

Aylesbury College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130607

Name of lead inspector: Janet Mercer HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Oxford Road
Aylesbury
Bucks
HP21 8PD

Telephone number: 01296 588588

Information about the provider

1. Aylesbury College is a medium-sized general further education college. In 2008/09 there were 4,230 learners funded by the Thames Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Just over half of all course enrolments were for 16 to 18-year-olds, but approximately 70% of full-time equivalent learners were in this age group. Over 40% of full-time equivalent learners studied on advanced programmes, with just over one third on intermediate courses.
2. The college offers programmes in all 15 subject areas, although the number of learners in horticulture, history, social sciences and education and training is small. The largest numbers of enrolments are in health, public services and care, retail and commercial enterprise, languages, literature and culture, preparation for life and work and arts and media. The college's mission is to 'deliver good quality skills at all levels to sustain a competitive economy and serve the community'.
3. While the proportion of 16-year-olds in Buckinghamshire who achieve five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is above the national average, many students join the college with lower than average prior attainment. All local schools have sixth form provision.
4. Two thirds of learners are female and one quarter from minority ethnic backgrounds, well above the proportion in the local area population. The largest minority ethnic group is of Pakistani heritage. The unemployment rate in the local area is lower than the regional and national average. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is also lower than the national average. Although most of Buckinghamshire is affluent, three areas in Aylesbury have considerable deprivation.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Remit Training
 - Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
 - Buckinghamshire County Council.
6. The following organisations provides training on behalf of the college:
 - John Laing Training
 - ATG Training Ltd
 - Smarter Training.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 Further education (16 to 18) Foundation learning	224 part-time learners 1,221 full-time learners 354 part-time learners 319 full-time learners 40 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	287 full-time learners 2,009 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	502 learners 471 apprentices

Summary report

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

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

Subject Areas	
Health, care and early years	2
Science and mathematics	4
Construction	3
Art and design, performing arts and media	3
Business, administration and law	2

Inspectors graded learner-responsive provision in health, care and early years, science and mathematics, art and design, performing arts and media, and business, administration and law, and employer-responsive provision in construction.

Overall effectiveness

- Aylesbury is a satisfactory college, where managers have brought about clear improvements since the last inspection. Outcomes for learners have improved and are now in line with national averages for those aged 16 to 18, and above average for adult learners. They are satisfactory for learners on work-based programmes and good for 14 to 16-year-olds on vocational courses. However they remain below average for students on General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS- and A-level programmes, and too few students achieve A* to C grades on GCSE courses.

8. The college demonstrates good capacity to improve. Managers are ambitious to improve learners' outcomes further, and have used self-assessment well to identify accurately the college's strengths and areas requiring further improvement. Recent improvement strategies have had a marked impact in some areas, but have not yet had time to secure sufficient improvement in all areas. Although the college self-assessed science and mathematics as satisfactory, inspectors found this provision to be inadequate. The college is keenly aware that, despite improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection, there is more work to do to ensure that all lessons enable students to make good progress in their learning and achieve their potential.
9. The college works well with local schools, employers and community groups to meet a wide range of diverse needs in the area. Learners receive good support to enable them to achieve and to progress well into further or higher education, training or employment. The college promotes health and safety and the safeguarding of learners well. Promotion of equality of opportunity is also good, and the college has made good progress in reducing the differences in success rates between different groups. The inclusive environment and culture of mutual respect is highly valued by students.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall for students aged 16 to 18, and good for adult learners. Success rates were below average for 16 to 18-year-olds in 2007/08, but improvements in the last year have brought these into line with national averages. Success rates for adult learners have also improved and are above national averages, particularly on foundation and intermediate level courses.
- Learners on vocational courses develop good workplace and practical skills and their success in key skills is good. This supports them well for their next stages in further study or employment. They particularly enjoy their learning and achieve well when they can apply knowledge and practical skills within their vocational area.
- Students make satisfactory progress, relative to their starting points, although almost one third of 16 to 18-year-olds on advanced-level courses did not achieve their expected target grade. Despite clear improvements in AS and A-level success rates over the last three years, they remain below national averages. The proportion of students achieving higher grade passes on AS- and A-level and GCSE courses is below average on many courses.
- Outcomes for students were judged by inspectors to be good in business, administration and law, health and social care, but inadequate in science and mathematics. They were satisfactory for work-based learners in construction. Although outcomes were satisfactory overall in art and design, performing arts and media, they were good in fashion and performing arts, but noticeably weaker on art and design and some media courses.
- Outcomes for apprentices and learners on Train to Gain programmes have improved in the last year and are now satisfactory overall, although success

rates vary considerably between different subject areas. Students aged 14 to 16 achieve well on vocational programmes and their success rates have improved significantly over the last three years.

