North Hertfordshire College

Ofsted Better education and care

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Contents

Basic information about the college

Name of college: North Hertfordshire College

Type of college: Further education

Principal: Mr Fintan Donohue

Address of college: Stevenage Centre, Monkswood Way, Stevenage,
                            Hertfordshire, SG1 1LA

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Chair of governors: Mr S Hollingsworth

Unique reference number: 130721

Name of lead inspector: Alan Clamp, HMI

Dates of inspection: 8 – 12 May 2006

Background of the organisation

1.   North Hertfordshire College is a large general further education college. The college is located in the towns of Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth, serving a population of around 200,000 people. The college operates from four main centres: the Hitchin Centre; the Centre for the Arts in Hitchin; the Stevenage Centre; and the Goldsmith Management Centre in Letchworth. It also provides courses at a large number of other venues, including schools, learning shops, community centres and the premises of local employers.

2.   The college provides courses in 13 of the 15 subject sector areas, with no land-based or construction provision. Courses range from pre-entry to level 4. The college has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). One CoVE is in management and the second is in sport and fitness coaching, which is provided in partnership with Cambridge Regional College. The college also provides adult and community learning courses under contract from Hertfordshire County Council and Learndirect courses funded by the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire e-learning partnership.

3.   Hertfordshire is generally an affluent county with high levels of professional and management employment and high educational aspirations. The proportion of school leavers with five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades at A*- C in Hertfordshire is well above the national average. The unemployment rate in Hertfordshire is below the national level. Despite this relatively affluent profile there are also some significant pockets of local deprivation in areas served by the college, particularly in the district authority of Stevenage.

4.   The college has approximately 3,000 learners aged 16-18, around two thirds of whom are full-time, and 11,000 adult learners, the large majority taking part-time courses. There are 80 work-based learners and 20 learners on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. The college also provides a range of vocational courses for 65 Year 10 and Year 11 learners from local schools. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is approximately 11%, which is higher than that of the Hertfordshire population as a whole. The college's mission is 'to provide the leadership to develop, deliver and promote education and training'.

Scope of the inspection

5.   In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (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
- specialist provision in: child development and wellbeing; information and communication technology (ICT); sport, leisure and recreation; performing arts; literacy and numeracy; and business.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2

Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2

Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3

Quality of provision	Good: grade 2

Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

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.

Curriculum areas

Child development and well being	Good: grade 2

Information and communication technology (ICT)	Satisfactory: grade 3

Sport, leisure and recreation	Good: grade 2

Performing arts	Good: grade 2

Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: grade 3

Business	Good: grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision   Good: grade 2

6.   The effectiveness of the college is good. The achievements and standards of learners are satisfactory. The overall success rate in 2004/05 was similar to the national average. There are low success rates for apprenticeship frameworks and key skills. Most learners achieve broadly in line with expectations, based on their prior attainment. Standards of work are satisfactory overall and in some cases good.

7.   Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features. Around half of the lessons observed were good or better, and no inadequate teaching was seen. The less effective lessons were characterised by a narrow range of activities and insufficient checking of learning. Many teachers and learners make good use of information and learning technology (ILT).

8.   Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college has a broad range of innovative and responsive programmes that promote inclusion and meet employers' needs. The college has successfully widened participation by targeting more disadvantaged groups of learners. Learners participate in a particularly wide range of enrichment activities. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good.

9.   Learners receive good guidance and support. All learners have good access to appropriate information, advice and guidance. Additional learning needs are well provided for. The college has good collaborative partnerships to support the development of independence in learners with disabilities.

10.   Leadership and management are good. There is strong leadership and strategic planning. The college has established outstanding partnerships with external organisations. Accommodation and learning resources are good. The college provides good value for money. Curriculum management is satisfactory and in some cases good. Self-assessment is broadly accurate although there is a lack of rigour in some curriculum self-assessment reports and action plans.

