

South Birmingham College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130461

Name of lead inspector: Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

Last day of inspection: 12 February 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: South Birmingham College
High Street
Digbeth
Birmingham
West Midlands
B5 5SU

Telephone number: 0121 694 5000

Information about the college

1. South Birmingham College is a large general further education college located across four campuses within central and south Birmingham. A number of smaller centres are also based in the community. The college's core business is vocational education and training with the majority of its further education provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).
2. The college offers programmes in all subject areas with the exception of agriculture, horticulture and animal care and social sciences. The college enrolls just over 14,000 students, of whom around a third are aged 16 to 18 years and follow full-time courses. Around 45% of these are studying at foundation level; 30% at intermediate level and 20% at advanced level. The majority of adult students are enrolled on part-time courses, predominantly at foundation and intermediate level. The largest number of full-time enrolments is in preparation for life and work; construction and health, public services and care. An increasing number of students aged 14 to 16 attend the college to study part-time and full-time vocational courses. Some 8% of the college's provision is employer-based training.
3. Most students travel to college from the Birmingham area and 73% are from inner city wards which have high levels of deprivation. In 2009, the proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C in Birmingham was 48%, lower than the national average for England. Around 60% of students in the college are of minority ethnic heritage, well above that of the local population. The college's mission is, 'to provide outstanding education and training which is primarily vocational, in response to the needs of learners and employers'.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - CITB (Construction Industry Training Board)
5. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the college:
 - BITA (British Industrial Therapy Association)
 - EDAS Study Limited (Life skills programmes)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	83 full-time learners and 386 part-time learners
Further education (16 to 18)	2,005 full-time learners and 968 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including	1,041 full-time learners 478 part-time learners
Entry to Employment	138 learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	2,478 full-time learners and 6,031 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain	2,659 learners
Apprenticeships	111 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	1
Subject areas	Grade
Health and social care	1
Engineering	2
Construction	2
Visual, performing arts and media	2
English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)	2

Overall effectiveness

6. South Birmingham College is a good college with many outstanding features. A culture of continuous improvement is well embedded and is raising the aspirations and improving the life chances of its students with great success, including those who are often under-represented in education. The college is highly inclusive and places the quality of students' learning experience at the heart of its work. Students have a powerful voice in the college and their feedback drives many improvements.
7. Outcomes for virtually all groups of students are good or better. Most areas show a strong trend of improvement with a high proportion of students achieving their qualifications, particularly on foundation level; however, the trend in improvement is slower at intermediate and advanced level. The quality of education and training is good with some outstanding features. Lessons are well planned and taught. They enable students to make good progress,

although in some cases students are not stretched sufficiently to achieve their full potential in lessons on advanced level courses. The use of additional learning support is excellent and contributes to many students succeeding in their studies. The flexible and responsive range of programmes is extensive and provides students with ample opportunities for progression. Guidance and support are good, with strong pastoral and specialist support. Attendance monitoring is frequent but attendance rates, although improving, are low for students aged 16 to 18. Leadership and management, including financial management are very strong. The college has excellent arrangements to safeguard students. Quality assurance and self-assessment procedures are good although not all the college's work, such as enrichment, progression and destinations data are evaluated comprehensively. The promotion of equality and diversity, including the celebration of cultural differences is exemplary and is very well embedded throughout lessons and tutorials. The college provides outstanding value for money and has a good capacity to improve further.

Main findings

- Attainment is good. Success rates overall and on foundation level programmes are very high and have improved rapidly. Success rates for intermediate and advanced programmes however, are broadly average with a much slower rate of improvement. The rate of improvement for key skills and work-based learning has been strong with high success rates in these areas in 2008/09.
- Many students make good progress in relation to their starting points and make significant gains in confidence. Success rates for different groups of students, including more vulnerable groups, are analysed in detail and are high or very high in most cases. Outcomes for students aged 14 to 16 are outstanding.
- Students enjoy their educational experience and demonstrate good attitudes to learning. The promotion of all aspects of health and well-being is outstanding. As a result, students are able to make well informed judgments about how to make lead healthier lifestyles and many choose to do so.
- Students feel very safe in the college environment. The good development of students' vocational, personal and social skills is strong and helps support their future economic well-being. Attendance rates are improving and are satisfactory for adult students, but low for students aged 16 to 18
- Teachers are highly skilled and plan their lessons well to help students improve their vocational skills. Most lessons meet the needs of students well but on advanced level courses they sometimes do not provide sufficient challenge for more able students.
- The college has excellent arrangements to provide additional learning support for students who require extra help with literacy and numeracy. Students who are offered support invariably accept it and their success rates are at least as good, and often better, than those of other students.
- Assessment at the college and in the workplace is rigorous and fair. Students are given helpful suggestions on how to improve their work and are provided with challenging targets to guide their subsequent progress. Individual learning

