

London Borough of Bexley Adult Education College

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Arts, media and publishing
- Languages, literature and culture
- Literacy and numeracy
- Independent living and leisure skills
- Family learning

Description of the provider

1. Bexley is a unitary authority within the Thames Gateway area. The authority is responsible for provision of adult and community learning. The college sits within the authority's children's and young people's services directorate and is Bexley council's main provider of adult education for the borough. The governing body has responsibility for finance and strategy, with direct control over spending and commissioning adult learning provision and overseeing quality assurance. The current principal was appointed in summer 2008. The college employs 490 part-time and full-time staff, including around 350 fractional and part-time tutors.
2. The college delivers over 1,000 courses to approximately 9,000 learners, comprising 13,000 enrolments a year across all 15 sector subject areas, and including discrete courses for schools as part of Bexley's complementary curriculum within its 14–19 strategy. Accredited courses make up 53% of provision. Bexley Adult Education College (AEC) operates from 54 main and community venues, during daytime, evenings, weekdays and weekends. The learndirect provision, which was not inspected, comprised 1,286 learners in 2007/08.
3. With a population of around 217,000, around 15% of Bexley's population is of school age (5-15); just over 63% are of working age (16-64); and around 16% are aged 65 or over. The percentage of local residents from minority ethnic groups is only 12.1%, considerably less than the regional average of 40.2%.
4. The borough has low unemployment levels of 1.8 % (2007), compared with the regional average of around 2.7%. Many of the borough's population are in relatively low-paid jobs and average weekly earnings fall below both the regional and national average.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

Arts, media and publishing	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Languages, literature and culture	Good: Grade 2
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Independent living and leisure skills	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Family learning	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management are all satisfactory, as are measures to ensure equality of opportunity. Measures to provide safeguarding for young people and vulnerable adults are adequate. Capacity to improve was judged to be good.
6. Provision in family learning and in languages, literature and culture is good. In arts, media and publishing, in literacy and numeracy, and in independent living and leisure skills, provision is satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade: 2

7. Bexley AEC has demonstrated good capacity to improve. Most areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been dealt with or are currently receiving attention. The local authority and governing body provide very good support and have a clear and well communicated understanding of the steps needed to secure further improvement. The new principal and senior managers provide good leadership. A clear direction for the college has been set out, and some major quality improvements have been made in the past ten months. Resources, accommodation and communications have been the subject of recent improvements, and are now good. Data is now much more widely accessible and is used by managers across the provision to review performance and make improvements. Marketing information, and advice and guidance to learners are good, though there is ineffective evaluation of the impact of information advice and guidance provision. Responsiveness to stakeholder views is good.
8. The college's self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the resultant report is comprehensive, including self-assessment and grading of all support and administrative functions of the college, plus a well articulated quality improvement plan, in addition to management and sector subject area assessments. The reports from each sector area are subject to peer moderation involving other colleges. However, at the most recent moderation, two areas were overgraded. Overall, the current report is suitably critical however, some sector subject areas failed to prioritise a number of strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors.

Key strengths

- Good leadership
- Good development of learners' confidence and skills
- Very effective partnership working
- Good support for learners

Key areas for improvement

- Further develop quality improvement procedures
- Develop the college's skills for life strategy
- Improve initial assessment and target setting
- Continue to increase the proportion of good and better teaching

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

9. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. In accredited provision, success rates on level 1 long courses have held steady at around the national average for the past three years. Success rates on long level 2 courses were 6% above national rates in 2006/07 and rose a further 3% during 2007/08. Success rates on short courses have been at or very slightly below the national rate during the past three years. The number of learners accessing accredited qualifications is increasing in literacy, numeracy, and family learning courses, though further improvement is needed in literacy and numeracy. Achievements on non-accredited provision are generally satisfactory. In some cases, data on learners' achievements are affected by non-return of individual learning plan outcomes from tutors. Retention rates are good in all inspected areas, and have shown a rising trend across the provision as a whole. Attendance during the inspection was satisfactory.
10. Learners' confidence and skills are very successfully developed in most areas. Many learners are able to play a more productive part in their children's lives and schooling, or are able to play a more active role in their communities, as a result of successes on courses. For many older learners, courses form an important factor in continuing health and in engagement with the community.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in arts, media and publishing craft courses, and in family learning. In the remaining areas there is a need, recognised by the college, to increase the proportion of good or better teaching. The quality of initial assessment and the links between initial assessment and individual learning plans (ILPs) are inadequate in too many areas. The college recognises this as an area for development and work is underway to bring about improvement. Assessment and support for learners in class are both satisfactory. In some areas, tutors made insufficient use of ILT in teaching and learning.
12. The range of courses is satisfactory overall, and good in languages, literature and culture. Many learners are able to access courses close to their homes at times which are convenient. In arts, media and publishing, there are insufficient progression opportunities for learners, many of whom remain on the same courses for many years. In literacy and numeracy the programme offer is insufficiently flexible to meet local needs.

