

Solihull College

Inspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Paula Heaney HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Solihull College
Blossomfield Road
Solihull
West Midlands
B91 1SB

Telephone number: 0121 678 7000

Information about the provider

1. Solihull College is a large general further education college, located on three main sites, with courses in all 15 sector subject areas and a significant amount of higher education provision. Work-based learning is a significant area of the provision and includes Train to Gain and Entry to Employment programmes. The college serves the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull and surrounding areas, recruiting a significant number of learners from the City of Birmingham. A major redevelopment of the college's largest campus, in the south of the borough on the Blossomfield campus, is in progress. In the north, an area of significant economic and social disadvantage, the college opened the Woodlands campus in September 2006. The college was awarded the Training Quality Standard in December 2008.
2. In 2008/09 46% of learners enrolled were from widening participation backgrounds with 20% of learners from minority ethnic groups. Around 75% of full-time learners are aged 16–18. Just under half of these learners follow advanced level courses, with the remainder split equally between courses at foundation and intermediate level. Around 80% of learners are adults with the largest proportion following courses at intermediate level. The largest number of full-time enrolments are in health, public services and care; engineering; sport, travel and tourism; arts, media and publishing; and business, administration and law.
3. The college works with secondary schools in two 14-19 partnerships serving the north and south of the borough and provides vocational opportunities for pupils aged 14-16. The number of Year 11 pupils who achieve five A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, in Solihull is higher than the national average.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
5. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the college:
 - Learning Curve

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008-09
Provision for young learners: 14-16	291 part-time learners
Further education (16-18)	2,474 full-time learners 1,261 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including	557 full-time learners 178 part-time learners
Entry to Employment	80 learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	485 full-time learners 13,117 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain	2,023 learners
Apprenticeships	709 apprentices

Summary report

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

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

Subject Areas	
Engineering	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Sport, travel and tourism	2
Visual and performing arts	2
Literacy, numeracy and ESOL	2
Business, administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

6. Solihull College is a good college and is outstanding in its work in partnership with employers and other agencies to promote learning opportunities in the local and wider community. Leaders, managers and staff are focused strongly on improving further all aspects of the college's provision and they include the views of learners based at the college very well in this quest. Learners speak very highly of the support they receive from their teachers and other specialist staff. They value particularly the friendly atmosphere, the safe environment and opportunities to learn about other cultures than their own.
7. Outcomes for learners are good. Most learners make good progress in lessons, produce good standards of work and develop skills useful to their progression

plans and future employment. While attainment is good across much of the college's provision, it is satisfactory for learners aged 16-18 on foundation and intermediate level courses. Strategies to enhance learners' literacy and numeracy skills are having a positive impact overall. Teaching and learning are good in the large majority of lessons but in a small minority do not provide sufficient variety of activities and challenge for the most able. Learner target setting and reviews of learners' progress to promote achievement are not sufficiently detailed or helpful, which the college recognises. The broad range of courses meets most learners' needs and interests well.

8. Leadership and management are good and financial management is outstanding. The college has invested significantly in its estate to improve accommodation and resources for learners very successfully. Quality assurance arrangements are effective and identify most of the key strengths and areas for improvement, but some grading is overgenerous. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. The college promotes equality and diversity effectively and monitors closely the outcomes of different groups of learners. The college has a good capacity to improve further and provides good value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall and improving. While attainment is satisfactory for learners aged 16-18 it is good for adults and for work-based learners. Learners make good progress when compared with their starting points. The achievement of specific groups of learners is largely better than the college average, including for more vulnerable learners.
- The development of skills to prepare learners for employment and for progression to other courses is good. Achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications is improving, although the development of information technology (IT) skills across the college is underdeveloped.
- Most learners express strong levels of enjoyment. Learners say they feel very safe in and around the college and have a good awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles. They make a good contribution to college life through developing their knowledge of the different cultures of fellow learners. Attendance is satisfactory. Retention levels are high and improving.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Most classes are planned and executed well so that learners' interest is maintained and they learn well. Learning resources and opportunities for e-learning are very good. A small minority of classes do not challenge learners of all abilities sufficiently.
- The college uses initial assessment well. All full-time learners are evaluated for their literacy and numeracy needs on entry. Support is put in place promptly and is effective, though sometimes held back by inconsistent attendance and insufficiently precise target setting at support sessions.

