

City and Islington College

Inspection report

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

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

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

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

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. City and Islington College is a large general further education college operating from 4 main sites and over 25 satellite sites and community venues in the London Borough of Islington. The borough is an area of great social contrast, with prosperity mixed with poverty and deprivation. It is rated as the sixth most deprived of 354 local authorities. It is an ethnically diverse area and 53% of students classify themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group. In 2006/07, there were 3,692 mainly full-time students aged 16-18 on Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded courses and 8,090 adult students, with around four-fifths studying part-time. There were 1,904 students enrolled on adult and community learning courses, 515 students on Higher Education (HE) programmes and 70 work-based apprenticeship students.
2. The college offers programmes in all sector subject areas except agriculture and horticulture. The majority of students are enrolled for preparation for life and work programmes; arts, media and publishing, health and care, and information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum areas also have large numbers of students. The college was awarded Beacon status in December 2005. It has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), in childcare and early years, and in ICT and Network Technologies. The college's primary mission is 'to deliver world-class education and training' and its vision is 'to be the first choice college in all of our areas of specialism'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: Contributory Grade 1</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

3. City and Islington College provides outstanding education and training. Achievement and standards are outstanding. The overall success rates for students on long courses are high and show a trend of improvement, particularly for those aged 16-18. They are significantly above the national averages for similar colleges for students of all ages and at all levels. Students from all minority ethnic groups show high achievement and acquire good skills. High quality additional learning support is successful in helping students to achieve their learning goals.
4. The overall quality of provision is outstanding. Highly skilled teachers motivate and bring out the best in their students through outstanding teaching and learning. Students enjoy their time in the college and many exceed the expectations they had when enrolling. Assessment practices and the monitoring of student progress are very effective. High quality accommodation and learning resources help students to achieve. A broad and responsive curriculum enables a high proportion of students to progress to further and higher education. Very good information, advice and guidance are readily available to students.
5. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Well co-ordinated and coherent arrangements offer flexible and appropriate individualised support. The tutorial process is well managed with stimulating activities to develop students' emotional and physical well-being. The students' union is very active and consultation with students is exceptionally strong. High quality information, advice and guidance are available in a wide range of formats and locations, and at convenient times.
6. Outstanding leadership and management from senior managers, supported exceptionally well by governors, have been successful in developing a highly performing college. Rigorous quality assurance procedures ensure the focus of all managers remains on maintaining high quality provision. Financial management is highly effective and the college provides outstanding value for money. Strong partnerships are cultivated and links with employers are good, although they need bolstering in a small number of curriculum areas. The views of students are highly valued and acted upon. The college promotes equality of opportunity strongly. Its ethos of educational and social inclusion is outstanding and highly valued by staff and students alike.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

7. The college demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve. Quality assurance procedures promote consistency and high standards. The self-assessment process is self-critical and accurately identifies the main strengths and the few areas for improvement. Dynamic managers, ably supported by governors, have set a clear strategic direction for the college and staff are clear about how

objectives are to be achieved. Management information is reliable and used well. The recruitment of students is buoyant in many curriculum areas and effective and efficient management of finances has left the college in a sound financial position. High and improving students' success rates regularly exceed the targets set by the LSC.

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

8. Exemplary leadership by senior managers and governors has ensured the college has made good progress since the last inspection. The substantial strengths identified at the previous inspection are still evident and many are now even stronger. Success rates have increased to very high levels, with the exception of short courses where remedial actions are in place. Rigorous quality assurance processes and comprehensive staff development have raised the quality and consistency of teaching and learning. Extensive refurbishment and new building have created a high quality learning environment and students express high and rising levels of satisfaction. Vigorous action has improved areas of weakness identified at the previous inspection, such as poor punctuality by students. Links with employers are strong generally, although less so in a small number of curriculum areas.

