

West Herts College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130720

Name of lead inspector: Paul Joyce HMI

Last day of inspection: 19 March 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College
Cassio Campus
Langley Road
Watford
Hertfordshire
WD17 4YH

Address:

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Information about the provider

1. West Herts College is a large general further education (GFE) college and is one of four colleges in the county of Hertfordshire. It has four main campuses: two in Watford: one in Hemel Hempstead and one in Kings Langley. It also provides courses in a number of community venues. The college offers courses in all subject areas with the exception of agriculture, horticulture and animal care. The majority of learners are enrolled on courses in preparation for life and work, health public services and care, arts media and publishing, and in retail and commercial enterprise. The college has its own work-based learning contract and offers train-to-gain, entry to employment and informal adult learning provision as well as providing education and training for pupils aged 14-16 from local schools.
2. The college offers full and part-time learning opportunities from pre-entry to advanced level. At the time of inspection, approximately 3,359 learners aged 16-18 attended full-time and 225 attended part-time. A further 643 adult learners attended full-time and some 2,284 were on part-time courses. In addition, 41 learners were on Entry to Employment programmes, 51 learners were on Train-to-Gain courses and 170 learners were on work-based learning programmes. A total of 666 pupils aged 14-16 attend college courses from local schools. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic heritage groups is approximately 11%.
3. The college serves a largely prosperous area, although areas of relative deprivation exist within the college's catchment. Unemployment rates within the local area compare favourably with national rates and a higher proportion of pupils leave school with five or more GCSE high grade passes than is the case nationally. The college's mission is to be 'an outstanding college that transforms lives through learning'.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - John Laing Training (Construction)
 - Watford Football Club (Football coaching)
 - Skillnet (Motor Vehicle)
 - YMCA (Prince's Trust)
 - Best Practice (Train-to-Gain in customer service)
5. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the college:
 - North Herts College (Train-to-Gain in care)

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09 |
|--|--|
| Provision for young learners: 14 to16 | 714 part-time learners |
| Further education (16 to18) | 3,205 full-time learners 304 part-time learners |
| Foundation learning, including | 793 full-time learners 88 part-time learners |
| Entry to Employment | 41 learners |
| Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+) | 609 full-time learners 3,461 part-time learners |
| Employer provision: Train to Gain | 51 learners |
| Apprenticeships | 170 apprentices |

Summary report

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

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|------------------------------------|---------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 1 |
|------------------------------------|---------|

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| Capacity to improve | Grade 1 |
|---------------------|---------|

| | Grade |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| Quality of provision | 1 |
| Leadership and management | 1 |
| Safeguarding | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 2 |

| Subject Areas | Grade |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| Construction | 2 |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 1 |
| Hospitality and catering | 1 |
| Performing arts | 2 |
| Literacy, numeracy and ESOL | 1 |

Overall effectiveness

- West Herts is an outstanding college that provides high quality education and training. Outcomes for learners are good overall and are outstanding in many curriculum areas. Success rates are high on most courses and continue to improve, although on short courses and on work-based learning programmes success rates remain below average despite recent improvements. The standard of learners' work is high and in some areas is outstanding. Learners thoroughly enjoy their time at the college and feel very safe in the friendly and supportive environment.
- The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good overall and outstanding in some curriculum areas. Teachers plan lessons very well to meet individual learners' needs and use a wide variety of teaching methods to motivate and engage learners. In a small minority of lessons, more able

learners are not sufficiently challenged and do not make the progress of which they are capable.

8. The range of courses and enrichment activities is outstanding and meets the needs and interests of users very effectively. Partnership working is outstanding and benefits learners by enhancing the curriculum. The college has developed partnerships successfully with local schools, many different community organisations and a significant number of local employers. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Learners are well informed about their rights and responsibilities and receive excellent pre-entry and on-course advice and guidance.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college has a strong record of bringing about improvements. Governors and college staff are committed to improving the learners' experience. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and the promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college has excellent quality improvement process and engages learners in the self-assessment process. Finances are well managed and the college has an outstanding capacity to make and sustain improvement.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall and are outstanding in many curriculum areas. Success rates on the vast majority of courses are high and have improved year-on-year. The college is successfully narrowing the achievement gap between different groups of learners. Success rates on many short courses, whilst improving, are below national averages.
- Success rates on Train to Gain courses are high and many learners on Entry to Employment programmes progress to a positive destination. Framework completion rates on work-based learning programmes are satisfactory overall, although too few learners achieve all the components of their programme within the timescale set.
- Learners thoroughly enjoy their courses and make good or excellent progress and achieve well. They produce work of a high standard and develop excellent skills that contribute effectively to their future economic well-being. In hairdressing and beauty therapy and in hospitality and catering the standard of learners' work is outstanding.
- Learners are extremely well informed about risks and have the secure knowledge and understanding to make informed choices about their safety, health and well-being. The friendly supportive college environment enables learners to feel very safe. Working relationships between learners and staff are very good.
- The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good overall, with many examples of outstanding teaching within most curriculum areas. Lessons are well planned and enable learners to make good progress.