plans are mostly of a good standard and enable students and tutors to monitor progress effectively.

- The curriculum is extensive in its breadth and responsiveness. Students progress very well. The participation, progression and success of individuals and groups often under-represented in learning are high. The college has developed and sustained outstanding partnerships with schools, employers and other partners all of which contribute effectively to improving students' well-being and promoting strong community cohesion.
- Support needs are identified appropriately and specialist expertise is used effectively to help students succeed. Pastoral and specialist support are particularly strong. A range of strategies to raise attendance has been more successful in raising the attendance of adults than those aged 16 to 18. Academic and vocational support provided by the tutorial programme is good.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Large numbers of students come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds; but a strong ethos of inclusion, raising aspiration and supporting individuals to achieve, passionately supported by governors, managers and staff, results in high success rates. Demanding targets are set and met. Excellent financial management allows significant, often innovative, improvements to be made to the college.
- Quality improvement arrangements are good. The self-assessment process is inclusive and takes good account of students' views. The college's evaluation of its provision was largely accurate although overgenerous in some of its judgements. Most aspects of the college's work are evaluated well, including at departmental level. However, the use of some data and the evaluation and monitoring in a few aspects of the college's work are insufficiently comprehensive.
- Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive. The college provides a high level of security for students and demonstrates numerous good practices which greatly exceed essential requirements in respect of staff checks and training. Safeguarding is promoted well throughout the curriculum. Students have a highly developed understanding of good health and safety practice. Risk assessments are comprehensive and reliable.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is exemplary. Comprehensive analysis of achievement by different student groups informs successful action to reduce any remaining achievement gaps. Equality and diversity are very strongly and consistently promoted throughout the curriculum. Diversity is widely celebrated. Access for students with limited mobility and disabilities is good.
- Very good opportunities are provided to students to express their views about the college. The very comprehensive, carefully structured and well supported system of course representatives and monthly Principal's Question Time at each campus supplement more routine student surveys and give students a powerful voice in decisions about course and college developments. The college is extremely responsive to students' views.

What does South Birmingham College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rigour and value of self-assessment reports by: making more effective use of data to identify strengths and areas for improvement; strengthening procedures for monitoring action plans; and extending monitoring and evaluation to some aspects of college provision where it is not comprehensive such as students' progress, destinations and progression.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning on advanced level courses by planning activities carefully to provide sufficient challenge for all students, particularly the most able.
- Improve success rates on intermediate and advanced level courses by measuring more effectively students' progress against their starting points and continuing to implement retention strategies.
- Improve attendance by making sure that teaching staff maintain their high expectations of students' attendance, set challenging targets for attendance and analyse and report overall attendance in more detail, including by college site.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- that everything revolves around the student
- the expertise and knowledge of subject teachers
- the flexibility of courses and timetables
- the good support from tutors
- the safe, friendly and welcoming environment
- the interesting lessons and approachable teaching staff
- the high quality equipment and specialist facilities
- the way the college helps prepare them for employment.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the parking available
- the price and quality of food in the refectory
- more and better sporting facilities on all sites.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very good levels of support and tuition received
- professional and approachable college staff

- the flexibility provided to help meet individual business needs
- the beneficial training and development of key employability skills
- the high expectations set by college staff
- good lines of communication.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the frequency of feedback reports on students progress
- the frequency and ease of communication with the college in a minority of cases.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement Grade 2

8. Capacity to improve is good. The college has made good progress in remedying the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The self-assessment process is inclusive and takes good account of students' views. It is well understood by staff and provides a clear framework for identifying and securing quality improvements. However, despite internal validation, self-assessment reports do not always provide consistently comprehensive or rigorous evaluation. Data which could support self assessment are not always presented or used to best effect and arrangements for monitoring progress against action plans are often unclear. A few aspects of the college's provision, such as progression, are not yet evaluated adequately. The college is ambitious and has a good track record of sustained improvements and meeting its targets. Its sound financial base and strong staff resource support its capability to continue to improve.