- Students feel safe in college and speak very positively about the culture of mutual respect between all members of the college community.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The college has put appropriate and well-considered strategies in place to improve the quality of teaching and learning, but these have not yet been fully effective. There is significant variation in the quality of teaching and learning, both within individual subject areas and across the range of subject areas in the college. Insufficient challenge for more able students remains an area for improvement since the last inspection.
- Lesson observations by college staff provides a clear and accurate overview of strengths and areas for improvement of teachers' practice in lessons and observers provide detailed feedback to individual teachers on what they do well or not so well. However, lesson observation feedback does not give sufficient emphasis to the impact of teaching on students' learning.
- The college's strong vocational focus meets the needs and interests of students, employers and the wider community well. The 'Pathways' programme provides good opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The wide range of provision for students aged 14 to 16 supports good progression to further education and training. GCSE provision and some AS- and A-level courses, which no longer match students' needs, are under review.
- The college uses its partnerships with schools, employers, the local authority and voluntary organisations well to extend provision and provide support to meet a wide range of learner, employer and community needs. The college utilises the extremely valuable resource of its 'state of the art' building for the benefit of the wider community.
- Students value the good quality learning support and it is effective in raising their achievement. They also value individual tutorials and know their targets, although the quality of setting and monitoring of targets is inconsistent across the college.
- Senior managers and governors have developed a clear vision for the college, focused on building better futures for students and raising ambition amongst staff to strive for excellence. Managers are successfully developing a culture of continuous improvement and high expectations of students.
- The college promotes equality and diversity well and is successfully reducing differences in success rates between different groups. Students say that they are treated with respect and that managers listen to, and act on, their views.
- Quality assurance and self-assessment are good overall and are leading to improvements. For example, success rates are now high in hairdressing and beauty therapy, sport, hospitality and catering, and information and communication technology. However, good practice in self-assessment and action planning is not consistent throughout the college and in a few curriculum

areas improvement has been too slow. In a few instances, grades in the self-assessment report were higher than those given by inspectors.

What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?

- Support teachers to develop stimulating and challenging lessons and consistently good teaching across the college, so that all students are able to achieve their full potential. Ensure that the lesson observation scheme focuses more explicitly on how teaching makes an impact on students' learning and progress in lessons.
- Improve the quality and consistency of learning targets and progress monitoring for students across the college, ensuring that these are sufficiently clear and precise to help students know how to improve and achieve higher grades.
- Share best practice in teaching and learning, progress tracking and in rigorous, critical self-assessment across the college to accelerate progress in those areas where students' outcomes remain below average.
- Raise standards in science and mathematics by ensuring that teachers plan appropriately challenging activities, provide sufficiently detailed feedback and monitor progress closely to ensure that all students meet their full potential.
- Improve the quality of students' work in art and design courses through ensuring students develop good observational drawing skills and first-hand research, and know how to develop their ideas and imagery in response to thematic projects.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- how well the range of courses at different levels meets their needs, allowing progression to higher level courses
- the level of support and constructive feedback provided by individual teachers
- the friendly and welcoming environment, and atmosphere of mutual respect
- how highly the college values students' views and how well it acts on them.

What learners would like to see improved:

- a more consistent standard of teaching across subjects
- the standard of pre-course information and course administration for students on part-time courses
- the too frequent changes to timetabling and staffing
- better and more timely information on next steps into further education or employment
- access to computers for study outside of lesson times.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the flexibility demonstrated in work-based assessment to meet their business needs
- support provided to apprentices in some vocational areas
- the responsiveness to bespoke training needs
- the good relationships with individual members of staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the frequency of feedback on employees' attendance, punctuality and progress
- the consistency and standard of communication irrespective of the department or individual tutor.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

10. The college's capacity to make and sustain improvement is good. Managers and governors have developed a clear vision for the college focused on achieving excellence and raising expectations. A rigorous performance management system and targeted training and development are supporting staff to improve professional standards. Thorough quality improvement procedures are supported by accurate data. Governors and teams at all levels routinely use performance indicators to monitor their progress towards challenging targets. Outcomes for students and the quality of teaching and learning have improved, particularly in the past year.
11. Self-assessment is broadly accurate and is leading to improvements in most areas. Overall, the college has made good progress in addressing most of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection, particularly in raising retention rates for 16 to 18-year-olds on level 2 and 3 courses, improving key skills success rates and improving the accuracy and reliability of performance data. Managers are aware that, while some improvements have been made, there is more to do to measure students' progress effectively and ensure that teaching provides sufficient challenge for the more able. Students' and employers' views are taken into account in planning for improvement and in decision making.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