Capacity to improve   Good: grade 2

11.   The college demonstrates a good capacity to improve its provision for learners. There is strong leadership with clear plans for the future and a focus on raising standards. The self-assessment report for 2004/05 was broadly accurate. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive, although not yet fully embedded in all curriculum areas. Finances and resources are used very effectively to promote improvement. The college has made satisfactory progress in addressing areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

Staff are committed to improvement. Success rates have improved since the last inspection and the college met its overall success rate target in 2005.

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

12.   The college has made satisfactory progress in addressing areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Retention rates have improved for learners aged 16-18 years. Modest progress has been made in improving achievements for key skills and work-based learning, and these remain areas for improvement. Attendance and punctuality remain satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning has shown some improvement. The use of ILT to support learning has significantly improved. The implementation of new quality assurance arrangements is improving consistency and staff accountability.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- high success rates for 16-18 year olds on level 2 and level 3 courses
- good progression of full-time learners to higher level courses or employment
- good use of ILT by many teachers and learners
- innovative and responsive programmes that promote inclusion and meet employer needs
- wide range of enrichment activities
- strong leadership and strategic planning
- outstanding partnerships with external organisations
- good accommodation and learning resources.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low success rates for adults on level 1 courses
- low success rates for key skills and apprenticeship frameworks
- the proportion of teaching that is good or better
- the effectiveness of curriculum management
- a lack of rigour of some self-assessment and quality improvement planning.

Main findings

Achievements and standards   **Satisfactory: grade 3**

13.   The college has accurately assessed achievement and standards to be satisfactory. The overall success rate in 2004/05 was similar to the national average. This rate has increased by 6% since 2002/03, a similar increase to that seen nationally. Improvements were due to increased retention rates and the overall retention and pass rates in 2004/05 were similar to the national averages. The success rates for 16-18 year olds were above the national average on long level 2 and level 3 courses. The success rate for adults on long level 1 courses was also below the national average. Subject sector area success rates vary from 52% in ICT and 59% in preparation for life and work, to 84% in arts, media and publishing, and 83% in leisure, travel and tourism. The success rates of adults from minority ethnic groups are generally lower than for white adults.

14.   Success rates in key skills were identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. These rates have improved for information technology, but remained low for application of number and communication. Achievement of apprenticeship frameworks by work-based learners improved in 2004/05, but remained below the national average. The achievement of full qualifications for learners aged 14-16 is another area for improvement. However, many of these learners have relatively low prior attainment. They make good progress to achieve partial qualifications and progression to further education or employment is satisfactory. Progression from E2E programmes improved in 2004/05 and was satisfactory.

15.   Analysis of value-added and distance travelled measures indicates that most learners achieve broadly in line with expectations, based on their prior attainment. Progression to higher level qualifications or employment is good for full-time learners. Inspectors agree with the college self-assessment that standards of work are generally satisfactory, although some good performance work was observed in performing arts and there is good development of vocational skills in sport. The overall attendance rate in 2004/05 was satisfactory at 81%. This figure is similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection. Health and safety practices are satisfactory.

Quality of provision   **Good: grade 2**

16.   Inspectors agree with the college that teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features. None of the teaching observed by inspectors was inadequate, although a significant proportion was satisfactory rather than better. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide variety of approaches to engage and retain the learners' interests and challenge them with high expectations. They use information and learning technology (ILT) creatively, accessing internet and intranet resources and often encouraging learners to do

the same. In the best lessons, learners enjoy learning and take pride in their progress. In less satisfactory lessons, learners are not sufficiently actively involved and there is too little use by teachers of questioning and feedback to help learners make progress. Arrangements for key skills have improved and are beginning to impact on achievement, although some learners still do not see their relevance and find some work repetitive.

17.   The system of lesson observations was changed in 2005/06 and is now much more effective. College observers have had extensive training and support. The very detailed observation reports and grades are moderated internally before being shared with the teachers. Areas for development are discussed in staff performance and development reviews and influence college staff development activities. Recent events have focused on increasing the variety of activities to engage all learners and the use of ILT. In the joint lesson observations carried out during the inspection, inspectors agreed with college observers on the main strengths and areas for development. However, not all teachers have been observed under the new arrangements, and some of the staff development activities have yet to impact on the quality of teaching.