Key strengths

- high achievement rates on long courses
- good progression to further and higher education
- stimulating and challenging teaching and learning
- highly effective support for students that improves performance
- innovative and responsive curriculum
- high quality leadership and management leading to sustained improvements
- highly effective governors
- outstanding social and educational inclusion
- strong partnership working
- excellent involvement of students and response to their views.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- employer engagement in some curriculum areas
- retention rates for level 1 adult students.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Overall success rates for long courses are high, particularly for students aged 16-18. They are significantly above the national average for similar colleges, for students of all ages and at all levels. This is reflected in both high retention and pass rates for a broad range of courses, which show a strong trend of improvement since the previous inspection. The retention rate of adults studying at level 1 declined in 2006/07, although current in-year retention rates show they are now rising again. Many curriculum areas have very strong results, including English, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), humanities, performing arts and science. The overall pass rate for GCE A levels in 2006/07 was 98%, with all students passing in 23 subjects.
10. Students from all minority ethnic groups achieve good success rates. Success rates for short courses are low, an issue acknowledged in the self-assessment report, and changes to the curriculum are improving this. Achievement for the small number of work-based students is satisfactory. Vigorous and sustained action by staff has reduced poor punctuality, although it is still an issue for some curriculum areas.
11. The progression of students to HE is high and increasing. Some 1,123 students progressed to HE in 2006/07. This is facilitated by the good links that the college has developed with local universities. Similarly, a high proportion of students progress within the college to higher level courses.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

12. The overall quality of provision is outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that teaching and learning are outstanding. Lessons are well planned with a broad variety of learning activities. Teachers motivate students particularly well and provide very good support. Students enjoy their lessons and speak highly of their teachers and the knowledge and experience they bring to lessons. Targets for the improvement of teaching and learning are set and met and the proportion of good or better teaching is high. The teaching of key skills has improved since the previous year but too many of these lessons are still judged to be unsatisfactory.
13. Teaching staff are well qualified. Learning resources are good and are used well to support the learning process. The standard of accommodation and information and learning technology (ILT) resources is particularly good. A virtual learning environment has been further developed recently. This is used well to support learning, although the college recognises that some curriculum areas are not as well advanced in its use as others.
14. Assessment and the monitoring of student progress are carried out very effectively. Assignment briefs are clear and the majority of feedback to students

- on their work is detailed and helpful. The identification of, and provision for, additional learning needs are good, particularly at level 3. This additional support is highly effective and improves students' performance; students receiving support have higher success rates than those not receiving this help.
15. The college's approach towards meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. A broad curriculum is in place and the college is particularly responsive to meeting the needs of the local community. Students are very pleased to study at the college and feel it is a safe place to learn. Most courses offer clear progression routes from levels 1 to 3 and beyond, and the expectations of students to progress are often exceeded. Enrichment opportunities are good, although the college does not sufficiently assess the contribution that the enrichment programme makes to students' experiences.
 16. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Well co-ordinated arrangements offer flexible and appropriate individualised support to all students. Support for students is integrated into curriculum planning; for instance, ESOL support is embedded into subject areas. Students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are holistically supported by effective and timely planning. The quality and impact of support are rigorously monitored.
 17. Information, advice and guidance are very good. They are available in a wide range of formats, locations, and at convenient times. However, students starting their course late do not always have a clear understanding of the range of advice and support open to them. College staff are forming increasingly strong relationships with other agencies, giving good access to specialist services such as childcare, mental health support and housing. Students engage in a broad range of voluntary activity, including peer mentoring, to support others in developing positive behaviour. The students' union is very active and staff consult and involve its officers in a broad range of college activities.
 18. Tutorials are well managed. Experienced and well trained lead tutors develop good practice through a wide variety of themed materials available on the college intranet. Effective target setting develops high aspirations among students, including those from vulnerable groups. Stimulating activities, often led by visiting speakers and health professionals, develop the emotional and physical well-being of students. For instance, counsellors and lead tutors have received recent training to support students who have been victims of conflict and war. The newly developed disciplinary policy has reduced exclusions by supporting students at risk of failing.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grade:
Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

19. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and senior management team provide strong strategic leadership and communicate this to staff well. They are ably supported by an outstanding governing body. Governors are highly experienced and offer valuable skills in their role as critical

friends. They play a key role in shaping the vision of the college and keeping the focus on maintaining high standards and providing high quality provision.