12. Successful management action has brought about sustained improvements in success rates since the last inspection, with a marked increase in the last year. For 16 to 18-year-olds, this has raised success rates on long courses in 2008/09 from below average to the national average. Success rates for adult learners have improved and are now above average. Students aged 14 to 16 achieve well and most stay on in post-16 education and training.
13. Students achieve well on foundation level programmes and success rates are above national averages for both age groups. On intermediate level courses success rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved to the national rate, but were above average for students aged over 19. They were broadly in line with national averages for both groups on advanced level courses, where results were better on vocational courses than for A-level provision.
14. Despite sustained improvement over three years, success rates on AS- and A-level courses remained below national averages in 2008/09. The proportion of students achieving A* to C grades was below average in all GCSE courses, except mathematics where it was similar to the national average.
15. Students achieve well in some curriculum areas judged good or outstanding by the college. There have been significant and rapid improvements in success

rates in information and communication technology, hospitality and catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and sport, where success rates are now high. However, success rates remain below average in science and mathematics, engineering and humanities subjects and around average in several other subject areas.

16. Students' progress relative to their starting points is satisfactory overall but, as the college acknowledges, in 2008/09 nearly one in three 16 to 18-year-olds on advanced level courses did not achieve their minimum target grade. Almost two thirds did not reach their more challenging 'stretch' targets, and the college has rightly identified challenge for more able students as an area for further improvement.
17. Many students have relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy when they start their courses. The college has almost doubled the number of students taking key skills in communication, application of number and information technology over the last three years. Success rates have improved significantly and, in 2008/09, were well above average for 16 to 18-year-olds and at the national average for students aged over 19.
18. Outcomes for work-based learners have improved well in the last year and are now satisfactory. However, there remain some significant differences between curriculum areas. For example, success rates on Train to Gain programmes are high in health and social care and hospitality but, despite improvements, remain well below average in construction. Apprentices achieved better on hospitality and hairdressing than on health and social care and construction programmes.
19. Students feel safe in college and value the inclusive and welcoming environment. They enjoy their time at college and attendance is satisfactory. Health and safety are promoted well in workshops and practical sessions. Healthy eating is promoted through tutorials and college-wide activities. Students make a good contribution to the college and wider community through their participation in college events and charitable fundraising. The well-established student council provides a good forum for communications between students and college managers. Most students progress to higher level courses, employment or training.
20. The college monitors achievement by different groups of students carefully and there are no significant differences between different ethnic groups. Success rates for students of Pakistani origin are now in line with the college average, and above average for this group nationally. The majority of students receiving support for learning or physical difficulties achieve as well as, or better than, their peers. Improved success rates for 16 to 18-year-olds have reduced the differences in achievement between these students and those aged over 19.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

21. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The college has improved the proportion of lessons that are good or better, but recognises that too many lessons remain no more than satisfactory. Inspectors found too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning within and across subject areas. However, inspectors observed some examples of outstanding practice in hospitality and hairdressing and beauty therapy, where the vocational focus of the work captured students' interest and supported the development of high-level practical skills. Formal and informal arrangements to share good practice in teaching and learning are not fully effective across the college.
22. Inspectors found good examples of students using information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons to research from the internet or to direct their own learning successfully through online study materials, supported by their teachers. Students say they find this an enjoyable and effective way of learning. However, the extent to which teachers use ILT to enhance teaching and learning is variable across the range of curriculum areas and not all teachers use it to a consistently good standard.
23. Teachers rightly value the good range of staff development opportunities and the support of advanced practitioners in helping them to develop effective teaching and learning strategies. Action points arising from lesson observation are rigorously followed through into development for teachers and subsequent observation. There has been a strong focus on planning lessons to meet students' individual needs with the use of highly detailed group profiles. However, teachers do not use these consistently well to tailor the work in lessons to students' different needs and abilities.
24. Insufficient challenge for more able students remains an area for improvement since the last inspection. Learning outcomes are frequently too general. Teachers focus on students' completion of tasks rather than on what they will learn from them, and in the weaker lessons students are not given enough time to complete these activities before the teacher moves on to the next part of the lesson.
25. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Students speak positively of the quality of feedback on their work and know what they need to do to improve. Teachers check learning frequently by asking directed questions, but students' answers are too often superficial and do no more than demonstrate recall of information. Teachers frequently miss opportunities to extend and develop students' learning through further questioning.
26. Lesson observations provide a clear and accurate overview of strengths and areas for improvement of teachers' practice in lessons. Observers provide detailed feedback to teachers, but this is not always sufficiently focused on how well teaching encourages students' learning and progress.