18.   Initial assessment is effective at identifying those learners who have additional support needs, and there is a good variety of methods to provide the appropriate support. Assessment is generally used effectively to plan lessons and monitor the progress of learners. Tutorials are used contructively to set appropriately challenging targets for individuals and to review their progress. College events for parent and guardians provide a particularly effective forum for providing information about how the college works and about the progress made by individual learners.

19.   Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college has established excellent partnerships with a wide range of organisations. Energetic engagement by the college with over 1,000 employers has radically expanded learning opportunities for local people. A broad range of innovative flexible and responsive programmes attract under-represented learners and meet employers' needs. Partnerships with schools are well established and productive. The increased flexibility programme for school pupils provides good early development of professional skills and attitudes. A well managed consortium, including schools and private training providers, coordinates all post-16 provision in Stevenage and provides a broad choice of well resourced courses. A very wide variety of well coordinated enrichment activities develops learners' creativity and employability skills. Learners in a small minority of subject areas have insufficient opportunities to experience industrial practice or to gain relevant occupational certificates to enhance their employability.

20.   The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. Participation in community learning has increased significantly since 2002/03. Carefully tailored programmes serve specific groups such as travellers, Muslim women, residents of sheltered accommodation and people suffering from brain injuries.

Well established multi-agency partnerships contribute to a smoothly planned transition from school for young learners with disabilities. The college's approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory although it recognises the need for more detailed analysis of the performance of different groups of learners.

21.   Learners receive good guidance and support. Individual learning plans are detailed and are monitored regularly during progress reviews. Learners receive good information, advice and guidance in relation to college provision and career progression. All learners have access to good support on personal issues and there is effective promotion of healthy lifestyles. Specialist advisers provide good support for learners with disabilities. A multi-agency approach with good collaboration supports and develops independence in learners with disabilities. Transitions are planned carefully to ensure that suitable and timely arrangements are in place before learners start their programmes. Flexible arrangements ensure that learners who cannot attend can keep up with work related to their courses. Some part-time staff are not sufficiently aware of the full range of services provided. A minority of learning support environments are insufficiently private and sometimes too noisy.

Leadership and management   Good: grade 2

22.   Leadership and management are good. The principal provides strong leadership in setting a clear direction to improve provision. There is a clear focus on teaching and learning, and management accountability. Staff comment positively about the change in culture and improved channels of communication since the principal was appointed in August 2005. Strategic planning is strong and responsive to local and national initiatives. The college is influential in shaping the Hertfordshire 14-19 implementation plan. The overall success rate improved by 6% over the last two years and has remained similar to the national rate.

23.   Quality assurance procedures have improved since the last inspection. The new arrangements are comprehensive and are starting to have an impact in bringing about improvements. A more effective lesson observation scheme was introduced in 2005/06 which is closely linked to appraisal, staff training and strategic objectives. Self-assessment involves all staff and is accurate. There is, however, a lack of rigour in some curriculum self-assessment reports and development plans. Management information is accurate and accessible to managers, but it is not used widely to track progress against actions in development plans. Curriculum management is satisfactory overall and good in some areas.

24.   The college's response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act are satisfactory. The college analyses the overall performance of different groups of learners, but there is insufficient analysis at curriculum level. The college recognises that it needs to do more in developing its practices in relation to equality of

opportunity. The college has increased the diversity of its staff and governors to more closely reflect that of the learner population. Access to premises for learners with restricted mobility is good apart from one building on the Hitchin campus. Appropriate procedures for child protection are in place but the college has been slow in providing training for governors and staff.

25.   Staff development activities are well focused and closely linked to college objectives. Learning resources and accommodation are good. The majority of classrooms have computers, internet access and interactive white boards. Facilities at the Stevenage and Letchworth sites are very good. The Hitchin site provides satisfactory accommodation and is well maintained. Financial management is good and the college has sustained a strong position for a number of years. The college provides good value for money.