Procedures to monitor the quality of teaching are rigorous and lead to improvement.

- In the most effective lessons an extensive variety of activities motivates and engages learners. Target setting and assessment are good and most feedback provided by teachers is constructive with clear guidance on what learners need to do to improve. However, in a small minority of lessons teachers do not sufficiently challenge the most able learners.
- The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. Exceptionally strong partnerships with key stakeholders promote social and community cohesion extremely effectively. Partnership working is outstanding and benefits learners significantly. The college enrichment programme is extensive and enables learners to develop useful skills.
- Guidance and support are outstanding. Learners receive excellent pre-entry advice and guidance where individual needs are identified comprehensively. When following their courses, learners receive outstanding individual care and support to help them fulfil their potential. Actions to address specialist learning needs are particularly effective.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Highly effective leadership and strong strategic and operational planning are focused clearly on improving the learners' experience. The management of learner responsive provision is more effective than that of the work-based learning section although significant improvements have been made to this area.
- Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and extremely effective in securing improvement. Governors perform their role exceptionally well and maintain an excellent overview of the college. The self-assessment process is robust and takes good account of learners' views although the use of employers' views is underdeveloped.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good overall. The college monitors the success rates of different groups of learners closely and takes action to remedy any underperformance. Equality and diversity is promoted well in many curriculum areas but not consistently across the college.
- Safeguarding procedures are good. Recruitment checks have been completed on all college staff and detailed policies and procedures are in place to ensure learners' safety and welfare. College staff are receiving safeguarding training and understand their responsibilities. Governors monitor the implementation of safeguarding arrangements well and review them as required.

What does West Herts College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise success rates, particularly on work-based programmes and on short courses, by monitoring the progress of learners rigorously against planned completion dates.

- Share the best practice in teaching and learning to increase the proportion of outstanding lessons and ensure all learners are sufficiently challenged so they make the progress of which they are capable.
- Ensure that the self-assessment process is fully inclusive by greater involvement of employers.
- Ensure that equality and diversity is promoted consistently well within all curriculum areas.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly and safe environment
- the supportive and caring staff
- the way the college listens and responds to their views
- the good teaching that enables vocational skill development
- the extensive range of support services provided
- the range of enrichment activities provided.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the availability of car parking spaces
- the range and quality of food items available on campus
- the quality of accommodation in some areas.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the way the college responds promptly to employers' needs
- the quality of teaching and training for employees
- the high standard of learners' work.

What employers would like to see improved:

- aspects of communication with the college
- involvement in reviewing and evaluating the college's work.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

10. The college has an outstanding capacity to make and sustain improvement. Governors, leaders, managers and staff are clearly focused on improving the learners' experience and ensuring success in achieving qualification aims. The principal and senior managers provide highly effective leadership which is based firmly upon a clear strategy to move the college forward and to enable learners to extend and fulfil their ambitions. Governors contribute significantly to ensuring that the college's performance is monitored closely and that resources are available for the benefit of learners. Financial management is outstanding. The imminent opening of purpose built accommodation will enhance resources significantly and provide further opportunities for learners to develop new skills.
11. The college has well established and very effective self-assessment and quality improvement systems. All aspects identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection have been rectified. The quality of provision has improved and is now outstanding. Teaching and learning continue to improve with a high proportion of lessons now being judged good or outstanding. Success rates have improved at a greater rate than the national average and overall success rates are high on long courses both for learners aged 16-18 and for adults. The self-assessment report is accurate and identifies correctly strengths and areas for further improvement. Data are accurate and used very well to monitor and improve the performance of all groups of learners.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