27. The courses on offer meet the needs and interests of students, employers and the wider community well. Most curriculum areas offer foundation, intermediate and advanced level programmes, which enable students to progress to higher level courses in the college. Provision is often very specifically targeted to meet local needs, for example in construction, but in science the range of provision is limited.
28. Provision is reviewed frequently through an effective curriculum business plan to ensure employers' views, local labour market intelligence and national initiatives are taken into account. GCSE and some AS- and A-level programmes are under review as they no longer meet students' needs effectively.
29. The active student council is at the heart of the student involvement strategy. Students work hard with college staff to organise college-wide events to promote diversity and health awareness topics. Curriculum enrichment is focused mainly on course-related activities. Very good use is made of the excellent atrium to host exhibitions and events such as a technology competition for local secondary schools. Students in hairdressing and beauty therapy, hospitality and sport develop good business skills through running these aspects of the college's work as real commercial enterprises with their own accounts and business plans.
30. Partnerships with schools, employers, the local authority and voluntary organisations are good. The college plays an influential role in the Aylesbury local strategic partnership and the 14–19 strategy group in the development of specialist Diplomas and other curriculum initiatives for this age group. This includes the development of Diplomas in construction and the built environment and hospitality and catering, with plans for six more, in partnership with local schools. The college offers a wide range of vocational courses to approximately 250 pupils aged 14 to 16 from local partner schools. The successful 'Give it a Go' programme enables young people at risk of not participating in education, training or employment to gain experience of vocational training and to build their confidence and self-esteem.
31. The college has focused on improving employer engagement. Some subject areas have very good links with employers, who value the the flexible training the college can offer. However, a few employers expressed concerns about infrequent contact and a lack of information about their employees' progress. The college shares its excellent facilities with the local community, for example in supporting the local police in the training of young officers and the hosting of 'business breakfasts' for local employer groups. The sports facilities are used by many clubs and community groups. Students appreciate the environment in which they learn and treat it with respect.
32. Care, guidance and support are good. Full-time students receive good advice and guidance prior to joining the college, although this is not so consistent for part-time students. Increased emphasis on ensuring students are on the appropriate course and level has contributed to improving retention rates. Students benefit from a thorough induction to college that helps them settle

quickly into their courses. Initial assessment identifies additional learning support needs and students receive appropriate support promptly.

33. Additional learning support helps students achieve well, although a small number of art and design students with dyslexia are not currently receiving support. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and the assistive technology centre is very effective in supporting students with a range of disabilities.
34. The college works closely with a number of specialist organisations such as housing trusts and welfare agencies to provide additional welfare support for students. Connexions staff provide timely crisis counselling which complements well the work of the college counsellor. Take up of financial support is high. Careers advice and guidance support students well in making choices about progression to further or higher education and employment, although some students said they would like to receive this earlier in their programmes.
35. Group tutorials cover the 'Every Child Matters' themes, although students say they find individual tutorials more useful. Teachers and tutors monitor students' progress towards academic and personal targets, but the quality of target setting is inconsistent across the college. Targets are often not sufficiently precise to help students improve or to monitor their rate of progress.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

36. Senior managers and governors are successfully developing a culture of high expectations across the college for staff and students. The clear vision for continuous improvement is shared by staff at all levels. Rigorous performance management and targeted staff development are contributing to improving professional standards. Senior managers set challenging targets for each course and have increased the levels of accountability for middle managers and course leaders.
37. Since September 2008, six new curriculum managers have been appointed with a clear brief to raise standards. New and revised policies and procedures have been introduced in a number of aspects of the college's work, for example, in support for students, teaching and learning and quality assurance, and these are beginning to have an impact. Success rates have improved over the past three years, particularly in 2008/09. In-year retention rates for 2009/10 show continuing improvement in most areas.
38. Where new curriculum managers have been in post for 12 to 18 months, there is evidence of significant improvement in students' outcomes and quality of provision. This is particularly evident in hairdressing, beauty therapy and sport, and in rising success rates in ICT and business. New managers are implementing appropriate strategies to improve and monitor the quality of provision, but in some areas, for example, science and mathematics, and art and design, it is too early to determine the impact of this on standards of work.

39. Governance is good. Members of the corporation use their expertise well to support the college, for example in the completion of the new building in 2006 and turning around a budget deficit of £1.68 million in 2007/08 to a secure financial position currently. The board is involved in strategic planning and provides a good level of challenge to the college. Governors review performance against key indicators at each monthly meeting and scrutinise papers such as the college's quality improvement plan, reports on outcomes for students and the self-assessment report.
40. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. The college has thorough and rigorous procedures for safe recruitment and ensures that all staff and students are suitably briefed and trained. Senior managers and governors receive regular reports on safeguarding to monitor the implementation of policies and procedures. Staff and students are aware of safeguarding issues and incidents are dealt with promptly and with sensitivity. College security provides a safe learning environment. Health and safety procedures for work in the college and on employers' premises are sound. Risk assessment is thorough.
41. Managers give equality and diversity a high priority and their promotion is good. Students feel that they are treated with respect. All staff and governors have undertaken accredited training in equality and diversity. Managers ensure teachers have good support to improve their practice in promoting equality and diversity, although teachers do not make consistently good use of opportunities to promote equality and diversity in lessons.
42. The college analyses data assiduously to evaluate differences between groups of students and staff and takes action where necessary. The achievement by students of Pakistani heritage is now in line with the college average and above the national rate for this group. The proportions of staff and students from minority ethnic groups are well above those found in the local community. Governors have recently recruited a wheelchair user and a member of the Asian community to support their work. The college is fully accessible for wheelchair users and a variety of equipment is used well to support disabled students.
43. Students are involved effectively in decision making through the students' council and membership of the governing body. Managers and governors listen to them and respond where possible, and their views are taken into account in self-assessment at all levels.
44. Quality assurance and self-assessment are leading to improvements. The college's self-assessment report identifies the key strengths and areas for improvement. At curriculum level, analysis sometimes lacks detail, some judgements are over generous and the impact of teaching on learning is not always sufficiently evaluated. Data are accurate and reliable and used increasingly well by course teams. The college's procedures for evaluating teaching and learning are robust but have not yet been fully effective in improving practice in all subject areas.