26.   Very strong partnerships have been established with schools, colleges, community groups and employers to help widen participation and enhance collaboration. Governance is good. Governors bring a range of skills and expertise to the governing body and have a good understanding of the college's key strengths, areas for development and financial performance.

Curriculum area inspections

Child development and wellbeing   Good: grade 2

Context

27. Courses in child development and wellbeing are provided for learners aged 14-19 and for adults. There are 145 learners aged 16-18 enrolled on programmes from levels 1 to 3, and 103 adult learners studying NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Thirteen 14-16 year olds study on an increased flexibility programme. There is progression to a foundation degree in early years.

Strengths

- high success rates on courses for 16-18 year olds
- well managed assessment for adult learners that promotes progress
- effective monitoring of learning targets by tutors and learners
- extensive partnership working and employer engagement in teaching and curriculum development.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates for adults on level 3 courses
- insufficient use of practical activities and ILT to support learning.

Achievement and standards

28. Achievement and standards are good. There are high success rates on courses for 16-18 year olds. Success rates on the foundation award in caring for children and the national diploma in early years are around 20% higher than the national averages. There is good progression for full-time learners from level 2 to level 3, and from level 3 to a foundation degree in early years. The standards of learners' work are generally satisfactory. Success rates for adults on level 3 courses were below the national average in 2003/04 and at a relatively low national average of 45% in 2004/05. This area for improvement was recognised in the curriculum self-assessment report.

Quality of provision

29. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and in some cases good. Learners are actively involved in the better lessons and well managed assessment arrangements for adult learners promote progress. Some lessons, however, rely upon a narrow range of strategies with insufficient use of practical activities and information learning technology. Lesson plans vary in quality and are not always sufficiently referred to during lessons. There are effective links between key skills and early years theory and practice. Feedback on written work is satisfactory. Arrangements for internal verification are effective.

30. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Extensive employer engagement informs curriculum development. Playwork provision has been redesigned in consultation with Stevenage Borough Council. Partnerships with external organisations have led to a play conference, stakeholder meetings and regular breakfast meetings for assessors.

31. Support for learners is good. Progress towards learning targets is carefully monitored. Fortnightly tutorials for adult learners encourage them to make progress at an appropriate rate. There is good reference to health and safety in practical tasks. The health needs of learners are identified at induction. Support includes enrichment activities, work placements, financial planning and help with job applications. These enable learners to enjoy their learning and develop their employability skills. The self-assessment report highlighted the need for diagnostic screening of independent childminder learners, but this has not yet started. However, a small percentage of learners have referred themselves for literacy and numeracy.

Leadership and management

32. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a new staff team in place with relevant vocational qualifications, but several lack teaching qualifications and experience. These staff development needs have been identified through the staff appraisal system. All the newly appointed staff have mentors and took part in a helpful college induction, including training on the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate. There are only a very small number of males studying early years provision despite a college target to increase the level of participation of men. One strategy to address this issue is linking with community agencies to offer 'Men into Childcare' events.

Information and communication technology (ICT)   Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

33.   The college offers a range of programmes at levels 1 to 3. There are around 4,000 learners, of whom the majority are adults following part-time programmes in learning centres. The learning centres are based on three main college sites and in three other locations in the surrounding area. Around 2,500 learners are studying at level 1, with a further 1,000 at level 2 and 500 at level 3. Approximately half of the 200 16-18 year olds follow full-time courses in GNVQ foundation, GNVQ intermediate and the national diploma. The other 16-18 year olds are studying GCE A level programmes, or are on the part-time provision.

Strengths

- high success rates on GNVQ programmes
- good support for learners
- effective use of links with employers.

Areas for improvement

- low retention rates on part-time programmes
- insufficient feedback to improve learners' performance
- insufficient variety of teaching methods for part-time learners.

Achievement and standards

34.   Success rates on GNVQ programmes are above the national averages with high pass rates and improving retention rates. Although the success rate for AVCE is improving, it remains below the national average. Retention rates on part-time programmes for adults are low, but have improved in 2004/05. Learners make satisfactory progress. The standard of learners' work is also satisfactory. Practical skills are well developed and learners gain confidence in using ICT. There are very few opportunities for adults to develop their personal and learning skills.

