

Highbury College

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	130697
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Last day of inspection:	13 May 2011
Type of provider:	General Further Education College
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Information about the provider

1. Highbury College is a large general further education college in Portsmouth. It offers provision in thirteen of the fifteen subject areas. Programmes range from entry level to higher education courses. The majority of students study at the college's redeveloped Highbury Campus to the north of the city, the Highbury Northarbour Centre and the Highbury City of Portsmouth Centre in the city centre.
2. In 2009/10, the college had 11,075 students. Of these, 21% were aged 16 to 18 and 49% were female. Employers sponsored 26% of students and 450 local school pupils aged 14 to 16 were on school link vocational programmes. Students of minority ethnic heritage comprised 9%, compared with a minority ethnic population of 5% for the city. Some 13% of students declared they were disabled and/or had a learning difficulty.
3. Portsmouth is one of the most densely populated cities in the country with approximately 196,000 residents. It has the fourth largest economy in the South East, with a broad employment base and is the national home of the Royal Navy. However, there are areas of high deprivation. The proportion of young people attaining five or more GCSEs A* - C including English and mathematics improved from 38.5% in 2008 to 42.8% for 2010, but this remains significantly below the national average. Similarly, adult residents of the city have fewer level 2 and 3 qualifications by the age of 19, and a higher proportion of adults have no qualifications, than surrounding regions in the South East or nationally.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Construction Skills
 - JTL
 - Scottish and Southern Electric.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - The Foyer
 - Hampshire Fire and Rescue (Prince's Trust).

Type of provision	Number of enrolled students in 2009/10
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to 18)</p> <p>Foundation learning</p>	<p>4 full-time students 437 part-time students</p> <p>913 full-time learners 117 part-time learners</p> <p>661 full-time learners 191 part-time learners</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p>	<p>788 full-time learners 3,453 part-time learners</p>
<p>Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships</p>	<p>1,104 learners 357 apprentices</p>

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 1
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Capacity to improve	Grade 1
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	1

Subject areas	Grade
Health and social care	1
Construction	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	1
Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	1

Overall effectiveness

6. Highbury College has improved significantly since its previous inspection and is now outstanding. Staff work hard with students to ensure they achieve their learning goals and most students do. The vast majority of students enjoy their time in college and complete their courses successfully. Success rates are far higher than for comparable colleges in all subject areas, although they are no better than satisfactory for apprentices. Many students develop good work-related skills, including literacy and numeracy, enabling them to progress to employment or further and higher education. The standard of teaching and learning is good and much is excellent. Most teaching sessions are lively and interesting and the college has excellent learning resources. Students receive outstanding care, guidance and support. The additional support received by some students often proves to be a key factor in their success. However, as staff fully acknowledge, students' attendance rates need to be improved.

7. An extensive range of courses is available to students and employers. Students have a broad choice of subject areas, in many cases from entry level to higher education. The outstanding partnerships established by staff, with a wide range of organisations and employers, provide many real benefits for students.
8. Leadership and management of the college are outstanding. The Principal, senior managers and governors have established a culture of high expectations for staff and students alike. Students feel safe and the college has good safeguarding arrangements. Excellent promotion of equality and diversity supports the inclusive atmosphere evident throughout the college. Staff take the views of students and employers seriously and often take action to improve things where they can. Staff know the strengths and weaknesses of the college very well. Quality improvement procedures have driven up standards very successfully. The college has high quality accommodation and equipment. It is in strong financial health and offers outstanding value for money. All these features indicate that the college has an excellent capacity to improve further.

Main findings

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. Retention, pass and success rates are very high for students of all ages and at all levels. They are above the national averages for all subject areas, in many cases significantly higher. All groups of students perform well, including all minority ethnic groups and male and female students. Outcomes on work-based learning programmes are good overall, but no better than satisfactory for apprentices.
- Students have very high standards of work and develop very good practical and work-related skills. Many students win awards at regional and national competitions. They make very good progress during their courses and achieve high rates of progression to further and higher education, and employment. Students' punctuality is good, but attendance rates remain no better than satisfactory.
- Students fully enjoy their time in college and many develop greater self-confidence and self-esteem. They feel safe in the college and respect is evident among students themselves and with staff. Behaviour is exemplary. Many students participate in voluntary and charity work and make a strong contribution to the local community.
- The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good with much that is outstanding. Teachers use a variety of activities to engage and motivate students. Learning resources are excellent. Staff use information and learning technologies (ILT) and the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) very effectively to enhance learning. In a small proportion of lessons, the individual needs of all learners are not met.
- Assessment very effectively supports students to make progress. Teachers marking students' work give constructive and informative feedback. Comprehensive initial assessments are compiled into group profiles and help teachers to plan lessons well to meet the needs of individuals.