13. Support for learners is good across all areas. Learner support provision and tutor support are good. Learners receive good advice and guidance and have a good understanding of the ways that staff can assist them with their work or with specific needs.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: 3: Grade: satisfactory

14. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leadership is good. Two members of the local authority are actively involved in the oversight of adult and community provision. They visit frequently for both formal meetings and informal contact with learners. The governors are very committed and represent a wide variety of skills and experience from the community. They have an overview of the strategic and operational management of the college and also have individual link capacities to various curriculum and college functions. The principal has been in post for ten months and achieved much in terms of sharpening the focus on quality improvement. Strategies for future improvement are clear and well communicated. The college has a clear management structure that is understood by all staff with clear role definition for the four senior managers.

15. Communication is good within the college with effective meetings, newsletters and email communication. Communication between the college, the local authority and the various partners is also very good. The college is highly responsive to requests for information and provides very good support for any training events with partners. The college has recognised the growing importance of links with employers and has recently strengthened communication in this area. The management overall and the management within curriculum areas are satisfactory.

16. The management of resources is good. The college has completed an accommodation survey to ensure that the accommodation can be used in a more efficient and cost effective way. Many of the buildings have been refurbished and some unsuitable accommodation demolished and replaced with new fit-for-purpose buildings. The college has secured capital funding for an additional learning centre in the central part of the borough. Classrooms are suitable and mainly well equipped with many electronic 'smart boards'. The kitchen area, which was built using Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding for a cookery skills course for students with a learning disability, has now been extended to provide training for level 2 courses. Bexley has also developed a hairdressing academy which offers level 2 training and a professional service from an initial request for non-accredited provision from a small community group. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and opportunities for continuing professional development are good. Several tutors are being supported both financially and in terms of time to complete higher degrees and other professional qualifications.

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17. Partnership working is very effective. Bexley AEC has developed strong links in the community and with the local schools, and has worked closely with the local authority's complementary curriculum co-ordinator to provide a range of options for the 14 to 19 age group, such as first aid, food hygiene, and health and safety. The college has made good progress this year to develop links with schools as employers by providing enrichment courses for school staff. The college has recently appointed a curriculum manager responsible for business development and employer engagement, and to develop and expand on several initiatives already in place. The college has worked with a large supermarket to offer pre- and post-shift courses in languages. Several links with the primary care trust have led to various initiatives such as a free 12-week health trainers' course.
18. Arrangements to secure equality of opportunity are satisfactory overall. The college presents a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment which is greatly valued by learners. A well-established equality and diversity committee oversees work towards the college's equality and diversity impact measures, which are narrow in range but appropriately challenging. The group is well selected to represent key areas of college activity, including individuals from family learning, neighbourhood learning, student services and the learner body, as well as tutors and senior managers. In addition, the local authority equalities officer attends, to translate borough policies into an appropriate context for adult and community learners.
19. The college Head of Curriculum communicates with curriculum managers on the work and proposals of the equalities committee, and all monthly curriculum and team meetings have standing agenda items on equality and diversity. Training is planned for curriculum co-ordinators in equalities impact assessment working, to further promote the awareness of diversity in curriculum design and lesson planning. The college does not yet have a clearly defined Skills for Life strategy, although a range of documents exist which outline measures in place and agreements with the authority to tackle literacy and numeracy needs in the borough.
20. The impact of these procedures to date is satisfactory. Outreach work amongst groups whose first language is not English is not extensive, but is developing, and has resulted in some tailored provision to attract under-represented groups. Collaborative links with a variety of local communities and with specialist providers and agencies, including schools, have enabled the college to use a broad range of outreach venues to broaden learner involvement and participation by hard to reach groups. A college group has recently been convened to monitor performance by different groups, and to translate key college documents into easy-read summaries for learners who have literacy needs or whose first language is not English. The college recognises the need to do more to reach non-English users in the community. Staff awareness of equality and diversity issues has been raised during the past two years by a range of training to increase understanding of deafness and hearing impairment, visual impairment, mental disorders and other issues.