45. Resources are well managed and used effectively to support learning. Financial management is good, and the college has eliminated its budget deficit, whilst securing improvements in students' outcomes, indicating good value for money. Managers carefully monitor efficiency through consideration of indicators such as average class sizes and room utilisation and take action where necessary.

Subject areas

Health, care and early years

Grade 2

Context

46. There are 302 current enrolments on full-time and substantial part-time programmes. Two thirds are enrolled on full-time child care and health and social care programmes from foundation to advanced level. One third are undertaking part-time counselling courses. In 2008/09 half the provision comprised of work-related short courses in health and social care.

Key findings

- Students' outcomes are good. Success rates on advanced level child care, counselling skills and short courses are high. Poor retention caused a decline in success rates on health and social care at intermediate level and child care at foundation level courses over the last three years. In-year retention on all courses has shown significant improvement in 2009/10 and rates are now high.
- Standards of work are high and students have a very good understanding of how the theory they learn in college relates to the workplace. They develop very good communication and workplace skills. Students understand the importance of equality and diversity and demonstrate high levels of respect for others.
- Progression rates into work or further study are good. Courses are available from entry level to advanced level and many students progress to higher levels of education and employment. The college provided additional training which prepared students completing level 1 in 2008/09 for level 2 or apprenticeship programmes.
- Teaching and learning are good overall, with some outstanding practice observed. In most lessons students work hard and enjoy completing the challenging and interesting activities to a high standard. Tasks and activities are planned well to take account of students' individual needs.
- Students make at least good, and sometimes very good, progress in lessons, making very thoughtful and articulate contributions to discussions. Many teachers have current experience of working in the sector that they use effectively to develop students' vocational skills. On a few occasions learning is slow and instructions are not always clear, with some students struggling to understand basic concepts and what they are required to do.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Teachers provide prompt feedback on written work, although the quality of feedback varies. The best practice provides detailed comments that specify what needs to be done by students to improve their grade, but some comments are too general to support improvement.
- Students are supported well through regular tutorials where they negotiate improvement targets relating to achievement of course objectives and personal ambitions. Students use online reflective journals to provide feedback to

teachers, particularly in key skills. Teachers respond well with supportive and encouraging feedback.

- Where specific support needs are identified, teachers work closely with learning development assistants to plan and deliver good support during lessons. Students benefit from good advice and guidance prior to joining the college, and effective careers guidance.
- Leadership and management are good. The manager has good, open and effective communications with course teams, who take an active role in self-assessment and quality improvements. The curriculum manager sets appropriate targets for staff leading to improvements in the quality of provision.
- Students' views on the quality of their courses are valued by teachers and managers and have a positive impact on the learning experience. Teachers adapt their approach to teaching and learning in response to students' evaluations of lessons.
- Self-assessment is broadly accurate in recognising the strengths and areas for improvement. While the report identifies the key areas for improvement, inspectors found a few judgements on teaching and learning and students' outcomes to be over generous.
- Students demonstrate their good understanding of equality and diversity in the way they behave in the college environment and on work placements. Teachers have a good understanding of equality and diversity in the curriculum area and share this knowledge effectively with students.
- Safeguarding is promoted well and has a high priority in the area. Students feel very safe in the college. As a result of discussions with students, teachers have implemented tutorials on assertiveness with single gender groups to help them to socialise effectively in a mixed-gender environment. Child care tutors have delivered the 'Live Life Safe' presentation from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all lessons are clearly focused on meeting the needs of individual students and that tasks and activities are clear and understood by all.
- Provide a more consistent approach to feedback on students' work to provide specific guidance on what they need to do and how they need to do this to improve the quality of their work.
- Develop a more self-critical approach to making judgements on the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on students' learning and performance.