Quality of provision

35.   Teaching and learning are satisfactory. On full-time programmes, teachers use a variety of teaching methods, including card activities and simulations, to enliven theory lessons. Teachers also make effective use of interactive whiteboards and the college virtual learning environment. In the learning shops, part-time learners work on individualised programmes with the support of a tutor. There is insufficient variety in the teaching and learning strategies employed. Feedback on assessed work rarely includes guidance on how standards could be improved. In the learning shops, coursework is assessed only when the learner is ready to take an external assessment.

36. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. Learners in the learning shops choose the units that they study. The range of full-time courses available allows learners to progress from level 1 to a foundation degree within the college. Technical qualifications are available for all learners and are embedded into the programmes for level 3 learners. Links with employers are used effectively to enrich the learners' experiences. Local employers have taken part in open days, the "World of Work" week, and are encouraged to act as mentors to full-time learners.

37. Support for learners is good. Additional support workers help learners with a range of needs including dyslexia and hearing impairment. Support workers have a clearly defined role which supports the teachers and the learners. All learners take part in regular tutorials. Short-term targets are set which are reviewed fequently. Tutorials for full-time learners include social and moral issues in addition to guidance on careers and progression.

Leadership and management

38. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is good communication through a network of area and team meetings. Teachers on the full-time and part-time programmes meet to share good practice. Quality assurance is becoming more robust and now involves all course teams. Internal verification is satisfactory and the learning resources are fit for purpose. Teachers take opportunities to raise learners' awareness of equal opportunities and health and safety. Annual curriculum reviews inform the self-assessment report that is generally accurate. Staff qualifications and experience are satisfactory.

Sport, leisure and recreation   Good: grade 2

Context

39.   This curriculum area was granted CoVE status in January 2006 and provides
       education and training to 205 full-time learners, most of whom are 16-18 year
       olds. Thirty seven learners are studying the introductory diploma in sports and
       leisure, 78 are studying the first diploma in sport and 90 are following the
       national certificate in sport (performance and excellence) or the national
       diploma in sport (sports development and fitness). Sports academies, run with
       local sports organisations, in football, rugby and tennis involve 125 learners.
       They receive specialist coaching, compete in major competitions and have
       access to specialist facilities. Sports academy learners complete a relevant
       qualification in their respective sports skills. A-level 1 FA coaching certificate is
       also provided.

Strengths

   •   high success rates for 16-18 year olds on most courses
   •   good development of learners' vocational skills
   •   good individual support in lessons and in tutorials
   •   highly effective promotion of healthy lifestyles
   •   good sports partnerships providing excellent opportunities for learners.

Areas for improvement

   •   insufficient vocationally relevant qualifications for full-time learners
   •   insufficient part-time sports courses for adult learners.

Achievement and standards

40.   Achievement and standards are good. Success rates for 16-18 year olds are
       high on most courses. Action has been taken to address low success rates in
       key skills, and learners who do not have the required GCSE grades make good
       progress in all three key skills. Standards of work are good overall and there is
       particularly good development of learners' vocational skills. Activities carried out
       by learners on all programmes contribute significantly towards their health and
       wellbeing. The sports academy is highly effective in promoting a healthy
       lifestyle.

Quality of provision

41.   Teaching and learning are good. Most teaching is dynamic and motivates
       learners to succeed. Vocational skills are well developed and preparation for
       work experience is good. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of sports
       theory and apply it well in a practical sports context. Information and learning
       technology is used effectively to widen the range of teaching strategies. Key

skill assignments have a good sport focus, but ineffective use is sometimes made of possible portfolio evidence. Learners often duplicate work in order to gain credit for key skills. The sports academy is effective in encouraging excellence. Coaching is well planned and is of a good standard. Learners demonstrate a high standard of skills and good knowledge of techniques, rules and tactics. Teachers emphasise the importance of punctuality, attendance and healthy lifestyle in supporting both personal and academic achievement.

42. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. Partnerships with local organisations provide access to excellent coaching services and facilities. However, a limited range of short courses is provided for adult learners. There are insufficient additional qualifications for full-time learners which impact on their employability prospects.

43. Support for learners is good. Initial advice and guidance is good. Induction is valuable in developing team building and setting standards. Target setting is effective in promoting progress. Learners receive good individual support in lessons and tutorials. Careers and higher education advice is effective.

Leadership and management

44. Leadership and management are good. Communication between staff is effective and issues are dealt with quickly. All staff contribute to the self-assessment report which accurately identifies key strengths and weaknesses. Development plans identify appropriate actions to improve current weaknesses. Managers use data well to inform decision making. The curriculum area has been slow to address low success rates in key skills and inadequate short course provision. Staff development concentrates on improving teaching and learning and new teachers value the support they receive.

Performing arts   Good: grade 2

Context

45.   There are 175 learners studying on courses in performing arts. All are full-time
      and the majority of them are aged 16-18. There are 122 learners taking
      courses in acting, dance and performance, with the remaining 53 learners
      taking music courses. Courses include first diplomas in performing arts and
      music, and national diplomas in acting, dance, performance and music practice.
      GCE AS and A2 music technology are offered as additional qualifications to
      national diploma learners in the college, and to other learners as part of a local
      consortium. There are 19 performing arts learners on these music technology
      courses.

Strengths

- high success rates on most courses
- good performance standards
- much good teaching and learning
- good enrichment with a wide variety of performance opportunities.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates on national diploma in music practice
- no provision at level 1
- ineffective quality assurance procedures.

Achievement and standards

46.   Achievement and standards are good. Pass and retention rates are well above
      national averages on most courses. Pass and retention rates are low, however,
      and below national average on the national diploma in music practice. There
      are indications that retention on this course is now improving. Learners are very
      enthusiastic about their studies at the college and greatly enjoy and value their
      work. Most learners make good progress. Standards of practical work are good,
      particularly in dance. Dance learners won the UK Skills Gold Award in
      Contemporary Dance in 2005.

Quality of provision

47.   Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their industrial expertise well to
      enhance their lessons. In the best lessons, teachers set challenging goals and
      learners respond productively. There is a performance focus in the curriculum,
      which motivates and engages learners. There is good self-discipline and focus
      in independent practical work. For example, in a variety performance class,
      learners worked tirelessly in groups to perfect their performances for a planned
      show. An improved strategy for the teaching of key skills is now in place.
      Assessment is good. Learners receive marked work back promptly and there is

detailed verbal and written feedback, which includes useful strategies for improvement.

48.   Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good overall. There is a satisfactory range of qualifications at levels 2 and 3, but no level 1 provision. For many learners this is often an important route into further education in performing arts. Progression to higher levels within the college and to higher education is good. Enrichment is good and includes a wealth of additional performance opportunities. There are workshops and master classes with industry professionals.

49.   Support for learners is good. In most tutorials, clear targets are used effectively to promote progress. Additional learning support is offered promptly to those with identified needs. There is good advice and guidance related to career progression.

Leadership and management

50.   Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers work creatively in course teams to improve standards. Most teachers are well qualified and have teaching qualifications. Accommodation and specialist equipment are fit for purpose. Equality and diversity are addressed in the curriculum through the use of a wide range of texts, varied music and dance styles, and performance projects that cover topics such as bullying and ethnic cleansing. Quality assurance procedures are not used effectively to improve standards. The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan lack rigour. Some key strengths are over-stated and not all key weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report feature in the quality improvement plan. Course reviews lack action plans.

Literacy and numeracy   Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

51.   The college offers a variety of courses in literacy and numeracy on two college
       sites and in community venues, including employers' premises. There are
       currently 950 adult learners on literacy and numeracy courses. Additionally,
       1,258 learners aged 16-18 have the opportunity to develop their literacy and
       numeracy skills through key skills lessons in application of number and
       communication at levels 1 and 2. Sixteen learners aged 15-16, who do not have
       a place at school, benefit from a course preparing them for employment or
       further study. The college provides additional literacy and numeracy support for
       86 learners in lessons and for 259 learners in small groups or on an individual
       basis.