- Much provision is delivered flexibly to meet the needs of learners, including the most vulnerable, and employers. Progression routes in most subject areas enable learners to access courses at the appropriate level. Most full-time learners participate in and enjoy the varied and wide-ranging enrichment programme.
- The college's work in partnerships is outstanding. The very good links contribute strongly to the highly effective provision of education and training initiatives in a wide range of local businesses and in the community. Employer links and work placements in a few departments are underdeveloped.
- Arrangements for learner support are very good. Well qualified staff offer a wide range of support services with good links to external agencies. Tutorials are effective and tutors are supported well through the availability of good quality resources and the assistance of specialists.
- Target setting for learners is not consistently effective across the college. Targets in some individual learning plans do not relate clearly to learning and do not help learners understand how to progress. Some learner reviews are not sufficiently effective.
- Leadership and management are good. Governors, leaders and managers set a clear strategic direction and monitor performance closely. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and lead to improvement. The self-assessment process is thorough although the college has overestimated the effectiveness of performance in a number of areas. The learner engagement strategy is excellent.
- Equality and diversity are good. The college monitors closely the success rates of different groups of learners and is narrowing the achievement gap successfully. Equality and diversity are promoted well in curriculum areas and other college wide initiatives contribute significantly to the promotion of community cohesion.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. Recruitment checks have been completed on all college staff and detailed policies and procedures are in place to ensure learners' safety and welfare. The majority of college staff have received safeguarding training and understand their responsibilities. The monitoring of vulnerable learners and learners at risk of leaving the college is excellent.

What does Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of learners aged 16-18, particularly for those on foundation and intermediate level courses, by developing their literacy, numeracy and IT skills further and ensuring that teaching and learning activities cater for the needs of all learners.
- Establish a consistently good standard of target setting for all learners, through staff training and the sharing of good practice. Ensure that targets in individual

learning plans challenge learners sufficiently and help them to understand what they need to do make the progress they are capable of.

- Improve the accuracy and rigour of self-assessment, especially with regard to the quality of teaching, by ensuring full consideration is given to the impact any identified weaknesses have on learning, the learner experience or learner outcomes.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly atmosphere in and around the college
- helpful and supportive tutors
- the good support for learning
- access to high quality resources
- the extensive range of enrichment activities
- the variety of teaching methods used to promote learning
- good access to healthy living information and advice.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the slow pace of learning in some classes
- some slow assignment marking
- some classes that are too large
- work experience opportunities where these are not currently available
- more healthy options and cheaper food in the refectory.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- excellent results and high standards
- excellent communications with college
- helpful tutors
- assessment in the workplace
- good improvement of employee skills
- good support for apprentices
- the college's flexible approach to training needs
- good partnership working.

What employers would like to see improved:

- nothing of significance was reported .

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

9. The college has a good capacity to improve. Governors, leaders and managers are committed to improving the learner experience and monitor the college's performance closely. The principal and senior managers provide effective leadership which is focused on a clear strategy to move the college forward. Staff have confidence in their managers and are supported effectively to make improvements. Outcomes for learners have improved overall and significant improvements have been made to the college's accommodation. The majority of weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been remedied although target setting for learners and the further improvement of success rates, especially for learners aged 16-18 on foundation and intermediate level courses remain areas that require attention.
10. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and quality improvement actions are generally effective. Data are accurate and used very well to monitor and improve the performance of different groups. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the report is broadly accurate in identifying the main strengths and areas for improvement within curriculum areas and for the college as a whole. However, the grading of many curriculum areas and of some cross college aspects is overgenerous and has failed to take into account sufficiently the impact of the areas for improvement identified, especially with regard to the quality of teaching and learning and the overall quality of provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

11. The college's overall success rates have risen in line with the rate of improvement nationally since the last inspection. Outcomes for learners aged 16-18 are in line with national averages in 2008/09. Retention rates are high. The introduction of new basic skills qualifications for learners on foundation and intermediate programmes has contributed to lower achievement than in previous years. High grade achievement is around the national average, but better on many arts courses. For adults outcomes are good overall and very good for those on intermediate level courses. Achievement for learners aged 14-16 is good.
12. Achievement is good overall for learners on employer-based courses. Apprentices' achievement has improved and is very high. For learners on hairdressing, horticultural and animal care apprenticeships achievement is outstanding. Outcomes on Train to Gain programmes are also improving and are satisfactory. Learners achieve their qualifications in good time, particularly on apprenticeships.
13. In the large majority of lessons seen learners make good progress compared to their starting points. The standard of learners' work seen on inspection was

largely good with some very good examples in art, child care, engineering and hairdressing courses. Learners develop good skills to prepare them for future employment, although not all learners have the opportunity to undertake work experience. Achievement in literacy and numeracy for learners aged 16-18 has improved, but learners' IT skills are not developed consistently well across departments. The vast majority of learners say they enjoy their courses. They value the skills they develop to help them progress to other courses and to employment, and the very good relationships they have with their teachers and trainers.