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21. Learners' work is celebrated adequately in a series of events attended by parents, carers, senior staff and governors. At these events, the college makes use of signers and ensures appropriate access for all learners and guests.
 22. Measures to safeguard young people and vulnerable adults meet current government requirements. Enhanced CRB checks are conducted on all AEC volunteers, adult helpers and staff who have contact with learners. The college learner support manager has close liaison with an appropriate range of specialist agencies to support vulnerable learners. Staff at AEC have an adequate understanding of their role in safeguarding.
 23. Quality improvement is satisfactory. The college has a good range of quality controls and quality improvement measures within a comprehensive quality schedule. This is well developed but various aspects of the provision are still in need of development. These include course documentation, the recognition and recording of progression achievement (RARPA), and the development of the virtual learning environment. The analysis and use of data, particularly the equality of opportunity data, has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Data is readily available through the management information system, although access is limited to a small number of staff. More staff are currently being trained to use the management information system. In languages, the observations of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but there is an overemphasis on teaching, with too little information about the learning. Areas for improvement identified at previous observations of teaching and learning remain, with no remedial action planned in some cases. The local authority also completes additional observations of teaching and learning and submits an annual report to the college. The college belongs to a peer review group with three other local adult education colleges with mutual moderation and sharing of good practice.
 24. Individual learning plans are not always completed and many lack realistic and measurable targets. The individual learning plan pack in the arts is good but is not being used by all tutors. Although a few curriculum areas have demonstrated good use of RARPA with clear targets, RARPA over the main provision is not well developed.
 25. The self-assessment process is good. The process is well established and includes all staff. Each tutor completes an end of course evaluation and the college collects learner and partner views. These are collated and analysed and contribute towards the self-assessment for each sector subject area. The college conducts a formal internal moderation of all the sector subject area self-assessment reports before external moderation with another local adult education college. The self-assessment for each sector subject area is very detailed, with judgements which broadly agree with those made by inspectors. The self-assessment report for the college as a whole is similarly accurate, but contains too much information. The college has recognised this and plans to produce a

more condensed self-assessment report. The grades awarded in the self-assessment report are a good match with those awarded at inspection.

What learners like:

- The friendly teaching and centre staff
- Making new friends
- 'classes are my life-line'
- The safe, welcoming environment
- Good parking at centres
- Good canteen facilities

What learners think could improve:

- Having to wait to start courses
- Greater clarity about course levels
- 'There are fewer courses than there used to be'
- Better car-park lighting at brampton centre

Sector subject areas

Arts, media and publishing

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

26. Bexley AEC offers art, craft, music, dance and photography classes. During the inspection there were 71 courses running, predominantly in art and craft (40%), but also in photography, music, dance and performing arts. There are eight accredited courses, spanning levels 1 to 3. Classes take place at 3 main sites and a range of community settings during afternoons, evenings and weekends. Classes run for 10 to 28 weeks. Currently there are 1003 learners on courses, including 233 who are new to the college. Male learners make up around 25% of the intake. The area is managed by a curriculum manager, overseeing 52 part-time tutors.

Strengths

- High retention rates
- High standard of work in craft classes
- Good acquisition of personal and social skills
- Good teaching in craft
- Good resources

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates
- Insufficient progression opportunities
- Insufficient recognition and recording of progress and achievement
- Insufficiently developed observations of teaching and learning

Achievement and standards

27. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Retention rates are good at 93% in 2006/07, and 96% in 2007/08.

28. The provision has 7% of its courses accredited. The success rate for these in 2007/08 was 53%, a declining figure over the past three years. Non-accredited courses have a success rate of 71%. However, data for non-accredited provision is not reliable because of an incomplete return of individual learning plans (ILPs) by tutors.

29. In craft classes there is a good standard of work. Learners gain skills with a good focus on design and creativity. New learners make significant progress and are able to complete complex tasks in a short time. The learners gain confidence to

experiment with fabrics and techniques to produce good work. Learners are able to articulate well what they have learnt. They enjoy class discussions and critiques. Peer support is good in classes. Learners are highly motivated and many consider classes to be the highlight of their week.

30. An extensive range of stimulating enrichment activities enhance learning opportunities. Learners exhibit work during adult learners' week, around centres and in the gallery at the Sidcup site. Learners on the needlework and patchwork courses visit exhibitions. Art classes visit galleries frequently. Jewellery classes make gifts for family and friends, in gold, silver and semi precious stones. In soft furnishing sessions, advanced learners are accepting orders for curtains and many set up small businesses after attending courses. Learners derive therapeutic benefits from attending the classes and make good personal and social gains.