12. Outcomes for learners are good overall and are outstanding in many curriculum areas. Success rates continue to rise and are high. On long courses for learners aged 16-18 and for adults at all levels, success rates are above or well above the corresponding national average rate for similar colleges. Success rates in the vast majority of subject areas, and in all areas where learner numbers are substantial, are above or significantly above average. Success rates on short courses, whilst improving, are below average and have been so for the last two years. Pupils aged 14-16 attending college courses from local schools achieve well and success rates on these courses are high.
13. On work-based learning programmes, overall framework completion rates are satisfactory but too few learners complete all the qualification requirements by the target end date and consequently timely success rates are low. Success rates vary considerably between different subject areas on work-based learning programmes. Train to Gain success rates are high and most learners on Entry to Employment programmes move into employment or onto further education or training courses. Success rates on other employer responsive provision are high.

14. The vast majority of learners make very good progress and develop sound skills and knowledge. The development of literacy and numeracy skills is good and key skill success rates are high. The standard of learners' work, particularly practical work, is high in most curriculum areas. In hospitality and catering and in hairdressing and beauty therapy the standard of learners' work is outstanding. Most learners on vocational courses develop excellent work-related skills that increase their employability prospects and contribute significantly to their future economic well-being.
15. The college pays close attention to monitoring the success rates of different groups of learners and is successfully narrowing the achievement gap. There is no significant underachievement for any minority ethnic group and success rates for different groups compare favourably to national rates. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers. Female learners achieve better than male learners and females aged 16-18 achieved particularly well in 2008/09. College data demonstrates that in-year retention and attendance rates are high and learners are generally punctual to lessons.
16. Learners report that they thoroughly enjoy college life and feel very safe in a friendly and supportive environment. Working relationships between staff and learners are very good. Learners are exceptionally well informed about matters relating to their health and well-being and have the knowledge and understanding to make informed choices. They have a secure understanding of their rights and responsibilities and, through a wide range of activities within the curriculum, make an outstanding contribution to the community.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

17. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good overall and are outstanding in some curriculum areas. A high proportion of lessons are good or better with examples of outstanding teaching across the college. Teaching is well planned and meets individual learners' needs effectively. Teachers use a variety of activities to motivate and engage learners and use their subject knowledge and experience well to enhance understanding. In most lessons, learners make good progress; in hospitality and catering and in hairdressing and beauty therapy learners make outstanding progress and achieve extremely well. Teachers use questioning techniques very effectively to check learners' knowledge and understanding although in a few lessons the most able learners are not challenged sufficiently by the complexity and pace of the work they are set.
18. Technology is used well to support learning in most curriculum areas despite many teaching rooms not being equipped with interactive facilities. Teachers use innovative approaches to ensure learners can access technology including the use of laptops, video recording equipment and digital cameras. Resources for teaching and learning are generally good in most areas although accommodation issues in some areas do impact adversely on learning.

19. Assessment is good. Assignments are well prepared with clearly defined assessment criteria. Assessment is frequent and fair and learners are usually provided with detailed feedback that informs them what they need to do to improve further. Target setting and monitoring practices are good and help learners make progress. Assessment practices for learners on work-based programmes have improved and learners are now assessed more frequently in the work-place. Internal verification practice is secure and ensures appropriate standards are maintained. Initial assessment arrangements are comprehensive and ensure learners that require support receive it promptly.
20. Arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching and learning are comprehensive. All teaching staff are observed by a member of the internal observation team and judgements made are moderated appropriately. Observers receive regular training and generally make sound decisions. However, in a few cases, where observers are making judgements outside their area of subject expertise, too little attention is given to considering normal expectations for the lesson and some over-grading results. Information collected during lesson observations is used well to identify training and development needs for individual staff members.
21. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of users is outstanding. An extensive range of courses from pre-entry to degree level is provided. The college has taken a leading role in the development of diploma courses as part of the 14-19 education reforms in the area. Community provision is particularly strong, with many successful initiatives with different groups and employers. Joint work with the Connexions service to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training has been highly effective. A large and successful programme is offered for learners with complex needs. The college's response to local and national initiatives is proactive and effective. Employer engagement is good and the college has developed provision which is tailored to the needs of individual employers and their employees. The college is highly responsive to labour market needs and a strength of the provision is the flexibility in responding to employer requirements.
22. The range of enrichment provision for full-time learners is extensive. Activities are well organised and evaluated and are planned carefully to assist learners to be safe and healthy. Activities also support the development of maturity and employment skills that contribute very effectively to learners' future economic well-being. Learners thoroughly enjoy their college experience and make an outstanding contribution to the community. Learners' involvement in evaluating their experiences is well-established through a range of feedback activities, including a strong student council. Learners report high levels of satisfaction with the college. Good progression opportunities exist in most areas, and progression to higher education or employment is good. The college acknowledges the need to develop work experience opportunities in the few areas of the college where these are limited.