Outcomes for learners Grade 2

9. The college's overall success rates have risen rapidly to well above national average. The rate of improvement on foundation level programmes has been significant with very high success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and adults however, the rate of improvement for advanced and particularly intermediate level, has been slower with success rates rising close to the national average. Success rates on key skills have improved notably each year and were very high in 2008/09.
10. The vast majority of students enjoy thoroughly their educational experience and demonstrate very good attitudes to learning. Most make good progress in relation to their starting points and make significant gains in self-confidence although the college does not yet make sufficient use of value added data to evaluate fully students' progress. Inspectors observed students producing a high standard of work in lessons and developing good vocational skills. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades improved on the previous year but remains low overall.
11. Outcomes for work-based learners have improved and were very high in 2008/09. Success rates for Train to Gain provision are broadly average and improving, with high success rates in some areas. College data indicate a high proportion of students on employer responsive programmes achieve their qualifications in good time.
12. The college analyses the performance of different groups of students in great detail. It identified accurately that most students of minority ethnic heritage achieve very well and success rates were just below the high college average for a small minority of groups. Success rates for students of Asian Pakistani heritage, the college's largest minority ethnic group, are consistently very high.

For those aged 16 to 18, little significant difference exists in achievement between genders although the more marked difference for adults is reducing. Outcomes for students aged 14 to 16 are outstanding, with the majority progressing onto full-time college programmes. For students with an identified learning difficulty and/or disability including more vulnerable groups, such as those who are seeking asylum, outcomes are very good.

13. The college has created secure and inclusive learning environments in which students feel very safe. The frequent and active promotion of safety is not only automatic for the people such as students but also for external visitors. Students greatly appreciate the college's firm approach to bullying. The promotion of healthy lifestyles is very strong and permeates the whole curriculum. Innovative initiatives include free breakfasts for all students who arrive early and taster sessions for refectory food. The healthy lifestyles week covers a vast array of topics including sexual, emotional and physical well-being, are proving increasingly popular and are improving the healthy choices students make. Many students take up the wide range of opportunities available to them to make a positive contribution, both in the college and in the wider community. The good development of students' vocational, personal and social skills is supporting their future economic well-being effectively. Attendance rates are improving and are satisfactory for adult students, but low for students aged 16 to 18. Many students progress through to further or higher education but the analysis and evaluation of progression and destination data is underdeveloped.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

14. Inspectors judged the quality of teaching and learning to be good, which is lower than the college's judgement in its self-assessment report.
15. Teaching staff plan their lessons carefully to provide a wide variety of activities to motivate students and support their good progress. Teaching staff demonstrate high levels of professional knowledge and expertise which help students develop very good practical skills. Most lessons are lively and interesting but sometimes do not meet the needs of all students as successfully as they might. Although teaching staff make sure that students who find learning difficult are provided with excellent support to help them improve, more able students, particularly those on advanced level courses, are not always provided with work which challenges them to achieve their full potential. Resources to support learning are good. Teaching staff make excellent use of information and learning technologies to encourage learning and are using the college's 'on-line learning platform' to increasingly good effect to provide supplementary information for students.
16. Initial and diagnostic assessments provide a secure basis for identifying students' additional learning needs in literacy and numeracy and the college has been successful in devising a variety of effective ways in which additional support can be provided. Students are keen to take up the offer of extra help and make progress which is at least as good, and often better, than their peers.

Most teaching staff are well aware of the necessity to develop students' literacy and take this into account in their lesson planning. However, sometimes they do not check their own, or students' work with sufficient care to ensure that good standards of literacy are reinforced.