Quality of provision

31. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching is good or better in craft. Tutors have extensive specialist knowledge and some are practitioners in their field. Tutors have high expectations of their learners and lessons are challenging. They set goals which stretch the learners. Activities are well planned, stimulating and challenging. There are effective demonstrations from knowledgeable tutors who follow this with sensitive one-to-one advice and guidance during sessions. Good handouts are given to learners to use when working at home. Most learners recognise their progress and enjoy engaging at a higher level.
32. Learners are not always sufficiently challenged in art lessons. In art classes, learners are not encouraged to keep sketch books or practise their skills at home or outside college. Tutors are reluctant to challenge learners to experiment and explore through a range of media. Learners in established groups are often repeating exercises. In all of the sessions visited learners were not encouraged to use ILT for research or as a tool for their work.
33. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to progress to a higher level. Most classes are of mixed ability and in the better sessions this works well. In the weaker sessions differentiation of learners' activities is not practised either by task or outcome. Many learners re-enrol on the same course year after year making little progress.
34. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners feel supported and tutors are aware of any discreet support required, making suitable arrangements for specialist interventions where necessary. While appropriate information advice and guidance are provided to classes towards the end of each course, measures are not in place to evaluate its effectiveness in encouraging and enabling progression.

Leadership and management

35. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Accommodation in the college's three main centres is good. Classrooms are airy with good lighting. In sewing rooms there are large cutting tables and spacious working surfaces. The pottery room is purpose built, has good wheels, kilns and storage facilities. All the art rooms have sinks and are large enough to accommodate a whole class using easels.
36. ILPs are not effective in recording progress or measuring success. In many sessions the ILP pack is not completed. Some tutors have added to the format with success, others have converted individual plans into a document to be completed by a whole group. Photographic evidence is not always used to full effect. There has been staff development in this area but it is not yet having sufficient impact on the process.
37. The observations of teaching and learning are insufficiently developed, and have an emphasis on teaching rather than learning. Feedback sheets contain insufficient evaluative comments and the action plans are not reflective of the grading. Not all the observations are carried out by subject specialists and some grades are higher than those during inspection. The service maintained a two-year cycle for observations, which has now been identified as an area for attention.
38. Staff development is taking place and some tutors have had the opportunities to update their specialist skills. However, in this area attendance at meetings is poor.
39. The promotion of equal opportunities and diversity is satisfactory. There is some cultural diversity in the curriculum, with good promotion of Batik and silk painting, film study of world films, belly dancing and American line dancing.
40. The self-assessment is broadly accurate with the areas for improvement closely matching the inspection findings. The strengths identified by the area team did not closely match inspectors' findings.

Languages literature and culture

Good: Grade 2

Context

41. Currently there are 987 learners attending nine classes in English and 58 classes in 12 foreign languages. These are British Sign Language, Mandarin Chinese, French, German, Greek, Latin, Italian, Japanese, Panjabi, Spanish and lip reading. Classes of 1½ and 2 hours are held at five centres and last for between one day and 28 weeks. 41% are held in the daytime with 10% on Saturday. The area is managed by one full-time curriculum manager and two part-time managers with administrative support from a peripatetic assistant. 31 tutors teach languages and four teach English.

Strengths

- High success rates on accredited courses
- High retention rates
- Good development of listening and speaking skills
- Wide range of courses
- Good curriculum leadership

Areas for improvement

- Underdeveloped arrangements for initial assessment
- Overuse of English in beginners' level language classes

Achievement and standards

42. Achievement and standards are good. The success rates on accredited courses are high. In 2007/08, 30% of all courses led to nationally recognised qualifications. For these the overall success rate was 75%. The success rate for BSL level 2 was inadequate at the previous inspection and is now satisfactory at 61%. Achievements on courses which do not lead to a qualification have improved by 15% across the past three years and are satisfactory at 74%.

43. The retention rates on all courses are above national rates. The overall rate in 2007/08 was 85% for accredited courses and 93% for non-accredited. The rates for beginners' courses, which were poor at the previous inspection, have improved by 16% on long courses and 5% on short courses.

44. Arrangements to develop listening and speaking skills are good. Learners experience increased levels of confidence, and are able to practise listening and speaking skills in good classroom exercises. Some learners have achieved unexpected successes which have improved their lives outside college. The standard of work in class is satisfactory. Written English work is good.