23. The college's partnership working is outstanding and central to its strategy. Many staff are engaged very effectively in highly successful partnerships that directly benefit learners. Examples include good collaboration with schools; a large 14-16 link programme and excellent support for the smooth transition to college at age 16. Partnerships with community organisations are extensive and highly productive with provision at 47 community locations. Many successful partnerships are supporting people from hard to reach groups to access learning. The Centre of Football Excellence, in partnership with the Watford Football League club, is a national award winner. This scheme is to extend its offer to females in 2010. The Dacorum Community Learning Centre is a fine example of coordinated working with the borough council and voluntary sector partners to meet learning needs locally and promote social inclusion and sustainable development.
24. Guidance and support are outstanding. Excellent information, advice and guidance are available to learners from their first contact with the college to when they leave. Extensive efforts are applied to ensure learners are on the course which best meets their needs and interests, thus contributing to high and rising retention and success rates. A strength of the advice and guidance service is risk-based assessment of individual needs, used by all members of the support team, to provide timely and effective support. Learners receive outstanding individual care and support to help them achieve their potential, aided by readily accessible information on learners' performance.
25. Additional learning support is well resourced and managed very effectively. Initial and diagnostic assessment is thorough and effective. Good specialist support meets a wide variety of learners' needs. The skilled and well qualified learning advisers and curriculum support staff give good individual support in classes and in small groups. Support for learners with complex needs is particularly well developed. Tutorial provision is well organised and tutors liaise regularly with curriculum staff. Learners value the support and guidance they receive. Good target setting and monitoring motivate learners to do well. Support services are accessible to all learners, including learners in the workplace and the community. Services, such as financial support and counselling are well publicised and monitored to assess their impact. Partnership arrangements are wide ranging and very effective with numerous external agencies to support learners.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

26. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and senior managers provide highly effective leadership which is linked to the ambitious strategic mission. The strategic planning process is excellent and has helped move the college from inadequacy in 2003 to a position where it now has a very clear sense of purpose and is achieving its mission. Highly effective arrangements are in place for linking the strategic plan to operational plans.

27. Progress against key performance indicators is monitored regularly and systematically. Timely actions are taken to improve provision. Success rates are high and continue to rise. Strong leadership which puts the learner at the heart of key decisions making processes has raised expectations and levels of ambition amongst staff and learners alike. A long-term strategy to rebuild the confidence of employers has been successful. A strong commitment to improve the college's accommodation is becoming a reality with the imminent opening of a new campus in Watford and revised plans to develop the site in Hemel Hempstead, despite recent setbacks in securing capital funding. Appropriate actions to ensure a more sustainable environment are included in these developments.
28. Governance is outstanding. The governing body comprises board members with highly relevant experience which is used to very good effect in shaping strategy, monitoring performance and holding college leadership to account. Governors exhibit a very good knowledge of the work of the college and have overseen effective plans to improve the college's accommodation and to secure financial stability.
29. The promotion of safeguarding arrangements is good. All staff are receiving training in safeguarding. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. In addition, governors have undergone Criminal Records Bureau checks and two members of the board have a designated responsibility for monitoring the college's approach to safeguarding. Learners feel safe at college and good arrangements for health and safety operate across the college. The move to the new campus will enable the college to manage security more effectively.
30. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Equality and diversity impact measures are in place for each area of the college. The performance of different groups is monitored carefully and actions to remedy concerns are successful. Achievement gaps are narrowing. The college has sought to increase the diversity of its staff through steps such as ensuring recruitment panels reflect fully the diverse college community. An equality and diversity group pursues initiatives such as a poster competition which promotes awareness. The very few incidents of bullying, harassment or racist behaviour are tackled swiftly and effectively. Staff are well informed about equality and diversity issues through their induction programme and subsequent training. However, the extent to which teachers promote equality and diversity within their lessons is uneven across the college. Although some buildings are at the end of their useful life, the college has made reasonable adjustments to ensure that accommodation is accessible for all learners and staff.
31. User engagement is very good. In relation to learners and community partners in particular, it is outstanding. A comprehensive learner involvement strategy ensures that learners' views are gathered and acted upon in order to bring about improvements. The promotion of partnership working is now well

developed and effective. A broad range of partnerships includes libraries, emergency and probation services and a local football club. While there are highly effective partnerships with some employers, the college is working towards a more effective engagement with this group.