17. The assessment of students' practical skills and coursework both in the college and the workplace are good. Written work is marked accurately and returned promptly, with plenty of helpful suggestions about how to improve. Target setting is good. Students agree personal targets that are designed to help improve their course performance and attendance. In most subject areas these targets are clear and appropriate and students say that they help them to direct their own learning. Individual learning plans are generally of a good standard, providing plenty of useful information to help students and tutors measure progress. In some subject areas individual learning plans are available to students on-line, enabling students and tutors to monitor progress very well and make speedy amendments to targets when necessary.
18. The curriculum is outstanding in its breadth and in its approach to education and social inclusion. It is highly responsive through a range of bespoke and flexible programmes designed to meet the needs of both students and employers. The college consults extensively with students and feedback is used very effectively to inform curriculum improvements. Students progress well through levels. The college evaluates the majority of the curriculum very well and students' destination and progression at subject level is evaluated well; however the analysis and evaluation of these at strategic level is less comprehensive.
19. The college provides a wide and varied range of subject-based and extra curricular activities which enrich students' experience. Participation is good and is analysed well at subject level. The curriculum is designed well to prepare students for employment. Access to a wide range of work experience is either built into programmes or students train in realistic work environments and undertake visits to workplaces through subject enrichment. Provision for those aged 14 to 16 is outstanding.
20. The college has developed and sustained outstanding partnerships with schools, employers, the local community, local statutory authorities, higher education institutions and other partners. It plays an integral role in the local community making a significant contribution to raising awareness of equality and diversity and in promoting community cohesion. It provides opportunities for and promotes participation by many individuals and groups normally under-represented in learning.
21. Guidance and support are good with particularly strong pastoral care. Pre-course and induction information, advice and guidance help students to settle swiftly onto the right programmes. Very good collaboration exists with external support services and agencies contributing effectively to students well-being and ensuring a wide range of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, can attend courses. A range of strategies aimed at raising

attendance levels have been more successful in raising that of adults than for 16 to 18 year olds. Group tutorial topics are well planned, relevant and of interest to students although the teaching of these in a small minority of areas is inconsistent. The majority of group tutorials promote equality and diversity very well.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

22. Leadership and management are outstanding. A strong ethos of inclusion, raising aspiration and supporting individuals to achieve is reflected in the college's values and strategic priorities. The college attracts large numbers of students with poor prior experience of education. Students attest that the college really does put learners at the heart of everything it does. Students, staff and governors display an exceptional degree of loyalty to and pride in the college. Under the current principal, a transparent, 'can do' culture has evolved. High standards are promoted positively and supportively. Strategic plans reflect strongly national and local priorities. Challenging targets are set and mostly met throughout the organisation. Strong trends of improvement are evident in most aspects of the college's performance. Curriculum management is consistently good
23. Governors provide dedicated and enthusiastic support for the college and bring a valuable range of experience. An effective committee structure and improvements in the clarity of reporting help them to monitor college performance closely and challenge managers well. Financial monitoring is particularly strong. Governors have regular training and assess their own performance. The governing body represents the college's ethnic mix, but it does not reflect the balance between genders and has very few female governors.
24. Safeguarding is a very high priority. Enhanced CRB checks are carried out every three years on all staff and governors. Teachers and governors are trained to intermediate level in safeguarding and the seven designated officers to advanced level. The single central record is extremely comprehensive. Identification cards and the courteous security presence at campus entrances create a safe environment for students. Safeguarding is well integrated into the curriculum. Students have a highly developed awareness of good health and safety practices. Risk assessments are comprehensive and reliable.
25. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Comprehensive analysis of levels of achievement between different groups of students has led to achievement gaps between different ethnicities being largely eradicated and gender differences reduced significantly. Student survey responses and other aspects of college life are increasingly analysed for equalities purposes. The single equalities scheme and action plan provide a sound basis for further developments. The college has worked hard to ensure the staff profile closely matches that of the students. Equality and diversity are very strongly and consistently promoted throughout the curriculum. Teaching staff frequently take the opportunity to extend discussions to challenge stereotypes, perceptions and

broaden students' cultural understanding. Diversity is celebrated widely in all its facets including good promotion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues through dedicated student steering groups. Community cohesion and tolerance of others is well embedded in the college culture. Students with impaired mobility have full access to the college and can review their routes in detail on the college web site.