Quality of provision

45. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. In all lessons tutors have a friendly, supportive manner and lessons are well paced and suitably challenging. The quality of tutor-developed teaching and learning resources has improved and many tutors make good use of ILT to support learning. Tutors have an improved understanding of different levels of ability and knowledge within their teaching groups. However, the standard of lesson planning is still variable and some tutors do not recognise the value of a clear, detailed plan.
46. Initial assessment is not sufficiently effective in establishing learners' starting points. The service has introduced formal assessment at the start of GCSE and A level courses but in many other courses learners' individual skills are not identified with sufficient clarity. Documentation to recognise and record achievement is generally well used, but individual learning plans are insufficiently personalised in many cases. Personal learning goals are not always specific or measurable.
47. Tutors over-use English in beginners' level language classes. In some classes at lower levels the meaning of new vocabulary and instructions are routinely conveyed in English with little attempt at paraphrase, mime or the use of visual prompts. This limits opportunities for learners to acquire listening skills quickly and extend their learning.
48. The range of programmes is good. A wide range of language learning opportunities is offered, and progression is possible in most areas. Timing and lengths of courses varies, to attract as many learners as possible. In 2008/09, 19 additional courses have been added to the programme following learner requests. Small group provision for lesser taught languages and higher level courses is available. The area has links with a large local employer in Spanish and with a primary school in French. The service has attracted under-represented groups, and has achieved good success with English courses for home educated learners. Enrichment activities such as visits to restaurants, and an established exchange scheme for learners of French have been beneficial.
49. Guidance and support for learners are good. Learners appreciate the safe, supportive environment. Tutors and centre staff are welcoming and obliging. Information on courses is clear and accessible. A specialist tutor will contact any potential learner if requested. The languages area also produces a business brochure and markets courses directly with schools, at a supermarket, with free taster sessions during adult learners' week and at an open day. However, course levels are not standardised across languages and some new learners find their titles confusing.

Leadership and management

50. The leadership and management of the area are satisfactory overall. The curriculum manager has a clear view of improvements needed and gives strong

leadership. Tutors are well supported by their manager, and communications are good. Short classroom visits provide further support and are useful for appraisals. Staff induction and mentoring arrangements are good. Attendance at termly team meetings and other professional development events has increased and is good.

51. Many tutors are native speakers of the language they teach and all are good linguists. Most have appropriate teaching qualifications or are working towards them. Teaching resources have greatly improved. Each centre has a well equipped staff room. In the classrooms there is good access to ICT for most learners and tutors.
52. Arrangements to promote or monitor equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Curriculum design affords opportunities to explore other cultures, but there is insufficient active promotion of equality and diversity in the classroom.
53. Observation of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Written comments on teaching and teaching activities are detailed and pertinent but there is too little comment on learning, and areas for improvement are not always followed up by relevant training. A small number of lessons have been overgraded.
54. The manager now has good access to MIS data which is used effectively for planning provision, target-setting and recognising areas for improvement. The self-assessment process is consultative and reflected most of the strengths, but not all areas for improvement identified by inspectors.

Literacy and numeracy

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

55. Bexley AEC provides literacy and numeracy courses to 388 learners on 6 sites. In 2007/08 497 learners were enrolled on literacy and numeracy courses and 281 of these completed their qualification. Of enrolled learners, 35% were male, 17% were of minority ethnic heritage and 18% had declared learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Courses are offered during day and evening times. Learners can attend a two-hour class for a maximum of 2 years depending upon their assessed level. All learners work towards Skills for Life qualifications. The programmes are managed by two curriculum managers supported by two assistant curriculum co-ordinators. They teach on a weekly basis along with twenty sessional tutors. Eighteen adult learner supporters help individual learners and small groups in class. One part-time office manager and two administrative assistants support the area.

Strengths

- Very good development of confidence and skills
- Particularly effective use of individual learning plans to record and monitor progress
- Very good support for learners

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of ILT
- Insufficiently flexible and responsive programme to meet local needs
- Insufficient strategic planning for skills for life provision

Achievement and standards

56. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners in literacy and numeracy classes develop very good skills and confidence. They are highly motivated and well engaged in class activities. They display high levels of concentration to achieve the set tasks. They are very keen and interested in improving their literacy and numeracy skills and develop much confidence from attending the classes. Learners have been able to achieve tasks which have benefited them economically, for instance, one learner completed a CRB check form independently and was then able to apply for a job as a crèche worker. The overall standard of learners' work is satisfactory.

57. The success rates for literacy and numeracy are satisfactory, at 54% in 2006/07, rising to 71% in 07/08. The service has taken steps to improve success rates by offering learners unit accreditation. However, insufficient learners achieve a full qualification in a timely manner.