32. Arrangements for quality improvement and self-assessment are well established and they have a significant impact. Regular course reviews are very effective in highlighting areas of concern and in initiating timely actions. Curriculum managers are held to account for any courses at risk of failing to meet performance targets. Self-assessment reports are mostly accurate although there is insufficient involvement by employers in the process. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory and improvements are being implemented although it is too early to judge their impact fully.
33. Value for money is good. Outcomes for learners are good and improving. The college has reported operating surpluses over the last three years and has entered into significant capital expenditure programmes without any deterioration in its financial health. Financial management and control is outstanding.

Subject areas

Construction

Grade 2

Context

34. The college offers courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level in bricklaying; plastering; carpentry and joinery; electrical installation and plumbing. Most learners are male and are aged 16 to 18. At the time of the inspection, 377 full-time and 216 part-time students were attending courses. A further 49 students were on work-based learning programmes and 128 pupils aged 14-16 attended from local schools.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. In 2008/09 success rates were high on foundation level diploma courses in brickwork, carpentry and plastering. On intermediate level courses success rates were above national averages except on the certificate in plumbing course where success rates were low. Success rates on the advanced level diploma in brickwork were very low.
- Success rates for apprentices on work-based learning programmes are satisfactory overall. However, too few learners complete all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework within the timescale set.
- The standard of learners' work is high on all foundation level courses. In plumbing, learners are able to accurately set out, cut and assemble copper pipework that is free from defect. In carpentry, frames produced by learners contained tight fitting joints. Learners make good progress and many of them complete extension activities to further enhance their skills. Learners on intermediate level courses complete work to expected industry standards.
- Learners feel safe and apply safe working practices well. They understand the risks in the environment and always use the appropriate personal protective equipment without being prompted by teachers.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Practical teaching is good and is more effective than the teaching in theory lessons. Practical lessons are well-planned and learners use well produced task sheets that challenge them and enable the good development of vocational skills. Teachers' demonstrations are good and develop learners' understanding further.
- The checking of learners' understanding is not sufficiently developed. Whilst teachers use a variety of teaching methods to maintain learners' interest, they do not check understanding frequently enough. Work produced by learners' is not monitored consistently and written feedback on completed work does not always provide learners with developmental comments to help them improve.
- Learners benefit from highly effective additional learning support. The majority of learners that receive additional support are successful in achieving their qualification aim. Close working relationships between learners, vocational

teachers and learning advisers ensures lessons are planned to meet learners' needs. Learners value the support provided.

- Courses meet the needs and interest of learners satisfactorily. Progression pathways between levels and are good. However, work-experience opportunities are limited and too many learners progress from one level to the next, on a full-time course, without the benefit of a work-experience placement.
- Guidance and support are good. Learners speak highly of the support provided by staff. Tutorials are used effectively to monitor learners' progress and to develop other skills that contribute effectively to their future economic well-being and personal development. Reviews of progress for learners on work-based courses are satisfactory.
- Leadership and management are good. Actions to improve provision have been successful and success rates are rising. Staff work well as a team and new teachers are supported very effectively. Communication is good. The self-assessment is largely accurate and identifies the key strengths and areas for improvement in the area.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners understanding is developed during themed tutorial lessons and scenarios are used during learners' reviews to test their knowledge. However, the promotion of equality and diversity during construction lessons is underdeveloped and staff miss opportunities to extend learners knowledge of equality and diversity within a construction context.

What does West Herts College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on the few underperforming courses by continuing to monitor learners' progress closely and by implementing the planned improvement actions.
- Raise overall and timely success rates on work-based programmes so learners complete all framework requirements within the timescale set by allocating the responsibility for an individual learners programme to a named member of staff.
- Ensure that learners' knowledge and understanding is checked at frequent intervals during lessons and further develop the marking skills of staff so they are better able to provide detailed feedback that informs learners what they need to do to improve further.
- Provide opportunities for full-time learners to complete a period of industry work-experience by further developing links with local employers able to provide a high quality placement.
- Extend learners knowledge and understanding of equity and diversity within a construction context by planning lessons to incorporate relevant themes where opportunities are available.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 1

