



# Hills Road Sixth Form College



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

Better  
education  
and care

## Inspection report

Audience Post-16	Published January 2007	Provider reference 130615
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## Basic information about the college

Name of college: Hills Road Sixth Form College

Type of college: Sixth Form College

Principal: Dr Rob Wilkinson

Address of college: Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8PE

Telephone number: 01223 247251

Fax number: 01223 416979

Chair of governors: Dr Tim Mead

Unique reference number: 130615

Name of inspector: Lindsay Hebditch HMI

Date of inspection: 2 November 2006

## Background of the organisation

1. Hills Road Sixth Form College operates from a single site close to the centre of Cambridge. The college enrolled 1,750 (1,711 FTE) 16-18 learners and 1,326 (120 FTE) (LSC funded) adult learners in 2004/05. Nearly all 16-18 enrolments were on GCE AS/A level courses. Most adult learners were enrolled on courses at level 1 or following courses leading to 'other' qualifications. About 7% of the learners were from ethnic minority groups; this compares with a figure of 4% for the ethnic minority population in the area as a whole. The Cambridge economy is prosperous. Unemployment is low, at approximately 2%. At age 16, educational achievement is above the England average.
2. Hills Road Sixth Form College was last inspected in October/November 2001. At that inspection all aspects of its provision were judged to be outstanding.

## Scope of assessment

3. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
  - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
  - achievements and standards
  - quality of provision
  - leadership and management.

## Summary of grades awarded

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1

*Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.*

## Overall judgement

Overall effectiveness outstanding: grade 1

4. The college is outstanding in all aspects of its provision. Managers and teachers share a clear purpose to ensure that all students achieve the highest possible standards and this is reflected in all college practices. The excellent achievements reported at the last inspection have improved still further. Students of all abilities achieve better results in GCE AS/A-levels than expected from their starting points. Teaching is highly effective and contributes significantly both to the increasing proportion of high examination grades and the enjoyment which students gain from their lessons. Students also benefit from the excellent choice of GCE AS/A level subjects and the exciting range of enrichment activities which are available to them. The appointment of specialist tutors has been successful in providing students with effective academic and personal support. Self-assessment is perceptive and accurate. The college's financial position is strong and it provides excellent value for money.

Capacity to improve outstanding: grade 1

5. The college demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve. Outstanding leadership and management enable students to achieve excellent standards in almost every subject. Already high success rates at GCE AS/A level have improved still further, with an increasing proportion of students achieving the highest grades. In the very few areas where weaknesses have persisted, such as success rates in key skills, the college has made well considered interventions and improvements have resulted. Self assessment is perceptive and accurate. The college monitors its own performance rigorously; it sets demanding targets and almost invariably meets them.

Achievements and standards outstanding: grade 1

6. Students' achievements have continued to improve since the last inspection, when they were judged to be outstanding. In 2005/06 the success rate for students aged 16 to 18 at GCE A level was 98% and at GCE AS level 93%. These figures demonstrate that Hills Road continues to be one of the highest performing sixth form colleges in the country. Although many students enter the college with very good standards at GCSE, their progress demonstrates that they are achieving much better results at GCE AS and A level than expected, in almost every subject. The proportion of students who achieve high grades in GCE AS and A level is exceptionally high. In 2004/05 the

average number of UCAS points gained per entry was the highest in the country. Progression to higher education is excellent, with some 90% of students progressing to degree courses, including significant numbers to the most competitive universities. Most adult students follow courses at level 1; success rates on these courses are also significantly above national averages. Attendance is good.

#### Quality of provision

outstanding: grade 1

7. Teaching and learning are consistently good and much is outstanding. A comprehensive and well established system for observing teaching and learning has been further strengthened recently. Observations are carried out in rotation by senior managers, peers from the teacher's own department and peers from other departments on a three year cycle. Good practice is effectively identified and widely disseminated. Development activities are highly effective in encouraging staff to review their practice and continuously improve their skills. Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects and they constantly challenge their students to develop and to excel. Students are well motivated and responsive to the variety of teaching and learning strategies used. They actively participate in learning, often spontaneously. They are mature, articulate and confident.
8. The college's extensive range of GCE AS and A level subjects provides students with an excellent choice. Enrichment activities are well-attended and highly valued by students. The exciting programme of activities includes both academic and recreational options. The sport and leisure centre provides excellent facilities and many students participate in organised team sports. Students who have not achieved a grade C in information technology at school are required to follow a key skills course in IT. Although this course is not always popular with students, results in external tests are above the national average and improving.
9. The views of students and parents are regularly sought. The analysis of students' views, as expressed in the regular perception questionnaires, are analysed meticulously. The results show that student satisfaction levels have improved still further since the last inspection and are very high. Students value the system of tutor group representatives and the work of the student council. They feel that their views are carefully considered and acted upon where appropriate by college managers. The college enjoys good relationships with local schools and students are well informed about the college's high expectations of them before they join. Students receive very effective tutorial support, both through their regular meetings with one of the team of specialist tutors and through the high levels of less formal support they receive outside of lessons from their teachers. Students enjoy coming to college and feel that they are recognised and respected as individuals.

## Leadership and management

outstanding: grade 1

10. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal's clear vision of how the college should develop is understood and endorsed by staff at all levels. The college constantly strives to ensure that students achieve the highest possible standards and this is reflected in all of its planning, self-assessment and review. Quality assurance systems are straightforward, clearly understood by all staff, and are highly effective. Challenging targets are set for all aspects of the college's business and are almost invariably met. The college's self-assessment report is simply stated, perceptive and accurate. The college has enjoyed a secure financial position for many years and its financial management is strong. Governors monitor the college's financial position carefully to ensure that excellent value for money is maintained. The college fully complies with current legislation on child protection and equal opportunities.



## Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	71	96	68	28	1802	97	76	21
	04/05	69	94	68	26	1653	97	74	23
	05/06	60	95			1440	97		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
NVQs	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
Other	03/04	71	96	68	28	1802	97	76	21
	04/05	69	94	68	26	1653	97	74	23
	05/06	60	95			1440	97		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	102	82	74	8	191	59	65	-6
	04/05	**				128	63	64	-1
	05/06	12	83			42	98		
GCSEs	03/04	51	86	77	9	88	44	62	-18
	04/05	**				84	51	65	-18
	05/06	12	83			42	98		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
NVQs	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
Other	03/04	51	78	69	9	103	72	66	6
	04/05	**				44	84	64	20
	05/06	0				0			

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	6868	92	80	12	**			
	04/05	7062	93	82	11	**			
	05/06	7142	94			61	99		
A/A2 Levels	03/04	2765	95	91	4	**			
	04/05	2844	97	92	5	**			
	05/06	2864	98			14	100		
AS Levels	03/04	4085	91	76	15	**			
	04/05	4192	91	78	13	**			
	05/06	4278	93			47	98		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	18	89	68	21	0			
	04/05	**				0			
	05/06	0				0			
NVQs	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
Other	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			

Note:

\*Figures for 2003/04 and 2004/05 from CPR; 2005/06 from data supplied by the college

\*\* unreliable data