14. The college monitors achievement for different groups of learners in detail. Achievement between genders is similar. Outcomes for most learners from minority ethnic groups are in line with or above national averages. The college identified that for Pakistani learners in 2008/09 achievement rates were low due to the poor achievement of additional qualifications on business courses. At the time of inspection, college data indicate improvement for these learners. The vast majority of learners with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve in line with, or better than, those without.
15. Learners say they feel very safe in and around the college. They adopt safe working practices in lessons and in workplace settings. Learners' attitudes to adopting healthy lifestyles are well developed. An increasing proportion take part in the wide and developing range of sporting and other physical activities at the college. Learners also appreciate the information they receive on drug, alcohol and mental health awareness through tutorials and on the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). Through activities such as 'Black History Week' and events to celebrate the different cultures within the college, learners make a good contribution to college life. Attendance is satisfactory. The college tracks learners' progression routes and destinations in detail. Progression to other courses within the college is satisfactory.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. Most learners make good progress overall, both in class and during their time at the college. Most teachers plan their classes well so that a variety of activities maintain learners' interest and stimulate them to learn. Teachers are well qualified and subject knowledge is good. In most classes explanations are clear, and effective questioning checks and reinforces learning well. Plans are usually made for teaching to cater for the needs of all learners. In many cases this is done successfully because the effective use of assessment data ensures that teachers have a good knowledge of the aptitudes and abilities of all. However, in a small minority of classes not all learners are encouraged to achieve their best, particularly the most able.
17. The most successful teachers set and monitor challenging targets for learners within their lessons very effectively. Learning in vocational areas is generally good and in some areas it is excellent. Learners aged 14-16 learn well and enjoy their time at the college. The college is working hard to improve teaching

and learning further by the extensive use of teaching and learning coaches. This is complemented by weekly development sessions, the sharing of best practice and an excellent online bank of resources for the development of teaching and learning.

18. Most teachers use information and learning technology (ILT) well. Interactive whiteboards are not always used to their full potential. Learners benefit from a very good learning environment. They are complimentary about access to computers and learning resources. The college has a well developed VLE (Moodle). Learners can access extensive course and learning materials from home and they use this facility extensively. The college recognises the need to extend this system to include individual learner tracking and progress data, and has plans in hand to do this. Increasingly, learners submit work online and receive their feedback or marks in this way.
19. The assessment of learners' coursework and practical learning is good and meets awarding body requirements. Assignment design is good with clear objectives and deadlines. Comments on marked work are helpful and timely. Teachers promote equality and support diversity effectively, for example by taking account of linguistic or cultural diversity in the planning of classes.
20. All full-time learners undergo early initial assessment of literacy and numeracy. Results are returned quickly, and support put in place promptly if needed. This is organised within curriculum areas or through a separate drop-in centre. The use of individual learning plans is extensive, although these do not always specify clear targets or the precise standards to be reached. However, the college has encouraging evidence that learners in receipt of literacy and numeracy support achieve better than their peers. Attendance at support sessions is not always monitored effectively. Learners appreciate the well-planned and effective work of learning support assistants.
21. The college meets the needs and interests of learners well, with a wide range of courses across all subject areas. All levels are offered, including a variety of courses for learners aged 14-16 and higher education programmes. Foundation courses are not available in art, and in engineering apprenticeships are limited. The curriculum meets the needs of the local and wider community with many programmes delivered flexibly to meet learners' needs. Courses include those for reluctant and previously excluded learners and those with low levels of prior achievement. Progression routes are clear and learners' progression is generally satisfactory. A varied programme of enrichment activities is available to learners. The programme is very well attended and offers learners the opportunity to build credits towards an award.
22. Partnerships are outstanding. The principal is a strong ambassador for learning in the local borough and the college is highly responsive and proactive in identifying opportunities for development and in meeting employers' needs very effectively. Communication with employers and partners is very good and staff are very enthusiastic about the wide range of successful partnership work.

Employer links and work experience are underdeveloped in a small minority of college programmes.