Context

35. The college offers courses in hairdressing, beauty and holistic therapies at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. At the time of inspection, 731 learners were attending with the majority females aged 16-18 attending full-time on beauty and holistic therapy courses. A further 53 pupils aged 14-16 attended from local schools and 45 learners were on apprenticeship courses. Some 15% of learners were from minority ethnic heritage groups.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Success rates on most courses are high and are significantly above national averages for similar colleges. In 2008/09 the success rate on the national diploma in beauty was 100%. The vast majority of learners complete their courses successfully. However, the success rate on the level 1 beauty therapy course remains below average despite continued improvement.
- Success rates for apprentices on work-based learning programmes are satisfactory overall. However, too few learners complete all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework within the timescale set. College in-year data show an improvement in the performance of work-based learning courses.
- The standard of learners' work is excellent. Learners' work often exceeds that required for the level of qualification and the skills developed significantly enhance their employability prospects. Learners work with confidence and demonstrate outstanding creative practical skills.
- Learners enjoy college life, feel very safe and adopt safe practices during their practical work. They are well prepared for their future economic well-being and have a good awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Learners know their rights and responsibilities and make a good contribution to the community.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. The planning of lessons takes account of individual learners needs and careful thought is given to setting challenging targets for learners to achieve. Theory is well-linked to practice. Learners receive good individual support and make excellent progress during lessons.
- A wide range of teaching methods are used that motivate and engage learners. Teachers make good use of questioning, discussion and coaching to encourage learners' participation. Peer assessment is used well to encourage learners to reflect on their own practice and to develop further different techniques.
- Assessment practices are good. Teachers have high expectations and continually encourage learners to improve their performance. Feedback to learners is construction and provides, in detail, what could be done to further improve practice. Portfolios are of high quality and are well presented.
- The provision is outstanding at meeting the needs and interests of learners. Managers have used learners' views to make improvements to provision and to

increase the entry and progression opportunities available. Enrichment activities are extensive and now include a wider use of work-experience and additional commercially relevant short courses.

- Guidance and support are outstanding. Learners receive excellent advice and guidance throughout their course. Learners diagnosed with additional learning needs receive very good support in lessons to help overcome barriers to learning. Tutorials are extremely effective in monitoring learners' progress and further developing their skills.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff are committed to continuous improvement and ensure that the provision is of the highest quality. Good communication and highly effective team working are strong features of the department. Quality assurance systems are well embedded and the self-assessment is accurate. However, employers' views are not yet utilised fully to inform improvements to provision.
- Arrangements to ensure the safety of learners are good. Teachers have received safeguarding training and are developing resources to further embed key messages into the curriculum. Learners receive detailed training in health and safety practices as part of their course and are able to talk confidently about how to deal with situations that may occur.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners benefit from having many opportunities to explore issues related to equality and diversity in a vocational context and most are able to explain how treatments would be adapted to suit different clients' needs.

What does West Herts College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise the success rate on the level 1 beauty therapy course by implementing the planned improvement actions identified following the learner views survey.
- Raise overall and timely success rates on work-based programmes so learners complete all framework requirements within the timescale set by allocating the responsibility for an individual learners programme to a named member of staff.
- Extend links with employers and seek their views on how the provision could be improved further to meet their needs.

Hospitality and catering

Grade 1

Context

36. The college offers full and part-time courses in hospitality and catering from foundation to advanced level. At the time of inspection, 196 students were enrolled on courses with 96 studying full-time and 100 part-time. The majority of learners were from a white British background and approximately 60% of the learners recruited were male. Some 101 learners were aged 16 to 18 and the remaining 95 were adults.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Success rates in 2008/09 on courses at all levels were well above national averages and on the foundation level cake decoration course was 100%. Pass rates are excellent; retention rates are high on all programmes and continue to improve. Key skill success rates are very high, particularly in application of number.
- The standard of learners' work is outstanding. Learners develop excellent practical skills very quickly. The standard of work on foundation level courses is particularly high. Learners prepare food with great care and their presentation skills are excellent.
- Learners feel extremely safe and are well informed about matters relating to safety. Safe working practices are adhered to in all lessons and learners work towards health and safety qualifications. Risk assessments are thorough in all learning areas and this is extended to the work-place when learners are on industrial placement.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. Learners are highly motivated and participate fully in lessons. Teachers plan lessons very effectively to meet the differing needs of individual learners. Good use is made of learners' prior knowledge and experience and teachers link activities effectively to industry practices.
- Learners develop excellent practical skills that support entry to industry. They use equipment confidently and competently and are often able to complete tasks that are above the expected level of complexity for the course they are on.
- The assessment of learners' work is good. Assessment activities have clearly defined criteria and teachers have high expectations. Assignments are well produced to test learners' knowledge and understanding. Completed work is marked promptly and contains good constructive feedback.
- The range of courses and activities provided is good at meeting the needs and interests of learners. Progression rates between one level and the next are high. Learners are able to complete beneficial short courses that enhance their employability prospects as part of an extensive enrichment programme.