26. Good, systematic arrangements for quality assurance, centred on the self-assessment process, exist and are securing improvements. Frequent audits of the college provision monitor how well courses are meeting their targets; focused curriculum audits assess the quality of the student journey. Detailed information is collected about all aspects of teaching and learning through extensive lesson observation procedures. Overall, the college's observations provide a secure basis for self assessment and reliable source of information to identify and target staff development activities although in a minority of cases the analysis of lesson quality is not sufficiently sharp. The college's own analysis indicates that the quality of lessons is broadly consistent between subject areas. Inspectors confirmed this, but found that the proportion of good and outstanding lessons was lower than the college's estimate on advanced level courses.
27. Very good arrangements exist for the learner voice. A comprehensive, carefully structured system of course representatives allows students to contribute at regular course team meetings and meetings with divisional managers. They influence modifications to courses and course self assessment. Arrangements are tailored to the needs of different groups, for example through providing interpreters or using more specific student focus groups. Principal's Question Time provides a monthly forum for students on each campus. Numerous examples of students' influence on college decision making include the recent creation of a help desk front to student services. The college is highly responsive to the needs of employers, schools and community groups and very resourceful in meeting them. Employers' views are periodically canvassed and extremely positive although there are no mechanisms for these stakeholders to contribute more directly to self assessment.
28. Value for money is outstanding. The college has a transformational impact on the lives of many students and success rates are high. Major improvements to the college estate, including sustainable design and construction features, have resulted in high quality learning environments and industry-standard resources. Excellent financial management enables the college to respond very positively to students' views by continually improving the experience of all groups of students, including innovations such as free breakfasts for students and incentives for outstanding teaching, whilst remaining financially robust.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 1

Context

29. Some 769 students are enrolled on a range of vocational courses in health and social care ranging from foundation to advanced level with around 58% of these aged 16 to 18. The area also offers a range of courses for 72 students aged 14 to 16. Around half of the students study on a part-time basis and a third of all students are male. Some 275 students follow Train to Gain programmes.

Key findings

- Success rates on the most courses, including Train to Gain, are high and improving. Success rates on the NVQ level 2 health and social care programme in 2008/09 however, were low. The college has put effective strategies into place to rectify this and students are now making good progress.
- Students develop outstanding personal and social skills which enable them to improve their social and economic well-being. Students make very good progress through their programmes and in the employer responsive provision they achieve qualifications within good time. The college recognises that students' attendance on many full-time courses however is low and has taken appropriate action to improve this.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teaching staff reinforce good professional practice very well and students develop excellent vocational skills. Strong links exist between the development of theory and practice both in the workplace and at college.
- Assessment practice is rigorous and fair. Staff are extremely well qualified. Their high level of professional experience enables them to provide assessment in a very broad range of health and care settings. In most cases, assignments are marked promptly and give detailed feedback to students on how they can improve assignment work and achieve better grades.
- The approach to meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. An extensive range of courses is provided with good opportunities for progression. Students have excellent opportunities to achieve additional qualifications in specific aspects of healthcare, including understanding dementia, personal safety and drug awareness.
- The college has developed outstanding links with employers which help it provide good quality, meaningful work placement and assessment opportunities for all students.
- Care guidance and support are outstanding. The college has developed highly effective strategies to keep students at risk of leaving education engaged in learning. Additional twice weekly support sessions for individual and small group work ensures students with a range of additional academic and pastoral

needs are effectively supported to remain in learning. Support for students' literacy and numeracy skills is good.

- Leadership and management are outstanding. Managers constantly review the quality of provision and demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Student feedback is valued and incorporated fully into all aspects of departmental planning. Continuing staff development is promoted and used well to develop learning programmes and services.
- Safeguarding has very high priority throughout the provision. Students' ability to identify potential risk is well developed. The highlighting of safeguarding and well-being by teaching staff is strong and is embedded through the curriculum.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Teaching staff highlight key aspects of equality and diversity frequently through their teaching, promoting cooperation and understanding between different ethnic groups. Stereotyping, inappropriate language or assumption is immediately challenged during lessons and tutorials. Staff take very good account of students' cultural needs.

What does South Birmingham College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on the NVQ level 2 programme in health and social care by continuing to increasing the frequency and improving the quality of assessment.

Engineering

Grade 2

Context

30. Currently there are 229 male and nine female learners following Train to Gain programmes in engineering. Of these, 122 learners are from minority heritage backgrounds. Most learners are aged 19 or over. Three qualification programmes are offered, each at NVQ level 2. Seven learners were enrolled to the performing manufacturing operations (PMO) programme, 145 were enrolled on transport operations road passenger vehicle (taxi) driving qualifications and 86 were on the specialist plant and machinery operations (fork lift truck driving) course.