58. Attendance is satisfactory at 77%. The service has recognised that punctuality of learners needs improving. Retention in 2007/08 was satisfactory at 79% and had improved from 55% in 2006/07.

Quality of provision

59. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better classes, lessons are well planned with good schemes of work which satisfy requirements for accreditation. Tutors create a positive and friendly atmosphere in the class and have a good rapport with learners. They produce some colourful materials to help learners achieve the set learning objectives. Tutors give learners clear explanations and positive feedback on their performance. At the end of lessons learners and tutors review and check what has been learnt and achieved. Learners ask for homework tasks. However, not all lessons have a sufficiently wide range of learning activities. There is a heavy reliance on paper-based materials and work sheets, even in classes where practical tasks such as texting are taught. Many lessons lack meaningful context in which learners can apply their new skills.

60. Literacy and numeracy tutors make particularly effective use of individual learning plans to record and monitor learner progress. The initial assessment is thorough and all learners receive a detailed personal interview and assessment of skills conducted by assistant curriculum managers. Learners are placed in appropriate classes. Interview forms and individual learning plans contain comprehensive background information about the learner and their goals. Learning targets, however, are generic and insufficiently personalised. The review of progress and achievement is good. In their regular reviews, learners comment upon their progress. They accurately record their learning at the end of each lesson. Many make pertinent comments on their achievements and receive immediate, personal and encouraging feedback from their tutor.

61. Tutors do not make sufficient use of ICT to support learning. Few classes have access to computers and where there are computers or electronic whiteboards, technical problems often occur. Learners have few opportunities to develop their IT skills while improving their writing, research or discussion skills.

62. The support for learners is very good. Specialist information, advice and guidance workers visit literacy and numeracy classes and encourage learners to use the service, including specialist workshops on curriculum vitae writing and application forms. Learners can also access the welfare service which advises them on for example debt, accessing mediation services to resolve difficulties with neighbours and obtaining benefits. Dyslexic learners are referred to a specific dyslexia support class. All learners receive much personal support from their tutors and their peers. Classes are held in safe and welcoming environments.

63. The programme is insufficiently flexible and responsive to meet local needs. Learners can only attend one two-hour class per week, resulting in some learners taking up to two years to achieve a qualification. Although some new

arrangements are now being put in place, there is no intensive provision for learners who wish to develop their skills at a faster pace. Although many classes have small numbers, some learners have to wait for 6 months before being placed into an appropriate class.

Leadership and management

64. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Internal communication is good and effective use is made of data to monitor performance. Termly staff meetings are well attended and provide sessional tutors with opportunities to share good practice and resources. Tutors are well supported by curriculum managers. The observation of teaching and learning and the appraisal process are supportive and constructive, however, feedback reports emphasise teaching rather than learning. Although the college has supported tutors to gain the new teaching qualifications, these do not include the subject specific qualifications.
65. Strategic planning for Skills for Life is insufficient. The service does not yet have a unified strategic plan for Skills for Life in the borough. Although a recent staff appointment was made to develop and embed literacy and numeracy across classes, no specific plan is yet in place to guide this development.
66. Equality of opportunity arrangements are satisfactory overall, however, in classes opportunities to engage with issues around diversity are not taken up.
67. Quality assurance processes are adequate. In addition to ongoing quality assurance measures, yearly audit checks are made of course files and individual learning plans. Internal verification system meets the requirements of the awarding body.
68. The self-assessment process is inclusive. The judgements in the provider self-assessment report do not closely match those made during the inspection. The provider identified only one strength identified by inspectors. The grade awarded is higher than that awarded during the inspection.

Independent living and leisure skills

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

69. Bexley AEC provides courses for 194 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Courses are in offered pottery, exercise and leisure activities and pre-vocational studies that include catering and ICT. One course takes place during the evening.

70. There are 33 courses, at three of the main college centres as well as in two outreach centres. Most courses are at pre-entry level although some are now offered up to entry level 2. About 15% of the courses are accredited, an increase on the previous inspection.

71. There is a full-time curriculum manager, 14 sessional tutors, 15 learning support assistants and over 24 volunteers. Tutors work for between 2 and 17 hours each week with over 50% working for only two hours (one session) each week. Almost all the classes have a supported learning assistant working alongside the tutor.

Strengths

- Good pass rates on accredited programmes
- Good retention
- Good support for learners

Areas for improvement

- Too much unchallenging teaching
- Weak target-setting for learners on many courses

Achievement and standards

72. Learners' achievements on accredited courses is good across the range programmes. Pass rates on accredited pre-entry courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high with all learners gaining the qualification for which they had been entered. Most learners make satisfactory progress through their prescribed learning programme. Retention on most courses is good and 88% overall for the curriculum area.