- Partnerships with industry are good. Links with local, regional and national employers are used to improve learners' knowledge and understanding. Some employers provide useful work-experience opportunities although not all learners benefit from this. Good links have been established with local schools to support progression into post-16 education.
- Guidance and support are outstanding. Learners' complete initial assessment soon after enrolment and the results are used to inform support needs. Additional learning support is highly effective both within the classroom and in practical environments. Support is well planned and monitored through clear action plans which are reviewed frequently.
- The monitoring of learners' progress is good. Tutorials are used effectively to track progress and detailed action plans identify further learning needs. Learners at risk of falling behind are identified early and appropriate support is provided in a timely manner.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Data are used effectively to monitor the performance of the area. Staff are focused on continual improvement and regular team meetings enable a frequent review of the provision. The self-assessment is accurate although the process does not consider employer views sufficiently.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Issues related to hospitality and catering are reinforced throughout all courses. Practical work addresses the needs of a good range of ethnic, religious and dietary needs. However, learners' understanding of broader issues relating to equality and diversity are not as well developed.

What does West Herts College need to do to improve further?

- Seek to provide all full-time learners with a period of industry related work-experience by developing more links with local employers.
- Extend learners understanding of equality and diversity issues by incorporating the broader aspects into lessons and tutorials.
- Engage existing employers in the evaluation of courses and enable them to contribute to the self-assessment process.

Performing arts

Grade 2

Context

37. The college offer courses in performing arts and music from intermediate to advanced level. At the time of inspection, approximately 250 learners were enrolled on full-time courses. The majority of learners were aged 16-18 studying at advanced level and two thirds of the learners recruited were male. Around 60% of learners were on music courses and approximately 20% of learners were from minority ethnic groups.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. Success rates in 2008/09 were high on most courses and were outstanding on the advanced level music course. Pass rates on all courses are very high. Learners on music courses consistently achieve a very high proportion of high grades and make excellent progress in relation to their starting points.
- The standard of learners' work is good overall. Learners develop a wide range of skills and master techniques that enable them to produce high quality creative work. However, first year advanced level performing arts learners have not yet developed the required level of skill or professional practice to enable them to produce work of a high standard.
- Teaching and learning are good, particularly in music. Teachers plan work well and successfully integrate theoretical and practical elements to maintain learners' interest and enthusiasm. The majority of teachers have high expectations and develop their students well as independent learners.
- Teachers do not always have sufficiently well developed strategies for stretching and challenging the more able learners. In a few lessons, and particularly in performing arts, the most able are not sufficiently challenged and do not make the progress or achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Resources and accommodation are poor as they were at the last inspection. Learners have improved access to computers; however, the use of interactive technologies to support and enrich learning and engage students is underdeveloped in some lessons.
- The provision is good at meeting the needs and interest of learners with opportunities to progress from intermediate to higher level courses. The number of learners progressing to higher education and employment is high with very high levels of internal progression.
- Partnership arrangements are good. Learners have benefited from a wider range of partnerships than were available at the last inspection; however, links with schools, community groups and employers are not yet extensive.

- Guidance and support are good. Learners with additional needs are very well supported in lessons. Detailed action plans and good communication with teachers ensure that learners who receive support achieve good outcomes.
- Leadership and management are good overall. Leaders and managers have been very effective in improving the quality of the provision, raising standards and ensuring consistency of approach. They seek the views of learners actively and have made a number of improvements as a result of learners' views.
- Curriculum management in performing arts is not sufficiently rigorous. Issues at course level have not been resolved quickly enough and have impacted on learning.
- Equality and diversity monitoring is good. The progress of different groups of learners is tracked and issues tackled. However the promotion of diversity issues through the curriculum is underdeveloped.

What does West Herts College need to do to improve further?