Strengths

   • high retention rates on level 1 literacy and numeracy courses
   • much good teaching and learning
   • very effective response to local needs
   • good additional learning support in lessons
   • high quality resources that enhance learning.

Areas for improvement

   • declining success rates in 2004/05 on most courses
   • lack of variety in teaching strategies in a minority of lessons
   • insufficiently clear targets to help learners monitor their own progress
   • insufficient use of management data.

Achievement and standards

52.   Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Retention rates on level 1 literacy
       and numeracy courses have been high over the last three years. However, in
       2004/05, success rates on most courses declined. Learners are making
       satisfactory progress in the current year. The standard of work of many
       learners is good and they develop high levels of confidence. Learners are able
       to explain confidently the impact their improved skills have had on their lives,
       such as being able to help their children. Most learners enjoy their lessons.

Quality of provision

53.   Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, there is well planned use
       of a variety of methods including practical activities. In these lessons, staff pay
       close attention to individual needs. However, a minority of lessons lack variety
       of teaching strategies to enable learners to develop their understanding of new
       concepts. Learners benefit from good additional learning support in lessons.
       There are good resources and accommodation. Targets that are set in

individual learning plans are clear to teachers but are not sufficiently clear to enable learners to monitor their own progress.

54. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. The college's response to local needs is very effective. It works well with local employers and other organisations to plan and develop a good range of courses. Employers value highly the responsiveness of the college. There is a particularly good course for young learners of school age.

55. Support for learners is satisfactory. Teachers provide effective personal and subject support. Learners are well-informed about the support services offered by the college. Appropriate guidance is provided on progression routes within the college and to employment.

Leadership and management

56. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have a detailed strategy for the development and improvement of literacy and numeracy across the college. The college has worked in partnership with other colleges and the local Learning and Skills Council to plan how area targets for skills for life can be achieved. This has also enabled useful sharing of good practice at a senior level. However, processes to ensure regular sharing of good practice between teams within the college are not yet fully developed. Staff have been actively involved in the self-assessment process. The curriculum self-assessment report is insufficiently rigorous. There is insufficient use of management data to set targets and monitor progress in development plans.

Business   Good: grade 2

Context

57.   The college offers a range of courses for full-time and part-time learners. There
       are 190 full-time learners, the vast majority of whom are aged 16-18 years. The
       courses offered to full-time learners include GNVQ foundation and intermediate
       business, national certificate and national diploma in business, NVQs in
       administration, and AS and A2 business studies. There are 1,330 part-time
       learners, most of whom are adults. The courses offered to part-time learners
       include a range of bookkeeping and accounting courses, and NVQs in
       administration. There are 24 learners on work-based learning programmes.
       Approximately 800 adult learners are studying on management and professional
       courses and were not included in this inspection.

Strengths

   - high success rates on most long courses
   - good rates of progression for full-time learners
   - good individual support from teachers and personal tutors
   - good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

   - low success rates for work-based learners
   - weak planning limits the effectiveness of some lessons.

Achievement and standards

58.   Achievement and standards are good. Success rates on most long courses are
       high, showing significant increases over the last three years. Pass rates are high
       with many learners achieving high grades. Most learners make satisfactory
       progress when considering their prior attainment. Progression to the next level
       of study for full-time learners is good, as are rates of progression to higher
       education. Success rates for work-based learners have recently improved
       although too many learners do not complete all aspects of their training
       programmes. Learners are generally well motivated and written work is
       generally of a good standard.

Quality of provision

59.   Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The better lessons are planned
       carefully. This planning recognises individual needs, and teaching succeeds in
       motivating learners to achieve. Planning is weak for some lessons. These
       lessons have a narrow range of methods to engage the learners, and do not
       utilise learners' prior experiences. Initial assessment is not always used
       effectively in planning learning. Lesson plans recognise the need to assess
       learning, but often questions are not used effectively to involve all learners and

check understanding. Most use of information learning technology (ILT) is for presentations and is not used interactively with learners. Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory. Work is assessed accurately and for most learners feedback is timely and helps them improve.