23. The arrangements for learner support are good and the college provides a wide range of well managed support services, supplemented by good external links. The college supports the welfare of most of its learners very effectively. Attendance for learners who access many aspects of the support service is better than the college average. Staff monitor the effectiveness of the support it provides well and can demonstrate that it is effective. However, the extent of this monitoring is not yet extended into curriculum areas fully. Part-time learners make less use of support services, which the college recognises. Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access college courses is good. Tutorials are effective and valued by learners. Pastoral tutors use high quality resources and provide effective individual support.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

24. Leadership and management are good. Governors and senior managers provide clear strategic leadership and direction. The principal, ably supported by a strong executive team, provides strong leadership and drives improvement with energy and enthusiasm. The team has created a positive and supportive culture successfully that is focused on raising aspirations and expectations. This is reflected well in the college's values and strategic priorities. Staff morale is high. Resources, including accommodation and technologies, have been improved and they support learning very effectively in the vast majority of curriculum areas.
25. Strategic planning is comprehensive and appropriate targets for most key areas of activity are set. Historically the college has been successful in meeting the majority of its appropriately challenging targets although in 2008/09 did not achieve its success rate targets in a number of areas. Operational plans are aligned to the strategic plan and business planning processes are thorough. The college has revised the curriculum offer appropriately to reflect both national and local priorities and uses available information to inform further development well.
26. Governors provide excellent support and a good level of challenge to managers; they have a wide range of experience and expertise and monitor college finances particularly well. The implementation and effectiveness of policies relating to equalities and safeguarding legislation are scrutinised closely. Governors are increasingly becoming more involved in monitoring individual curriculum areas. Attendance levels at some meetings has been a cause for concern.
27. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good with some exemplary practice. Most governors and all staff have undergone criminal record bureau checks and the vast majority of staff have received appropriate awareness training. Learners, staff and visitors are required to wear identification cards

and security officers provide a reassuring presence at both main sites. The college has excellent arrangements for monitoring vulnerable learners. Policies and procedures relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination are detailed and risk assessments are up to date. Staff and learners generally adopt safe working practices in curriculum areas.

28. The promotion of equality and diversity is good overall and some aspects are outstanding. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place and a single equalities scheme has been implemented. The college monitors the success rates of different groups of learners and has been successful in narrowing the achievement gap. However, in 2008/09 the success rates for Pakistani learners, the largest of the college's minority ethnic population, declined to below average levels. The college screens student survey responses and other aspects of college activity for equality purposes routinely and takes appropriate action to improve if required. However, equality impact assessments have not been fully completed and equality and diversity impact measures are not identified comprehensively in all areas. The ethnic profile of governors, staff and especially of middle and senior managers is not reflective of the student population. Staff have received equalities training and teachers in most curriculum areas promote equality and diversity well. The college has several excellent initiatives that develop learners understanding further and these contribute significantly to promoting community cohesion.
29. Excellent arrangements are in place to enable learners to support and promote improvement. A comprehensive learner involvement strategy and a carefully structured system of course representatives allow learners to contribute at regular intervals. The college does seek the views of employers and other community groups although the engagement with these partners to support and promote improvement is not yet as effective as that for learners.
30. The self-assessment process contributes well to improving the quality of provision and outcomes for learners. Performance management arrangements are strong. Management information is accurate and data are used well to monitor performance. Quality assurance systems and processes are implemented consistently in most cases. However, although the college's lesson observation system is extensive and systematic the college has been overgenerous in grading the effectiveness of learning in some lessons. Plans to improve performance are produced and improvement actions are generally monitored effectively.
31. The college uses its available resources efficiently and provides good value for money. Outcomes for learners continue to improve and are good overall. The college has entered into a significant capital expenditure programme that is improving college accommodation significantly without any deterioration in its financial health. Financial management and control are outstanding.