Key findings

- Outcomes for engineering programmes are good. Success rates on the PMO and transport operations courses were high in 2008/09, with a very high proportion of these learners completing their qualification in a timely fashion. The success rate for fork lift truck driving however was low. College data suggest marked improvements for this programme in the current year.
- Inspectors observed good development of students' numeracy and literacy skills. Literacy and numeracy needs are diagnosed effectively at recruitment. Appropriate additional learning support is provided including taught sessions on employers' or college premises. On the taxi programme, team-teaching is used well to ensure basic skills support is integrated carefully into teaching sessions in a meaningful and relevant way.
- Learners enjoy their training and achieve levels of skill which are at or above that expected in their trade. On the fork lift truck programme, employers report significant reductions in accident and damage rates. On the taxi programme enhanced customer service skills are developed very well.
- Learners improve their economic well-being significantly. In the fork lift truck programme learners achieve an NVQ as well as acquiring a fork lift truck licence which is often a key employment qualification. On the taxi course learners are prepared well to be vocationally qualified as a licensed taxi operator.
- Teaching and learning are good. High quality, relevant learning materials enhance learning well. Assessment practice and the tracking of learners' progress are good in most cases. Assessment is timely, uses standard working conditions and provides clear feedback to candidates. Assessors are well qualified for their role with good practical experience gained over many years in industrial settings.
- The extent to which the provision meets the needs of employers and learners is outstanding. Programmes provide employers with contextualised and well planned training which is delivered, often on site, at a time that suits them. Both employers and learners value the college's provision highly, though a small minority of employers receive insufficient feedback on learner progress.

- Partnership working is effective. The taxi programme responds well to a need identified by the Birmingham taxi industry. The college works effectively with key stakeholders including Birmingham City Council and the LSC, to develop a programme that suits local needs and anticipates potential future qualification requirements.
- Guidance and support are good. Assessors provide particularly good care and support to learners during their training programmes. The assessors manage their key link role between learners, employers and the college very effectively. They work well with learners and employers to maximise training opportunities and provide effective pastoral and technical support throughout the shift patterns worked by their learners.
- Leadership and management are good. Administrative systems are comprehensive and effective. Managers have created a positive air of enthusiasm and a 'can-do' attitude. New training opportunities are being pursued actively and developed. Data are examined rigorously. The self assessment is largely accurate and is used effectively to help drive improvement.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All training venues, including employers' premises have a good range of promotional documentation, leaflets and wall displays. Teaching staff quickly address potential discrimination or equality or diversity issues and take opportunities to discuss them openly with learners when they arise spontaneously.

What does name of South Birmingham College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on the fork lift truck programme by ensuring retention and achievement strategies are implemented and that good practice in assessment is shared.
- Improve feedback arrangements to employers so that all employers are updated regularly and made fully aware of the progress of their employees when attending Train to Gain programmes.

Construction

Grade 2

Context

31. Courses are offered at entry to advanced level and include craft, technician, professional and a range of higher education programmes. All the major crafts are available with a number of specialised trade programmes. Of the 2,728 college based enrolments 919 are aged 16 to 18 and 1,741 are adults. A further 68 are aged 14 to 16. Within construction, 47% of students are studying foundation level programmes, 37% intermediate level and 13% are on advanced level programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good overall. Success rates are broadly average on many courses. They are high on the refrigeration and air conditioning systems course and on foundation level diplomas in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating and plastering and low on both the intermediate and advanced plumbing courses. Students' attendance is satisfactory.
- Observations by inspectors confirmed students make good progress and develop very good practical, job knowledge, personal, welfare and social skills, such as team working and environmental awareness. These contribute effectively to their future well-being and employability prospects. The quality of students work is generally good or better. All areas of the provision celebrate students' success through prominent displays of students' work.
- Students feel safe and their compliance with health and safety working practices is good. Work activities and the environment are appropriately assessed in relation to risk. Issues identified relating to dust and noise levels in workshops are being well managed by the college. In work-based learning, there are adequate arrangements for monitoring of health, safety and welfare.
- Teaching and learning are good. Where teaching is particularly effective teaching staff provide students with opportunities to produce exciting and challenging work. Good questioning techniques to check students' understanding are a feature of many lessons. The virtual learning environment contains a good range of support materials, is well used and helps extend students' learning.
- Many foundation level students are not encouraged to take sufficient responsibility for their own portfolios and learning. Their collection of support materials and note taking are not always organised effectively. In some cases, foundation students arrive poorly prepared for theory lessons, which delays the start to lessons.
- Assessment is fair, reliable and timely. Good assessment practices in work-based learning include the effective use of the many opportunities to observe and capture naturally occurring evidence. The recording of achievement informs