Science and mathematics

Grade 4

Context

47. There are nearly 400 enrolments on science and mathematics courses. Most students attend full time and around 70% are aged 16 to 18. The college offers GCSEs in mathematics, psychology and science, AS-level human biology and AS- and A-level psychology and mathematics.

Key findings

- Students' outcomes are inadequate. Success rates are significantly below the national average in many subjects, particularly for AS-level human biology and mathematics. Success rates for AS and A-level psychology are high. The proportion of students achieving A* to C grades in GCSE science and psychology is well below average, but around average in mathematics.
- The standard of work for many students is below the expected level and students are not well prepared for external examinations. However, students work well together, enjoy their studies and feel safe in college. While the number of students progressing to higher education is small, 95% of A-level students made successful applications to university in 2008/09.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and stimulate students to think for themselves through careful questioning. Lesson plans are detailed, but there is insufficient focus on the purpose of the task and the learning taking place. The pace of lessons is sometimes slow, with too much time spent on single tasks and insufficient checks on learning, consolidation and transfer of new information.
- The results of students' initial diagnostic tests are used well by teachers to develop an accurate profile of students' abilities. However, these profiles are not used to plan lessons to meet the needs of individual students. All students receive the same tasks, regardless of their ability, and more able students are not stretched or challenged sufficiently.
- The assessment of students' work by teachers too often lacks explicit comments on how students could improve their work and make better progress. Target setting and monitoring of individual students' progress is inconsistent.
- The range of science and mathematics provision is limited to a small number of GCSEs and A-level subjects, with no vocational science courses available at any level. Some collaboration has taken place with local schools, but partnership work is underdeveloped.
- Students appreciate the good support they receive when requested from teachers and tutors. However, procedures to ensure teaching staff can inform tutors about the progress of students are not systematic. Information about the value added by courses to students' prior attainment is not used effectively to set targets for current students, monitor and encourage their success or measure the effectiveness of subjects.

- Leadership and management are inadequate. Management information is accurate, but the self-assessment report is not sufficiently self-critical and evaluative. Key areas for improvement have been identified but the actions are not sufficiently precise. Course managers do not use reviews sufficiently well to evaluate the impact of teaching on students' outcomes or progress. Self-assessment judgements focus on the positive and are over generous.
- The new science and mathematics curriculum manager is implementing appropriate actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning and promote high expectations among students and staff. Regular course team meetings identify and monitor actions for improvement. Teams have made some improvements, but it is too early to determine the impact of actions taken to raise standards.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Course teams audit learning materials to ensure they do not contain stereotypes. Teachers promote equality of opportunity in a positive manner within lessons. Procedures to safeguard students are satisfactory.

What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' outcomes, by agreeing specific and measurable individual targets with students, and ensure regular liaison between tutors and subject teachers to monitor students' progress.
- Prepare students better for external examinations by ensuring teaching meets the needs of individual students, and challenges more able students.
- Make sure students joining AS-level courses are prepared fully for the standard of work by providing appropriate additional study skills.
- Ensure the results of initial diagnostic tests and learner profiles are used by teachers to meet the needs of individual students in lessons.
- Ensure all students receive subject-specific support which is consistent with their needs.
- Improve the rigour of course reviews and ensure self-assessment judgements are rigorously self-critical and accurate.
- Review the science provision to ensure that it meets the students' needs.

Construction

Grade 3

Context

48. Currently, 137 apprentices and 132 advanced apprentices are enrolled on work-based provision that includes brickwork, carpentry, plumbing and electrical installation trades. Ninety-three learners are on Train to Gain programmes, mostly on level 2 brickwork or building maintenance operations courses. Most learners are male, with nearly 60% of all apprentices aged 16 to 18. Fewer than 5% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds. One in four learners is on a Train to Gain programme.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall and timely success rates on apprenticeship programmes have improved for three consecutive years and are now satisfactory. However, success rates for electrical installation and plumbing apprenticeships remain significantly below their respective national averages.
- Despite improvement over three years, overall success rates for Train to Gain programmes remain well below average. Too few learners complete programmes within the expected time. In-year completion rates for key skills are high.
- Learners make good use of the practical skills learned at college in the workplace. They develop good social skills, communicating effectively with customers, work colleagues and training advisers. Learners feel safe and implement safe working practices. They understand their responsibility for their own safety and that of others and have a good understanding of hazards associated with their workplace.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has been significantly reduced, but there is insufficient good or better teaching. In the best theory lessons, well-designed activities enable learners to apply knowledge gained to their vocational area. Teachers use skilful questioning to check learners' understanding and challenge more able learners with more advanced work. However, in some lessons, poor presentation and explanation of information and a slow pace impede learners' progress.
- Assessment in the workplace is satisfactory. Assessors make good use of naturally occurring evidence in the workplace. Questioning effectively confirms learners' understanding of their work and its context. In a few instances, assessors do not sufficiently challenge learners to identify relevant evidence themselves, and do not always make their decisions clear about learners' competence.
- Staff use regular reviews to provide feedback to learners on their progress and encourage contributions from learners, supervisors and employers. However, reviews do not always successfully promote learners' wider understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity. Targets resulting from the reviews are often too vague.