73. Many learners enjoy their learning and talk enthusiastically about how they look forward to their classes. Attainment is good in most classes with students using their improving confidence to engage more effectively with each other and with the tutor. Learners on leisure courses for cookery are successfully transferring their food preparation skills into their lives so that they are able to cook for themselves and others.

74. Attendance is satisfactory and averaged in excess of 80% during the inspection. Punctuality was sometimes poor with too many learners arriving up to 30 minutes late for their classes.

Quality of provision

75. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Schemes of work are generally detailed and well presented, but a minority are poorly completed. Most plans contain information as to how the individual needs of learners will be met but there are few references as to how the literacy and numeracy needs of learners will be addressed. Too much teaching is unchallenging relying heavily on repeated activities that do not fully engage learners. In some classes the number of learners is too high for them to be engaged in practical activities for more than a small percentage of the time.

76. Initial assessment (IA) is satisfactory. Most learners undertake a specific curriculum based initial assessment. Where IA is good the assessment provides specific and accurate detail about a learner's starting point. Most tutors do not use the information gained from IA to adjust the scheme of work or to personalise learning. All learners have individual learning plans (ILPs) that accurately record successful completion of course learning objectives. However, there are insufficient opportunities for learners to identify their own learning goals or to set and review achievable targets. Personal targets are sometimes the same for every member of the class.

77. The course offer is well planned to meet the needs of specific groups of learners. The college works closely with local statutory and community groups to identify needs. The range of courses located in venues across the borough is satisfactory, though there are still too few accredited courses. Courses take place in a variety of venues most of which are managed by the local authority. The provision in outreach centres is sometimes dual purpose with other activities taking place in the same space. This has an adverse effect on classes.

78. The service maintains effective partnership arrangements with a wide range of statutory bodies, local schools, community groups and voluntary organisations. The curriculum manager meets regularly with other organisations across the borough to discuss the broad range of services on offer and opportunities for collaboration.

79. Support for learners is good. The service employs a high number of learning support assistants (LSAs) as well as using volunteers. Additional adults make a positive contribution in classes. The involvement of an LSA for one learner resulted in that learner being maintained in the class and with improved behaviour control reported in other environments. All additional adults are well trained and are effectively deployed, an improvement on the previous inspection.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management of the curriculum are satisfactory. Tutors appreciate the level of communication as well as the timely support they receive from the curriculum manager. Difficulties encountered by tutors are dealt with speedily and support is practical and well received. Staff benefit from frequent continuing professional development. Thorough risk assessments are prepared for all courses and this is an improvement on the previous inspection.
81. The arrangements for self-assessment are satisfactory with most staff making an appropriate contribution. The area development plan is detailed and contains appropriate actions to address areas for improvement. The judgements on strengths and areas for improvement made in the most recent SAR are broadly similar to those made during the inspection. However, the overall grade given to this area after moderation was inflated.
82. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. There is satisfactory understanding of the different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of learners and this is sometimes reflected in the choice of resources. Access is good to all sites and appropriate resources are readily available. The needs of vulnerable adults are recognised and protected, however insufficient emphasis is made on self-support within curriculum delivery and planning.
83. Quality assurance procedures have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. The observation of teaching and learning is frequent and thorough with most observations being undertaken by staff from other curriculum areas. Too much emphasis is placed on teaching rather than learning. Feedback to staff is timely and evaluative with suggested actions specific enough to promote improvement. Where inadequate performance is identified, support and re-observation takes place quickly. There has been a significant commitment to continuing professional development and most staff attend training frequently.

Family learning

Good: Grade 2

Context

84. During inspection 796 learners were enrolled on family learning courses. In 2007/08, 798 learners attended family learning programmes. Of these, 377 learners attended family learning literacy and numeracy (FLLN) programmes, while a further 463 attended wider family learning programmes. Of these 12% were male and 10% were from minority ethnic groups. FLLN courses include family literacy, ESOL and numeracy programmes of up to 96 hours. Wider family learning provision includes a range of programmes designed to enhance parental involvement with children's learning, development and behaviour. Provision is overseen by a curriculum manager and an assistant curriculum manager, an office manager and 30 part-time tutors.