Subject areas

Engineering

Grade 2

Context

32. The college offers courses in motor vehicle maintenance, aerospace engineering, mechanical engineering and electrical/electronic engineering from foundation to higher levels. Some 335 learners follow full-time courses, most aged 16-18; 67 learners follow part-time courses with around 50 pupils aged 14-16 from local schools. Only four learners follow apprenticeships currently.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on most courses are outstanding. Key skills success rates have improved and are comparable to the national average. Success rates for the very small number of apprentices are low. Attendance and punctuality are good.
- Learners' satisfaction and enjoyment levels are very high. In lessons, learners make good progress and develop good industrial skills. The quality of learners' work is good. Full-time learners achieve good, relevant employability skills through studying additional qualifications.
- Learners feel safe and work safely in practical workshop lessons. They are aware of their responsibilities towards health and safety, but there is insufficient warning signage for some hazardous practical equipment.
- Teaching and learning are good. Learners respond positively to their challenges and work well, both individually and in groups to complete tasks. In better lessons, teachers make good use of practical resources to enthuse and extend learners' knowledge and skills.
- Learners benefit greatly from participating regularly in the college's VLE. While learning areas are equipped with interactive whiteboards, few teachers make effective use of them. In theory lessons, many teachers fail to use a wide variety of assessment tools.
- Practical resources are good in electrical/electronic and mechanical engineering workshops, but in motor vehicle the workshops are cramped with a limited range of industry-standard testing equipment for intermediate and advanced learners. In aerospace learners do not have sufficient practical activities or resources.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners at risk of not completing their course are identified promptly. Additional learning support is highly effective within both theory and practical lessons.
- A broad range of courses is offered from foundation to advanced levels but apprenticeship provision is very limited. Opportunities to undertake work

experience to provide learners with industrial experiences are not currently available.

- Leadership and management are good. Effective processes for monitoring and evaluating the performance of courses are in place. Managers implement an effective range of procedures and actions to secure improvement. Staff awareness of improvement actions for their courses is good.
- Self-assessment is broadly accurate, but some aspects of the quality of provision and their impact on learning are overgraded. Strategies for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning are not focussed sufficiently well on the best use of new and available resources, particularly in motor vehicle.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Teachers identify and plan learning activities to emphasise diversity in lessons effectively, reinforced well through the gender mix and ethnic backgrounds of staff. The promotion of females into engineering is successful. Female learners are supported well in motor vehicle, through peer mentoring by female staff in the department. Plans are in place to offer taster lessons to school aged pupils to increase female engagement further.

What does Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Develop teachers' skills further in the use of innovative, learner-centred activities, using the interactive whiteboards and e-learning to stimulate, extend and assess learners' progress.
- Provide industrially current testing equipment in workshops, to ensure learners are competent in working with the latest advancements in technology, particularly for intermediate and advanced motor vehicle learners, and improve access to resources for aerospace learners.
- Broaden the provision further by extending the range of employer-based courses and providing work experience opportunities for full-time learners.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

33. The college offers courses in hairdressing and beauty and holistic therapies from foundation to advanced level. Of the 365 learners on learner responsive provision the majority study hairdressing and are aged 16-18, with 43 learners aged 14-16. Some 130 learners follow apprenticeship programmes in hairdressing.

Key findings

- Success rates are good and above national averages on intermediate and advanced level beauty therapy and manicure/pedicure courses. On the intermediate hairdressing course success rates are outstanding. Success rates are satisfactory on foundation and advanced level hairdressing courses. On employer responsive courses success rates are outstanding overall and retention is high.
- Standards of learners' work are good. In many cases learners' work exceeds the requirements of their qualification, as learners are challenged to attempt treatments and skills associated with the next level of service. Learners make good progress overall and demonstrate good levels of understanding of hairdressing or beauty principles.
- The promotion of safe and healthy environments is good. Learners say they feel safe. Theory lessons have an appropriate emphasis on health and safety issues and these are reinforced well during practical lessons. In employer responsive provision, some apprentices are provided with personal alarms to assure their safety when leaving their salons late in the evening.
- Teaching and learning are good. Good technical demands are made of learners to work to commercial timings. Learners' confidence and motivation are developed well. Teachers use their experience to set underpinning knowledge in a commercial context effectively. In some lessons the pace of learning is slow, there is insufficient challenge for the most able and learning is not always checked effectively.
- Apprentices' reviews are particularly effective and learners currently on programme are making very good progress. Apprentices are encouraged to set their own challenging targets and some have completed their programme of study earlier than originally planned.
- Assessment is fair, reliable and timely. It meets awarding body requirements well. Teachers monitor and track progress through paper-based systems effectively and course team meetings help to highlight learners who are at risk of falling behind. For apprentices there are many assessment opportunities both in the workplace and at college.