- Support for learners is good. Staff respond flexibly to learners' requests for assessment, including weekend site visits, and advisers provide good personal support. Assessors keep accurate and detailed records of apprentices' progress, which are regularly updated. Assessors and training advisers have timely notice of learners' end dates, and a cumulative indication of in-year progress, which enables them to identify and support those at risk of not completing. This good practice is not shared across Train to Gain programmes.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recently-appointed managers have built a strong team ethos, and use weekly meetings to keep staff well informed. Self-assessment is evaluative and accurate. Detailed action plans target specific areas for improvement. Managers monitor progress closely and there are early indications of improvement, for example, in the early successful completion of key skills courses and high success rates for the electrical installation skills test.
- There is insufficient formal engagement with employers or sector organisations. There are no employer forums or consultative groups to capture employers' opinions and engender their support. Training advisers foster good working relationships with employers. Individual employers note a significant improvement in the service the college provides.

What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on electrical and plumbing programmes by ensuring more frequent and timely assessment of learners' skills and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching and learning.
- Increase the consistency of workplace assessment by sharing good practice between assessors, monitoring learners' progress through observation and ensuring learners collect their own workplace evidence and reference it to NVQ standards.
- Use reviews with learners in the workplace to set precise progress targets, and promote learners' understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity through work-related discussion.
- Share good practice in the tracking of learners' progress on all courses by replicating the successful apprenticeship tracking system on Train to Gain programmes.
- Strengthen partnerships with employers and sector organisations to support the further development of construction provision.

Art and design, performing arts and media

Grade 3

Context

49. Currently 105 students are enrolled on BTEC national award or diploma courses. Just under half of these study art and design, with one third studying fashion retail and one quarter on performing arts provision. The majority are aged 16 to 18 and three quarters are female. There are 243 students studying on GCSE, AS- or A-level courses in art and design, photography, film and media. The college offers a part-time jewellery course.

Key findings

- Students' outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates in 2008/09 were satisfactory on performing arts and A-level courses. They declined on the first diploma in art and design and were below average. Success rates on AS-level courses have been below national averages for the last three years. In-year retention rates show improvement on most courses.
- Students make satisfactory progress relative to their prior attainment, but this varies between courses. Students made better progress on A-level media and film courses than on art or photography courses. On AS-level courses, students made better progress in film studies, than media, art or photography. The proportion of students achieving higher grades on AS, A-level and GCSE courses is below average.
- The standard of students' work is satisfactory overall. Students on performing arts, fashion retail and jewellery courses make good progress in developing their technical skills and discuss their work with increasing confidence.
- However, in art and design courses, observational drawing and thematic research are underdeveloped. Two- and three-dimensional work often lacks sufficient ambition and challenge. Students' critical and evaluative skills are not sufficiently developed to promote confidence for independent learning.
- Assessment of work is often over generous. Teachers' comments give praise and encouragement but too little information on how to improve the standard and presentation of work, particularly in art and design and photography.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but there remains significant variation in quality between courses. Inspectors observed the best practice in fashion, performing arts and A-level photography. Most teaching is well structured with a range of vocationally-relevant activities.
- However, in art and design, tasks are too teacher-led with little student discussion or checking of understanding. Students are passive and remain unchallenged. The conclusion of lessons often lacks a critique to evaluate progress and plan for future work.
- Teachers prepare comprehensive group profiles but these are not used consistently to support the identified needs of individuals. Students on intermediate level courses who complete tasks quickly often have to wait for the

whole group to catch up before they can move on. Where extension activities are prepared they are generally repetitive rather than at a more advanced level.

- Accommodation is good overall, but successful recruitment in fashion means the studio is cramped. Media and photography resources are good, but space available in the edit suites makes it difficult for large groups to complete film work. Performing arts students have no stage or blocks for performance and rehearsal, and few costume resources. There are few displays of students' work around the college and limited work displayed in studios.
- The promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Teachers integrate relevant themes into lesson plans and ensure projects refer to cultural and social influences. Art and design students have produced posters to promote the college-wide equality and diversity event, and fashion students have studied garment styles from Japan and China. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities in lessons to engage students in discussion or to celebrate cultural diversity.
- Leadership and management at curriculum and course level are inadequate. The curriculum area self-assessment report focuses too much on positive aspects, and pays insufficient attention to weaknesses in students' outcomes in 2008/09, and the weak development of subject skills in art and design. Managers frequently awarded over-generous grades for lesson observations with insufficient focus on students' learning and progress.
- The new curriculum manager and course teams have developed a thorough quality improvement plan, but have not yet tackled the inconsistencies in teaching and learning and students' skills development across the subject areas. Course teams are beginning to share good practice but have yet to raise standards throughout the curriculum.
- The college has improved advice and guidance and appointed new teachers in the area, in response to poor results on several courses last year. In-year retention rates are improving. The new staff team has a clear understanding of key areas for improvement and a commitment to raise standards.