- When planning learning ensure that the most able learners can be stretched and challenged in order that they can reach their full potential.
- Ensure that the skills of performing arts learners are developed fully through actions such as the provision of more specialist pathways.
- Develop more extensive local partnerships with schools, community groups and employers to expand potential benefits for learners.
- Strengthen curriculum management in performing arts by improving communication and allocating specific responsibilities to staff so that issues of concern may be dealt with and resolved more quickly.
- Ensure that equality and diversity are embedded effectively into curriculum planning and assignment design to develop learners' knowledge and understanding further.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Grade 1

Context

38. The college offers literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses from pre-entry to intermediate level. A number of non-accredited short courses are also offered. At the time of inspection, 730 learners were enrolled on courses. The majority of learners were on part-time courses, were female and were adults. Approximately 75% of learners recruited were from minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Success rates on most courses in 2008/09 were above the high national averages. Improvements have been made to the one underperforming course and the current achievement rate on this course is now high. Learners make excellent progress and develop valuable skills on the vast majority of courses.
- Learners thoroughly enjoy their learning and in the majority of classes attendance rates are high. Learners respond enthusiastically to well-planned learning activities. They develop skills which enable them to support their children's school work, to function as citizens and to improve their confidence in work situations.
- Learners feel extremely safe at college. Induction arrangements are thorough and the college has responded well in tackling concerns raised through learners' feedback. Specific safeguarding topics are used in lessons and this develops learners' understanding as well as improving their literacy and language skills.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers plan meticulously to meet individual needs. Teachers demonstrate sound classroom management, teach enthusiastically and insist on high levels of spoken accuracy by ESOL learners. In some lessons, however, teachers do not use learners' experience and existing knowledge enough.
- The monitoring of learners' progress is good. Teachers track learners' progress carefully and frequently; they set clear targets for learners to achieve. However, some written feedback on learners' work lacks detail and some teachers rely too much on verbal feedback without recording their advice sufficiently.
- The range of courses offered is outstanding at meeting the needs of learners. Enrichment activities are extensive and give learners the opportunity to appreciate British culture and history. Recent activities have included an external speaker talking about volunteering opportunities; a visit to parliament; visits from the local MP and from a celebrated author. These activities broaden learners' understanding and enhance the curriculum.
- Partnership working is outstanding. Many different partners are involved from different community groups. Partners work closely with college staff to identify

specific needs of potential learners and the curriculum is adjusted accordingly. Improved arrangements for pre-course information, advice and guidance have been a benefit of close working with community partners.

- Guidance and support are outstanding. Pre-course information, advice and guidance to learners are excellent. Support arrangements whilst learners are on courses are equally as effective and ensure high retention and pass rates. The college makes particularly good use of initial assessment, including information on support needs identified by the learners themselves.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Communications are effective and meetings productive. Course reviews are comprehensive and have been particularly effective in raising retention and achievement rates. The self-assessment is accurate and identifies clearly the main strengths and areas for improvement. Managers recognise the need to further involve partners to ensure that all learners' needs are met given the changing local demographics.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Routine risk assessments take place and learners who are potentially vulnerable are encouraged to undertake personal risk assessments. These are well-documented and immediately available in tutors' files. All schemes of work stress the importance of health, safety and welfare.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Lessons routinely invite discussions on the cultural characteristics of the diverse learners in each group. Topics arising naturally, for example food and religious customs, are utilised well to promote and reinforce key points.

What does West Herts College need to do to improve further?

- Encourage teachers to make more effective use of learners' prior knowledge and experience during lessons to further engage learners and promote their skills development.
- Ensure that written feedback to learners is sufficiently detailed to help them improve and that verbal feedback is recorded to enable the quality of feedback to be verified effectively.
- Continue to work with partners to investigate the learning needs of the local community to ensure that the curriculum remains responsive to changing circumstances and demographics.

Information about the inspection

39. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven 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), the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
40. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
West Herts 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 | 4002 | 0 | 3359 | 643 | 0 |
| Part-time learners | 3741 | 666 | 255 | 2284 | 536 |
| Overall effectiveness | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 1 | | | | |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners progress? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 1 | | | | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 2 | | | | |
| 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?* | 1 | | | | |
| Quality of provision | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 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? | 1 | | | | |
| 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?* | 1 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement? | 1 | | | | |
| How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners? | 1 | | | | |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 2 | | | | |

*where applicable to the type of provision

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