20. Quality assurance procedures are well established and ensure consistently high performance is maintained. A strong commitment to improve the quality of teaching and learning drives the process. Inspectors agreed with the accurate portrayal of the key strengths and few weaknesses of the college in the self-assessment report. The college's procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning process are robust and reliable. Managers are clear about their roles and fully accountable for their areas of responsibility. Where under-performance is identified, improvement plans are instigated and appropriate support is given. Staff are well supported by comprehensive staff development.
21. The financial health of the college is strong and well managed. Very large scale building projects are completed within timescale and budget. The different college sites are distinctive in culture but all operate within a framework of high managerial competency. Management information is accurate and is used effectively by curriculum managers to monitor and evaluate key performance indicators. The broad curriculum offer is innovatory in its approach to new programmes. Recruitment targets are exceeded annually and the business side of the college is run both effectively and efficiently. The college offers outstanding value for money.
22. The college has highly effective partnerships with a broad range of organisations. Links with employers are strong generally, although further work to engage employers is required in some curriculum areas, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The achievements of the college are recognised externally and the college has gained several prestigious awards, most recently the Queen's Anniversary Prize.
23. The college is a highly inclusive institution with outstanding equality of opportunity. Procedures for safeguarding students and the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA) fully meet government requirements. The college's equality and diversity plan is monitored rigorously. The rich diversity of the students' heritage is widely celebrated. All groups of students from minority ethnic backgrounds perform better than in similar colleges. The college is working to improve the proportion of managers and teachers from a minority ethnic background, which is currently much lower than the local community or student population.
24. Students greatly enjoy their time in the college and appreciate its inclusive ethos. Their views are actively canvassed and they are confident their opinions are listened to and acted upon by managers. Staff morale is high and the improving learner success rates are a testimony to the effectiveness of staff and the policies and procedures in place.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	1159	55	62	-7	627	64	62	2
	05/06	698	79	68	11	269	73	67	6
	06/07*	810	79			438	73		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	147	66	64	2	18	78	n/a	
	05/06	58	87	70	17	16	81	n/a	
	06/07*	16	81			0			
Other	04/05	982	52	61	-9	609	63	61	2
	05/06	605	79	67	12	253	72	67	5
	06/07*	779	79			403	74		

* college data

** national rate not available

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	1500	75	61	14	596	59	60	-1
	05/06	1460	74	65	9	545	68	66	2
	06/07*	1422	74			509	76		
GCSEs	04/05	835	80	66	14	141	77	64	13
	05/06	865	79	69	10	112	71	67	4
	06/07*	786	75			106	78		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	203	72	67	5	10	60	65	-5
	05/06	107	58	66	-8	7	71	65	6
	06/07*	36	61			40	50		
Other	04/05	428	70	59	11	355	49	58	-9
	05/06	445	70	63	7	348	65	65	0
	06/07*	538	74			271	78		

* college data

** national rate not available

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	4433	80	66	14	1459	56	57	-1
	05/06	4755	78	68	10	1219	64	63	1
	06/07*	4438	80			1101	68		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1338	91	85	6	90	73	74	-1
	05/06	1433	93	86	7	83	82	74	8
	06/07*	1450	91			78	95		
AS Levels	04/05	2280	78	64	14	109	60	53	7
	05/06	2524	74	64	10	76	65	57	8
	06/07*	2270	76			64	69		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	419	74	60	14	60	62	52	10
	05/06	198	70	68	2	47	70	54	16
	06/07*	22	64			0			
Other	04/05	382	64	58	6	1046	55	57	-2
	05/06	592	58	62	-4	912	63	62	1
	06/07*	684	68			842	64		

* college data

** national rate not available