- Provision meets the needs and interests of learners well. The range and content of courses is good and enables learners to study at the appropriate level. Enrichment opportunities are good and include competitions, fashion shows, visits to trade fairs and manufacturers' product training. However, learners in hairdressing feel too much time is spent studying customer services, which the college acknowledges.
- Employer responsiveness is outstanding. Learner records in work-based learning sessions indicate very effective action planning between employer, learner and the college.
- Care and guidance are good. Levels of individualised support for learners are good. Good use is made of initial assessment and group profiles to plan appropriate support. Learners with dyslexia and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) receive good one-to-one coaching. Learners say their teachers are supportive, caring and interested in their progress.
- Leadership and management are good, with a strong a commitment to continuous improvement. Communication is very good, within an atmosphere of teamwork. Curriculum development is shared within the team effectively and the monitoring of progress has been developed well. While the self-assessment report is broadly accurate, grading is overgenerous and does not take full account of the satisfactory success rates on some courses.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Equality and diversity are developed effectively in lessons. For example, learners are able to explain how they would adapt treatments to assist clients with mobility impairment or when treating Muslim women.

What does Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Set more challenging targets for learners on foundation and advanced level hairdressing courses, reviewing the progress they make more rigorously, so as to help them achieve the required competencies in the planned time more effectively.
- Further develop the pace and challenge in weaker lessons by sharing good practice between teachers to better meet learners' individual needs.

Sport, travel and tourism

Grade 2

Context

34. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in sport, leisure and recreation and travel and tourism from foundation to advanced levels, with specialist provision for training as air cabin crew. Higher level courses are offered in sport. Of the 613 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 423 follow full-time courses and of these 47 are adults. Some 140 learners follow apprenticeships in sport, leisure and recreation.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Learners enter courses with relatively low prior attainment and make good progress. Success rates are high for learners on advanced sports courses and outstanding on the advanced aviation operations and air cabin crew courses. They are, however, low for learners on foundation and intermediate level courses in sport, although pass rates on these courses are very high. Attendance during inspection was low with poor punctuality a feature of some classes. Success rates for apprenticeships are good.
- Learners develop good vocational skills. Knowledge of job roles as well as personal and social skills are developed well. These contribute effectively to learners' future well-being and employability prospects. The quality of learners' work is mostly good or better. Learners feel safe and they comply with health and safety working practices well. Health and safety and risk assessment are well understood by learners.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the most successful classes, staff plan learning well to integrate themes relating to safeguarding, healthy living, employability skills and the promotion of equality and diversity. Activities are matched well to learners' different needs. Where lessons are less effective, learning activities and resources do not challenge the most able sufficiently.
- Assessment is fair and rigorous. Effective questioning techniques by teachers extend learners' understanding successfully in most lessons. Learners benefit from thorough feedback on assignment work with clear indications of what they need to do to improve. Opportunities to correct poor spelling or grammar are, however, sometimes missed. Learners do not reference the resources and information they use in their work consistently.
- A good range of provision meets the needs of learners and employers, including opportunities to undertake work experience. Many learners progress into employment, for example working for airlines or within the exercise and fitness industry. The college uses partnerships effectively to develop learning programmes further.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners say that tutors are approachable and they are confident they can discuss problems and receive

appropriate advice. Those with particular identified support needs are well catered for. Learning plans are not always completed thoroughly. Learners' longer term targets are not sufficiently precise, nor are they always monitored effectively.

- Self-assessment is comprehensive and areas for improvement are monitored closely. Judgements are clear, but some evaluations are insufficiently self-critical. Although observations of teaching and learning are comprehensive and helpful to staff, the grading is sometimes overgenerous.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good and given a high priority. All staff have received basic awareness training. Learners receive appropriate information and training and are aware of current safeguarding issues such as e-safety. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds work well and achieve together.

What does name of Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Improve learners' attendance and punctuality, and the retention rates of learners on foundation and intermediate courses in sport by ensuring teaching and learning meets their needs and by supporting those at risk of leaving the college more effectively.
- Improve the quality of target setting for learners in sport and monitor their progress more rigorously to encourage them to make the progress they are capable of achieving.