target setting adequately to support students' progression. Progress review targets for apprentices are realistic and achievable however; in many cases these targets are not time-limited.

- A good range of provision meets the needs of students and employers. Experienced workers can attend a range of industry recognised qualifications which increases future employment opportunities. Students undertake programmes in a wide variety of trade and professional occupations with very good progression opportunities available. The college provides training in specialist areas such as refrigeration and air conditioning.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Additional learning support provision is outstanding. The take up of additional support by students is very high and it is helping many students to achieve their qualifications. Students feel confident that they can discuss personal problems and receive appropriate advice.
- Communication links with employers are satisfactory. The department works with a wide selection of employers. Feedback is frequent for some employers but others do not receive enough information about the progress students are making or how they can support them to achieve.
- Specialist accommodation in construction is of a very high quality. All practical areas are well managed and the classroom accommodation provides an attractive and stimulating learning environment. Opportunities for students have improved through the continuing development and review of the centre.
- Safeguarding is good and given a high priority. Robust systems are in place for carrying out risk assessments. In one area, they use a dynamic risk assessment in which students have the opportunity to add their own risk assessments related to the practical tasks that they are undertaking.
- The active promotion of equality and diversity is good. A prayer room for all faiths is provided and teachers recognise the need to use the prayer room at particular times during the day. The good practice around equality and diversity within the college has yet to be extended fully to the workplace.

What does South Birmingham College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on plumbing courses by implementing strategies to improve retention and achievement and ensuring all targets within students' progress reviews are appropriately time-limited.
- To ensure foundation students take more responsibility for their portfolios and learning by making sure students have a clear understanding of employment and qualification requirements; are actively encouraged to come prepared for all lessons particularly theory sessions.
- Improve communication with employers to better co-ordinate on-and-off the job training, assessment and review by seeking and evaluating employer views more regularly.

Visual, performing arts and media

Grade 2

Context

32. Approximately 840 students are enrolled on a range of vocational courses in performing arts, music, art and design and media from foundation to advanced level, with around 200 on intermediate and 400 on advanced level courses. Over half of the students are adults with nearly three quarters being male. The majority of students study full time.

Key findings

- Success rates for students on intermediate courses are high and have improved steadily over the last three years. At advanced level success rates and the rate of improvement over the last three years are satisfactory, with success rates for students aged 16 to 18 showing the most improvement.
- Students' practical work is of a very high standard. It is characterised by a good understanding of the principles of performance and production. Inspectors observed students effectively manipulating a wide range of skills and techniques to produce imaginative and competent artistic work. A high proportion of students attain high grades. Although much improved over the last three years, students' attendance remains low.
- Progression to university and employment is good. Students receive effective support and guidance in planning their progression pathway. Internal progression from intermediate to advanced level is satisfactory. Several past students are now successful teachers in the department.
- Teaching and learning are good. Students value highly the excellent support that teachers give them. Teaching staff have developed excellent productive working relationships with students. In the best lessons teachers plan and teach challenging activities that enable students to progress swiftly. In lessons at advanced level however teachers do not always give sufficient attention challenging and stretching students' abilities.
- The department offers an extensive range of full-time, part-time, day and evening courses to meet students' diverse needs. The wide range of enrichment activities available supports students' learning effectively giving them a valuable insight into the professional world.
- The department has developed some excellent partnerships with local businesses, employers and schools. Students work to professional standards on range of high profile projects. Students come together to work on well planned cross curricular projects. The fashion show, for instance gives them the opportunity to develop successfully a wide range of personal and work related skills.
- Curriculum leadership and management are good. Managers are open, approachable and responsive and have developed a strong positive team ethos and excellent cohesion. Teaching staff are very well supported. A wide range of

effective actions have been implemented in order to improve the provision. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Teachers use the curriculum highly effectively allowing students to explore many cultural and social themes. In an excellent devised play "The Healing Ska" students explored how music challenged racism in the 1960s. Students are tolerant, respectful of the views of others and have a good understanding of equality and diversity issues.
- Students' views are actively encouraged and sought in order to improve the provision. Many improvements have been made as a result. Students give feedback to teaching staff, managers and leaders, including the principal, at regular meetings and open forums.

