 62% in 2006/07 to just over 74% in 2008/09. In 2008/09, the overall success rate was depressed by the poorer performance of the college's first significant intake of learners under the age of 19. Their overall success rate was only 58%. In contrast, the rates for learners aged 19 and over, over the three years 2006/07 to 2008/09, have significantly improved, from 63% to 83%, which is around the national average.
10. The college's overall pass rate has improved since the last inspection and is now high, at 90%. The retention of learners is high for those aged 19 and over, but low for younger learners, at 91% and 67% respectively. Regardless of ethnic background or gender, learners have broadly the same success rates.
11. Learners' progress to higher education, further education and employment is good. Of the 29 learners completing their courses in 2008/09, nine out of the ten applying for degree courses were successful, seven moved on to higher level courses at the college or elsewhere, seven gained relevant employment and one is pursuing further training.
12. Learners often achieve good standards of creative work and make good progress on their courses. They gain skills which focus on design and creativity and enjoy experimentation, as seen in sketch books and active projects. Good use is made of sketch books as a reference tool. New learners gain good skills in a short time. The standards of learners' work in fashion vary too widely.

13. Learners enjoy their studies and develop good personal and social skills, gaining in confidence and self esteem. Their attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. The self-assessment report identifies continuing issues with punctuality and inspectors noted poor attendance and timekeeping in two lessons for fashion.
14. Learners feel very safe at the college. They comment positively about the good support they receive from college staff. They have a good understanding of the importance of health and safety in their areas of study.

## The quality of provision

Grade 2

15. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are supportive and encouraging of learners, but also suitably challenging. They provide an environment in which learners feel confident and able to express opinions in front of their peers. Teaching is usually accompanied by informative demonstrations and handouts. Lively discussions take place, with all learners taking an active part. Learners are encouraged to critique the work of fellow learners. Teachers make good use of the wealth of galleries and exhibitions in London. Learners' individual project work is well supported. In lessons for fashion, poorer planning sometimes leads to learners tackling briefs which are not appropriate for their level of experience and expertise.
16. Insufficient use is made of ILT by teachers and learners. Although digital technology is used well in specialist areas, there is little use of interactive display and 'smartboard' technologies. The art studio has no facility to use digital display and in one lesson learners had to view photographs in art books held up by the teacher. Teachers encouragement of learners to use ILT for research and presentation, including word processing on final projects, is insufficient. The college has no intranet at the moment, but intends to launch this as part of its current review of college information technology systems.
17. Teachers are well qualified and are practising professional artists. They have extensive commercial subject knowledge and use this to good effect in their teaching, enhancing learners' understanding. Resources to support teaching and learning are generally satisfactory. However, the art studio is uninspiring with no displays of work.
18. Assessment of learners' work is good. In contrast to the last inspection, teachers and learners make good use of individual learning plans. Learners take ownership of them, completing them comprehensively and using them to record and plan their learning.
19. The needs and interests of learners are met well. The college attracts a very diverse group of learners and the range and content of the provision meets their particular needs. The college emphasises the production of a body of work for portfolios to help achieve their goals. Progression routes for learners are well signposted. Many choose the college because of its smallness and its location in central London. The college understands this and meets learners'

expectations, with a good programme of external visits. On the fashion course, learners are not introduced to working designers or small manufacturing units in the area, to enable them to understand the nature of the fashion industry.

20. The care, guidance and support of learners are good. Initial advice and guidance are good overall. Applications and admissions are well handled. This creates firm foundations for close working relationships between learners and college staff; much valued by learners. Teachers and other staff provide good ongoing advice, guidance and support. They know their learners well and are interested in their well-being. In the case of younger learners, initial advice and guidance are not as effective. The college has identified this area for improvement.

## Leadership and management

Grade 3

21. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Following the last inspection, the executive direction of the college changed and the rigour of some aspects of management and quality assurance was not maintained. Since then, new management arrangements have been introduced. They are clear and well understood, are increasingly effective, and are improving the quality of provision.
22. The new management team has clear priorities for improvement. These are increasingly understood and supported by staff. Under a new director of studies, a more rigorous, but supportive, culture for teachers is being established. Teachers are clearer about what managers expect of them. Academic policies and procedures are being systematically reviewed and revised. For example, successful new approaches to individual learning plans are being introduced, an area for improvement noted at the last inspection.
23. The small staff team work closely and cooperatively together in the best interests of learners. Informal communications are good. Essential staff meetings, both general, and for specific purposes, increasingly complement informal contact. Formal opportunities for teachers to share good practice are still to develop.
24. As at the last inspection, there is insufficient use of management information to inform decisions and to monitor the progress and achievement of learners. While the college has a computer-based management information system it is incomplete and some aspects are out of date. The college is actively engaged in reviewing options for a new system.
25. The college manages its resources appropriately and provides satisfactory value for money. Teachers are engaged in an impressive range of activities to support their continuing professional development. Arrangements for staff development are satisfactory, but the recent absence of an active scheme of lesson observation has removed an important indicator of development need. The single building which houses the college provides adequate specialist and



general accommodation and is fit for purpose. There has been significant recent investment in new computers, but too few general ILT resources are available.

26. The safeguarding of learners is satisfactory, in the context of an independent specialist college. The college had not previously fully understood their responsibilities, but key government requirements are now being met. There is a thorough statement on safeguarding policy, a single central record, managed by the director of studies, and all staff in regular contact with relevant learners hold current Criminal Record Bureau checks, or are in the process of being checked.
27. Arrangements to promote equality and diversity are satisfactory. Equality of opportunity policies and procedures, for all key aspects, are in place, but they need updating to reflect current legislation and practice. There are no implementation plans. Policies clearly state the college's commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity.
28. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and their rights and responsibilities. The students' handbook details actions for learners should they feel the need to complain and they are fully aware of what to do. Equality matters are satisfactorily covered during induction.
29. The college is a particularly diverse community. All learners are helped to settle into the college well and, where necessary, to England and to London. Good working relationships are actively promoted. Staff have a good understanding of cultural differences and traditions. The needs of all learners are met equally well.
30. The college does not routinely record and analyse learner data by various equality categories. There is little difference between the success of learner groups from different ethnic backgrounds and between outcomes for male and female learners. In 2008/09 the success of learners below the age of 19 was considerably lower than for older learners.
31. Arrangements to assure and improve the quality of provision are satisfactory. The college's scheme for the observation of teaching and learning, which was sound in 2006/07 and 2007/08, fell into disuse in 2008/09. It has started again for the current year, but is not yet providing sufficient information to aid quality improvement. The process of self-assessment is satisfactory. The self-assessment report, updated for the inspection, presents an honest evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement and provides a good update of progress since the last inspection. Teachers make a contribution to its development. It uses the views of learners well. Analysis of evidence to support judgements is sometimes insufficient.

## Information about the inspection

32. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the college's director of studies, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the last inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection.
33. Inspectors used group and individual interviews. They looked at questionnaires learners had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions and assessments. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in the subject area the provider offers.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## Blake College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	29		12	17	
Part-time learners					
Overall effectiveness	3		3	3	
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3		3	3	
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a				
Quality of provision	2		2	2	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	3		3	3	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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