Visual and performing arts

Grade 2

Context

35. The college offers mainly full-time vocational courses in art and design and performing arts from foundation to advanced level. Some 430 learners follow learner responsive provision, with the majority aged 16-18 and studying visual arts courses.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. Success rates on the majority of courses improved in 2008/9. On the advanced level foundation course in art and design success rates have been outstanding over the last three years with a very high proportion of learners achieving high grades. Success rates on the national diploma graphic design course are low and have declined steadily over the last three years.
- Standards of work are high and in the case of the foundation art and design course outstanding. Work in textiles and photography is particularly good. Learners' work is characterised by thorough research and the creative and thoughtful application of well developed skills and techniques. The proportion of learners who obtain high grades overall is very high compared to national rates.
- Progression from intermediate to advanced level courses is satisfactory and good from advanced courses to higher education. An increasing number of learners accept places at their first choice of university. A number of learners who started at foundation level have progressed successfully to higher education.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are very good. Enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers use a wide range of imaginative approaches to involve and engage learners. Staff encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop intellectually and creatively. Teachers give learners detailed feedback to ensure that they are able to improve their work and maximise their grades.
- Resources for learning are good. Staff have an impressive range of specialist skills and many are practising artists. Teachers provide learners with excellent handouts and stimulating visual presentations. Classrooms are generally well appointed and resourced. A minority of art and design studios are not large enough for the activities that take place in them.
- The provision meets the needs and interests of learners well. Learners gain a rich understanding of the arts through taking part in a wide range of well organised and relevant trips, visits and workshops. The department offers

advanced level courses predominantly with few opportunities for learners to study at foundation and intermediate levels.

- Partnerships are underdeveloped. Learners have few opportunities to undertake work experience or work on live briefs or collaborative projects.
- Learners are very well supported personally and academically by their teachers and tutors. Individual tutorials are very well organised and delivered expertly, allowing learners to make improvements to their work and progress. The group tutorial programme is effective in meeting learners' needs. Staff assess learners' additional support needs quickly and appropriate support is provided promptly and reviewed regularly.
- Leaders and managers are particularly effective in developing a strong team ethos in partnership with their highly committed and enthusiastic staff. Staff feel well supported and their contribution valued. An excellent programme of staff and management development is effective in raising standards and promoting ambition throughout the department. The area is very well organised and responsive to learners' needs.
- Equality and diversity are promoted very well through the curriculum. Learners show a good understanding of equality and diversity issues as they explore themes for their own creative work and interact with their peers. Some teachers do not record the work they do to promote equality and diversity sufficiently.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and the strengths and areas for improvement reflect the provision accurately.

What does Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on the national diploma graphic design course by considering ways in which retention may be improved by introducing an intermediate level course.
- Improve progression routes for learners and more effectively meet their needs by considering the feasibility of increasing foundation and intermediate level courses.
- Develop more extensive local partnerships with employers and community groups to increase opportunities and potential benefits for learners.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Grade 2

Context

36. The college offers mostly part-time courses from entry to intermediate level in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Most provision is in addition to learners' main courses. Of the 4,559 learners, 2,551 are aged 16-18. Learning is provided at main college sites, at employers' premises and at community venues.

Key findings

- Success rates are broadly satisfactory. For foundation and intermediate level literacy and foundation level numeracy courses success rates are high. However, they are low on short foundation level literacy and numeracy and on ESOL speaking and listening courses.
- Learners feel safe and enjoy their learning. Good progress is made by learners in literacy and language classes. They quickly develop literacy and language skills relevant to everyday life and work. Learners on ESOL courses practise their speaking and listening skills in class effectively and have a good understanding of examination requirements. All learners grow in confidence significantly while attending courses. Learners develop a satisfactory range of numerical skills.
- Teaching and learning in literacy and ESOL are good. Where teaching is particularly effective tutors provide imaginative activities using topics relevant to everyday life and work. In these lessons ILT is used well to interest learners. The quality of numeracy lessons is satisfactory. The use of targets to measure learners' progress in lessons is inconsistent. Activities within some lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for the most able learners.
- Initial assessment of learners' development needs is satisfactory incorporating screening of literacy, numeracy and language levels. Feedback on learners' progress on marked work is useful and helpful. Individual learning plans and reviews of learner progress are insufficiently detailed to help learners know what they need to do to improve.
- A very good range of provision meets the needs of learners and employers well. Courses provide good progression opportunities from entry to intermediate level and are easily accessible at community venues and workplaces in addition to main college sites. The timing of courses is flexible to meet the needs of employed learners including shift workers. Literacy, numeracy and language courses are incorporated well into main learning programmes.
- Partnership working is outstanding. The college works closely with employers to develop a wide range of programmes that are particularly relevant to learners' everyday lives and work activities. Strong partnerships with the probation

service have engaged and supported learners in the achievement of qualifications and employment very successfully. College staff work closely and effectively to develop and deliver bespoke literacy and numeracy courses for employees. Courses are developed with curriculum areas enabling learners to access further study successfully.