What does South Birmingham College need to do to improve further?

- Further improve success rates at advanced level by: continuing to evaluate and adapt the curriculum; refining the interview/audition process; and improving the level of challenge and target setting in lessons through sharing good practice.
- Ensure that current strategies to improve attendance are developed and monitored further in order to maximise students' success in attaining their learning goals.

ESOL

Grade 2

Context

33. The college provides English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses from foundation to intermediate level, at the four main college sites and community venues. There are 1,692 students on 115 courses. Of these, 1059 students are female and 972 students are on full-time courses.

Key findings

- Students' outcomes are good. Students enrol on the programmes in order to develop good English skills and many achieve this aim. Observations by inspectors confirmed that the development of students' confidence and speaking skills is good. Progression is good with a high proportion of students progressing from foundation to intermediate level. The standard of students' work is high. The attendance of adult students is low.
- Student's ability to make choices about their own health and well-being is outstanding through a very good focus on healthy living in the curriculum, and the enrichment and tutorial programmes. Free breakfasts provided at centres provide a healthy start to the day.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teaching staff are well qualified and skilled. The majority of lessons are stimulating, motivating and promote learning. Topics and resources which are relevant to students' lives such as sustainability and preparing for employment are used well. However, in some lessons there is insufficient access to information learning technology.
- Initial and diagnostic assessment is good with effective use of individual learning plans to set targets and monitor progress. Progress and development of skills observed by inspectors in lessons is good. Students are well motivated, work hard and co-operatively together and improve their reading, writing and speaking skills.
- Monitoring and assessment of students' progress in lessons are good with very effective use of observation, oral and written assessment of work to support learning. However, in a small minority of lessons an insufficient range of assessment methods and checks on students understanding are used.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding and embedded well into the curriculum. Cultural diversity is very well celebrated and students' acceptance and tolerance of each others diversity is well promoted and managed by staff.
- The range of flexible provision for 16 to 18 and adult students is good at all levels with high take up of progression opportunities. The college has responded well to the increased demand for ESOL courses and has broadened the provision by embedding ESOL into literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, childcare and business administration courses.

Course enrichment is satisfactory although there is insufficient participation in the cross-college programme.

- Partnerships are good with good development of specific community- based programmes to meet the needs and interests of students. Termly course review meetings held with partners are used well to develop and improve the provision. Links with employers to provide work placement opportunities for students are satisfactory.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Good pre-course information and initial assessment processes place students on the right programmes and identify promptly additional support needs. Multi-lingual staff give good support to students through the initial assessment and induction phases of their programmes. Access to specialist advice and guidance staff in the main centres is good with weekly meetings and drop-in sessions.
- Personal support for students is outstanding with locally-based support staff providing good advice and guidance on a range of welfare issues such as housing and benefits. Punctuality is well managed and is mostly good, although some students are late to classes after breaks.
- Curriculum leadership and management are good. Quality assurance is good and supported by focused staff development. The promotion of health and safety is very good. The involvement of students in improving the provision is outstanding using imaginative initiatives to seek their views. Summary data is insufficiently detailed to monitor effectively and improve students' achievements and progression.

What does South Birmingham College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve teaching and learning by ensuring activities, resources and access to information learning technology meets the needs of individual students.
- Improve the usefulness of information on students' achievement and progression by ensuring all data are analysed and evaluated at management level so it provides a clear overview of performance and enables managers to better target improvement.

Information about the inspection

34. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and 8 additional inspectors, assisted by the college's deputy principal as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
35. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
South Birmingham College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	4,924	66	2,106	2,752	0
Part-time learners	7,328	317	807	4,234	1,970
Overall effectiveness	2	1	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2	1	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	1				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	1				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	2	1	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	1	1	1	1	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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

T: 0300 1231231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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