60.   Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. There is a good range of programmes which promotes progression. A wide range of curriculum related enrichment activities is provided. Learners enjoy enrichment and the activities contribute to the development of their employability skills.

61.   Support for learners is good. Teachers and personal tutors respond to learners' individual needs and provide effective advice on how to improve performance. Personal tutors set and monitor short-term targets effectively, and are quick to follow up poor attendance or punctuality. Recently introduced electronic portfolios have improved support and communications for learners on work-based programmes and have increased the motivation of these learners.

Leadership and management

62.   Leadership and management are good. There is good communication between managers and teachers, and a clear focus on raising standards. There is effective monitoring of learner recruitment, retention and achievement against targets at team, curriculum and faculty level. Curriculum area self-assessment reports are generally accurate although quality improvement plans contain insufficient detailed actions relating to improving teaching and learning. Staff are supported effectively to gain teaching qualifications. The deployment of staff is systematically monitored and adjustments are made to ensure that it is effective.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, 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	02/03	569	61	56	5	3275	34	55	-21
	03/04	459	69	60	9	1490	54	59	-5
	04/05	525	61			1365	54		
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	90	72	60	12	2	50	47	3
	03/04	101	70	65	5	2	50	52	-2
	04/05	91	78			2	100		
NVQs	02/03	88	75	56	19	21	81	57	24
	03/04	97	66	61	5	11	27	62	-35
	04/05	127	77			1	0		
Other	02/03	391	55	56	-1	3252	33	55	-22
	03/04	261	69	60	9	1477	55	59	-4
	04/05	307	50			1362	54		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, 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	02/03	821	55	52	3	1154	46	49	-3
	03/04	879	58	56	2	1228	47	53	-6
	04/05	865	66			1215	53		
GCSEs	02/03	172	64	57	7	142	73	55	18
	03/04	103	70	61	9	166	75	59	16
	04/05	95	68			197	74		
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	136	68	59	9	3	67	53	14
	03/04	167	70	63	7	12	67	57	10
	04/05	148	76			8	88		
NVQs	02/03	198	48	42	6	195	54	49	5
	03/04	140	51	52	-1	161	37	53	-16
	04/05	176	62			151	65		
Other	02/03	315	49	50	-1	814	39	48	-9
	03/04	469	52	54	-2	889	44	52	-8
	04/05	446	64			859	47		

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, 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	02/03	1066	54	62	-8	759	57	51	6
	03/04	1097	65	64	1	807	51	53	-2
	04/05	1088	69			840	55		
A/A2 Levels	02/03	132	75	82	-7	119	65	63	2
	03/04	166	81	84	-3	117	60	66	-6
	04/05	203	80			107	68		
AS Levels	02/03	420	48	61	-13	180	52	48	4
	03/04	467	58	63	-5	183	50	50	0
	04/05	379	69			181	54		
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	375	51	50	1	32	19	45	-26
	03/04	122	63	52	11	22	32	43	-11
	04/05	150	55			10	40		
NVQs	02/03	19	68	51	17	99	45	45	0
	03/04	23	43	54	-11	139	47	47	0
	04/05	44	84			169	60		
Other	02/03	120	60	55	5	329	65	54	11
	03/04	319	71	56	15	346	52	56	-4
	04/05	312	65			373	51		

Table 4

1. Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2003 to 2005.

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	38	16	32	34	47
	Advanced	23	9	31	43	48
2004/05	Apprenticeship	68	26	38	43	50
	Advanced	42	29	34	60	48

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	36	6	16	8	24
	Advanced	24	8	19	38	30
2004/05	Apprenticeship	63	13	21	22	29
	Advanced	43	28	21	58	31

*   The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

**   College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

2. Outcomes on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes managed by the college 2003 to 2005.

Year	Number of starts in year	Achieved Objectives *	Progression **	Still in learning
2003/04	107	40	42	0
2004/05	79	66	38	0

*   These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

**   Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period