- Support for learners is effective. All full-time learners and those aged 16-18 receive effective tutorial support. Part-time learners are supported well by their course tutors. Learners value the additional literacy and numeracy support they can access at the college's learning centre. Learning support assistants work effectively in classes with individual learners, enabling them to participate fully in lessons.
- Managers have responded quickly and effectively to address low success rates on ESOL speaking and listening and short literacy and numeracy courses. Through staff development activities, tutors have developed a good understanding of examination requirements and are particularly effective in the provision of learning sessions relevant to everyday life and work. Good communication, strong team working and effective use of the VLE facilitate the sharing of best practice well.

What does Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve success rates on ESOL speaking and listening courses and short entry level literacy and numeracy courses by implementing strategies that prepare learners for examination requirements more effectively, while ensuring that learners' progress is tracked more effectively against their learning goals.
- In numeracy lessons ensure activities challenge the most able sufficiently and that in planning lessons individual learners' targets are more specific and measurable, to enable a clearer picture of the progress learners are making.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

37. The college offers courses in business, administration, law and professional studies from foundation to higher level. Of the 227 learners on full-time courses, 207 are aged 16-18. The majority of the 1,175 part-time learners are adults. Of the 309 learners on employer responsive courses, the majority follow Train to Gain programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates for both full-time and part-time learners are consistently above national averages in most cases. On part-time accounting courses success rates are particularly high. Apprenticeship success rates are also high, although learners on advanced apprenticeships do not always achieve within the agreed time.
- Learners develop good employability skills. Apprentices and learners on Train to Gain courses are confident in their roles and apply their newly learnt skills to enhance their performance at work. Full-time learners on vocational courses develop employment related skills. Learners feel safe. However, risk assessment in the work place is not sufficiently detailed.
- Teaching and learning are good. Where teaching is particularly effective a good range of learning activities stimulates and involves learners. In the less successful lessons the more able learners are not challenged sufficiently. Teachers' questioning of learners is sometimes insufficiently precise and does not enhance learners' understanding.
- Too little notice is taken of initial assessment when planning individual learning programmes for work-based learners. Their training needs go unrecorded and the link between the college's and employers' training is not made sufficiently clear.
- Assessment is fair and reliable. The planning of assessment is good and frequent, with feedback to learners that is detailed and timely. Learners on advanced level full-time programmes are encouraged to achieve higher grades.
- Provision to meet the needs of learners and employers is good, with appropriate progression routes from foundation courses to higher education for all full-time and part-time learners. Additional vocational and higher levels of literacy and numeracy qualifications are available for many full-time learners.
- Very effective partnership arrangements with external organisations are in place. The college works in close partnership with several local, large, high profile companies where training programmes are integrated into companies' workforce development strategies very effectively. The college has established working arrangements with several large trade unions very well.

- Pre-course guidance and on-going learner support is satisfactory. Tutorials are very supportive and linked well to targeted action planning. Induction arrangements are successful and guidance for progression including into higher education is effective.
- Progress reviews within work-based learning are ineffective. They do not focus adequately on target setting to help learners progress. Employers are not involved in the process. The reinforcement of health and safety and equality and diversity aspects within learners' workplaces is insufficient.
- Leadership and management are good overall. Team work is very effective at all levels. However, the coordination of the work-based provision is less effective. Staff development is satisfactory. However, too few tutors and assessors receive opportunities for industrial up-dating. Self-assessment is accurate and includes staff on learner responsive provision. However, staff on work-based learning provision feel less knowledgeable about the process and outcomes.
- Accommodation is good across the college and on employers' premises, with many learners in the workplace having access to online portfolios. Teaching rooms are well equipped and learning resources are of a high standard. The college's VLE is not used sufficiently on many programmes.
- Safeguarding is good for full-time learners but less detailed for work-based learners. Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity which is reinforced during lessons well; however, it is done less well on work-based courses. The college is good at offering flexible provision to meet the needs of learners and employers.

What does name of Solihull College need to do to improve further?

- Extend the sharing of good practice further within teaching, training and learning and ensure that tutors and assessors become more actively engaged in industrial updating.
- Improve the progress of learners on work-based learning courses by the better use of initial assessment and the involvement of employers in planning learning, the review of learners' progress and in joint target setting.
- Develop the work-place review process so that the assessment of health and safety, potential risks and equality and diversity aspects have a stronger focus and are linked more precisely to learners' job roles and their places of work.

Information about the inspection

38. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's deputy principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of Solihull College most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Skills Funding Agency or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
39. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners 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 Solihull College offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Solihull 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	3,516		3,031	485	
Part-time learners	17,579	291	1,439	13,117	2,732
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
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?	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	2	2	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?	1				
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: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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