Strengths

- Excellent achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications
- Good development of learners' skills in supporting their children's learning, behaviour and well-being
- Good teaching and learning
- Good support for learners
- Good curriculum leadership and management
- Very effective partnerships

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient links between initial assessment and target-setting
- Insufficient access to ICT in some settings

Achievement and standards

85. Achievement and standards are good. Achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications is excellent. In 2007/08, 9% of learners were entered for accreditation, and 100% of these learners gained national certificates in literacy or numeracy. Learners make good progress in working towards qualifications. Standards of learners' work are good. Retention is also good, at 92% in 2007-8.

86. Learners develop good skills in supporting their children's learning, behaviour and well-being. Most learners improve their skills in supporting or interacting with their children, for example in dealing with children's behaviour, or helping with their reading, or managing eating habits. Learners report substantially increased levels of confidence. Many parents and carers progress to other family learning, Skills for Life or other programmes. Many have become more involved with the school, as volunteer readers or by qualifying as support assistants.

Quality of provision

87. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Well-qualified and highly motivated teachers provide sessions that are well paced, interactive and challenging. They provide learners with a good range of practical activities and opportunities for discussion. Teachers produce good course and session plans, with clear learning objectives, thorough activity and assessment schedules and planning to meet the diverse needs of learners. Adult teachers and school teachers cooperate well in joint planning sessions. Teachers encourage learners to reflect on the implications of activities for their own and their children's learning.
88. The provision of additional learning support is good. The college quickly responds to requests for support, for example for those learners with dyslexia or who are beginning English speakers. Well qualified staff work alongside family learning teachers in providing specialist support.
89. Results of initial assessment are not sufficiently linked with learners' targets. FLLN learners identify skills they want to acquire drawn from a list provided by the college. Only one of these relates to their own literacy, language or numeracy skills. Learners record their progress against common objectives set by the teacher. They have too few opportunities to record progress against individually negotiated literacy, language or numeracy targets. This was also identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
90. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. Family learning provision is offered in most primary schools in the borough. The area team responds effectively to the needs of learners, schools and communities. Schools and learners are able to select from a menu of appropriate FLLN and wider family learning programmes.
91. Support for learners is good. They receive good information, advice and guidance both before their course and on completion. Comprehensive packs of information for both teachers and learners are distributed. Learners are able to attend workshops on writing CVs or completing applications. Staff respond quickly and effectively to requests for support. Learners on parenting programmes benefit from specialist support from health visitors working in partnership with the service before and during their course. Childcare provision is comprehensive.

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management within family learning are good. Managers have a clear strategic vision of the role of family learning within the national skills agenda and in contributing to the five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters'. Information drawn from teacher and learner course evaluations is well used to improve the quality of provision. Managers and teachers make good use of achievement, retention and attendance data in planning provision to meet the individual needs of learners.

93. Communications are good. There are frequent team meetings. Staff are well supported. Staff take up a good range of professional development opportunities, for example in supporting learners with specific learning difficulties or in developing knowledge of the primary literacy and numeracy strategies. Celebration of learners' achievement is particularly effective.
94. The service has very effective partnerships with schools and a range of partners including the primary care trust. Head teachers praise the efficiency of the family learning team and feel particularly well supported by them. Some consider that family learning contributes considerable value to their extended schools agenda. The college plans and evaluates provision with partners very effectively.
95. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The college effectively promotes social inclusion, for example through targeting male learners. Promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum is satisfactory.
96. Learners make use of a satisfactory range of resources, including those that they use to support their children's learning. Accommodation in most schools and settings is satisfactory. Learners in schools and early years settings are able to use furniture appropriate for adults.
97. Learners have insufficient access to ICT in some settings. Too few tutors use ICT to enhance learning. Learners working to improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills do not have sufficient opportunity to use ICT to support their acquisition of those skills. Parents cannot adequately enhance their ability to support their children's learning through using ICT.
98. Staff contribute to the self-assessment report, which includes most of the key strengths identified during inspection. However, it contains insufficient analysis of teaching and learning.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Learners' achievements in FE funded, accredited provision offered by ACL providers

Success rates on accredited entry and level 1 (combined) and level 2 qualifications, by length, expected end year and age.

2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for GFE colleges.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	19+			Diff
		Starts – Transfers	ACL Provider Rate	National Rate	
1 long	06/07	763	69%	70.5%	-1.5%
	07/08*	753	68%	N/A	-
2 long	06/07	623	75%	69%	+6%
	07/08*	528	78%	N/A	-
Short**	06/07	477	81%	82%	-1%
	07/08*	477	79%	N/A	-

* ACL provider data not validated (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

** Courses over 5 weeks long