What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?

- Improve observational drawing and thematic development in art and design.
- Provide opportunities to develop and promote systematically discussion, critical analysis and evaluation across the curriculum.
- Make use of the comprehensive group profiles to review teaching strategies to ensure that all students are sufficiently challenged to enjoy their work and to reach their full potential. Ensure teaching and learning observations focus more closely on learning.
- Identify and share good practice across all subject areas at all levels, in particular in teaching and learning, use of thematic projects, first-hand research, group critiques with student-led discussions and peer evaluations.
- Use specific subject expertise to improve teaching and learning and the standards of students' work to secure rapid improvements in success rates.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

50. A total of 238 students are enrolled on courses in business, law, accountancy and management. Provision includes AS and A levels in business studies and law, BTEC first diploma, national award and national diploma in business, NVQ level 2 and 3 in accounting, certificate in personnel practice and certificate and diploma in management studies. Two thirds of students are aged 16 to 18.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Success rates have improved significantly in 2008/09 and are now high on many courses. However, they declined on the BTEC first diploma to below average and on NVQ level 2 accounting where they are now in line with the national average.
- Students' progress is satisfactory, relative to their prior attainment, but there is some variation between courses. Progress is very good on the BTEC national award in business, but weak on the national diploma.
- The standard of students' work is good. Students present work well, exhibit a sound grasp of key concepts and the ability to apply them effectively to business situations. They contribute confidently and articulately in lessons. They develop good evaluative skills, which are often used well in assessing each others' work and supporting each others' learning.
- Students enjoy their experience at the college and value the opportunity to learn in what they perceive to be a very safe environment. They appreciate the mutual respect between staff and students, and recognise the commitment of teachers to their success. They respond well to the high expectations teachers have of them.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use meticulously planned, interesting and appropriate activities that engage students and enable them to develop and demonstrate their learning. Teachers use examples from their own industrial and commercial experience effectively to illustrate how theories are applied in practice. Lessons are well paced and purposeful. However, insufficient use is made of ILT to enhance learning.
- Assessment is planned well and scheduled carefully into course programmes. Teachers provide good briefing on assignments in class to support students' preparation and understanding of what needs to be done to achieve good results. Marked work is returned promptly with helpful and supportive written and oral feedback. Internal verification procedures are rigorously applied.
- The range of provision is good and meets most students' needs. Links with employers, although developing, are insufficient. Some educational visits are provided, but there are no systematic arrangements for employers to contribute to the curriculum, and provide work experience for full-time students.
- Support for students is good. Students value the approachability of staff and their willingness to provide much informal support outside lessons. Induction

provides well-planned and effective opportunities to develop social relationships with their course peers and create course group cohesion.

- Individual tutorials provide good opportunities for students to reflect on their progress and identify where they need to focus their efforts for improvement. Tutors use individual learning plans to set clear academic targets which are closely monitored and used effectively with students to support and encourage higher levels of performance.
- Leadership and management are good. Teamwork is strong, with productive sharing of good practice. Outcomes for students have improved and staff share a common purpose to improve them still further. Departmental meetings are used effectively to create team cohesion and support the ethos of continuous improvement. Informal communication is extensive between teachers, although formal course team meetings are infrequent.
- Managers have implemented rigorously the teaching and learning development strategy, which has had a significant impact on the quality and consistency of teaching and learning. They use developmental and formal observations well to identify improvement priorities, and to agree action plans and support arrangements, which are closely monitored.
- The curriculum team's self-assessment of the provision is largely rigorous and accurate. The team has a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve further in order to sustain the improvements achieved so far. However, a few formal end-of-course reviews and action plans lack rigour and precision.

What does Aylesbury College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on first diploma and level 2 accounting courses by sharing best practice in teaching and learning, student performance monitoring and course management.
- Implement rigorous target setting and progress monitoring to improve students' progress relative to their prior attainment.
- Make greater and more effective use of a range of ILT techniques in order to enhance further students' enjoyment of lessons and their learning.
- Develop more links with businesses to support enrichment of the curriculum and the provision of work experience opportunities for full-time students.

Information about the inspection

51. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the college's director of quality, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
52. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Aylesbury 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	2158		1743	415	
Part-time learners	3002	258	265	1399	1080
Overall effectiveness	3	2	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	2	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?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	3	2	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
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?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	2	2	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2				
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?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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