- An extensive range of courses provides students with good opportunities for progression. Excellent awareness of, and involvement with, local and national organisations help staff to identify the needs of students and employers and provide them with benefits and services. The college provides a diverse range of activities to enrich the lives of students.
- Very strong partnerships help students to succeed and overcome barriers to education. Close collaboration with relevant agencies is effective in helping vulnerable students and those from under-represented groups to re-engage with education.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Highly effective initial guidance and advice ensures students are enrolled to the most appropriate programme and reduces the likelihood that students will leave. Learning mentors and support staff provide very good specialist support to meet individual student needs. Additional learning support is provided swiftly when required and contributes to the high achievements of students.
- Leadership and management are outstanding, as is governance. Highly effective leadership and detailed strategic and operational planning have led to high standards throughout the college. Accommodation and specialist resources are of high quality. Financial controls are strong and the college provides outstanding value for money.
- Quality assurance arrangements, including self-assessment, are comprehensive and rigorous. Staff make very effective use of management information to monitor and evaluate performance. Curriculum management is very strong and drives improvements.
- The college makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. The promotion of equality and diversity is exemplary and helps to make the college highly inclusive, both in its intake of students and in atmosphere.
- Staff value students' views and there are highly effective arrangements to involve students in decision-making processes. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and detailed procedures are in place to ensure students' safety and well-being.

What does Highbury College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attendance of students by ensuring tracking and follow-up procedures are followed closely by all staff.
- Increase success rates for apprenticeship programmes by continuing to monitor the progress of trainees rigorously and ensure they achieve within planned timescales.
- Continue the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning by sharing the good practice that exists in the college to ensure all teaching sessions meet the individual needs of students.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- developing personal and job-related skills that will help them in the future
- the friendly atmosphere where they make new friends
- the knowledgeable staff who are freely available when needed
- the informative and interesting lessons and practical sessions
- how staff keep regular contact with part-time students and give them support
- the excellent learning facilities and up-to-date equipment
- the local and accessible location of college centres
- the help and support students get to complete their course
- the wide choice of qualifications.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the long breaks between some lessons
- the high prices in the canteen.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the rapid response by college staff to any requests
- the way staff maintain regular contact and develop a relationship
- the flexible nature of programmes
- the way college programmes complement the in-house training carried out by employers.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the time students spend travelling for a relatively short period of time in the college.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

9. The college has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection. It was a good institution and now provides outstanding education and training. The overall effectiveness of provision is outstanding in health and social care, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and literacy, numeracy and ESOL, and good in construction. Strengths highlighted at the last inspection have been developed further and areas for improvement tackled successfully. Success rates have improved rapidly in all subject areas and are very high in relation to comparable colleges. A culture of high expectations is now embedded among staff and students. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive and consistently applied. They lead to improvements, including in subject areas already performing very well. Self-assessment processes are very accurate. The college has developed high quality accommodation and specialist equipment. It has strong financial health and provides outstanding value for money. All these features place the college in an excellent position to maintain and improve its high performance.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

10. Outcomes for students have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Success rates are now outstanding for students of all ages, on long and short courses, and at all levels. They are significantly higher than those of comparable colleges. These results are particularly impressive considering the relatively low levels of attainment of school leavers and adults in Portsmouth.
11. Retention and achievement rates are significantly above national figures. In 2009/10, the overall retention rate for students of all ages was 94.8%, compared to the national average of 88.3%, and the overall achievement rate was 97.2% compared to 89.8%. Success rates for each subject area taught in the college are also higher than national figures, in many cases significantly so. However, as acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report, there are low retention rates in a small minority of programmes.
12. Outcomes for employer responsive provision are good. Success rates within the planned timescale for students on Train to Gain programmes in 2009/10 were significantly above national averages. However, they were no better than satisfactory for apprenticeship programmes.
13. Staff work hard and are successful in ensuring there is no attainment gap for any group of students. Students of all minority ethnic groups represented in the college perform above the national averages. Female students of all ages succeed at a slightly higher rate than males, but success rates are high for both genders. Students with a declared disability and/or learning difficulty have higher overall success rates than other students.

14. Students make good progress taking into account their previous attainment. Progression rates to further study, higher education or employment are high. In 2009/10, 90% of school pupils aged 14 to 16 studying part-time at the college achieved and almost all progressed to courses, either at the college or other providers, or gained employment. Staff place a high priority on improving students' attendance rates, but they remain stubbornly no better than satisfactory. Punctuality is good.
15. The standard of students' work is very high, with good development of practical and work-related skills. Students take great pride in their achievements, some winning national skill awards. Staff work hard to raise the aspirations of students and many make very good progress in developing their personal and social skills. Students improve their literacy and numeracy skills very well and have a clear awareness of potential career opportunities.
16. Staff have fostered a strong culture of respect between students themselves and towards staff. Students' behaviour is exemplary. They feel safe in the college and greatly enjoy their time studying. Many make a strong contribution to the local community by undertaking a broad range of voluntary and enrichment activities. Students participate with enthusiasm in activities that raise their awareness of healthy living.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

17. Teaching, learning and assessment are good with much that is outstanding. Teachers are well qualified and have a very strong focus on supporting students to achieve. The large majority of lessons are lively and interesting. Teachers use very effective questioning and answering techniques to engage students and check their understanding. Teachers use ILT confidently, giving lessons a brisk pace and challenging students appropriately. They use teamwork and peer assessment particularly well to motivate students.
18. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not take full account of the needs of different students and miss opportunities to develop higher level skills. Teachers give equality and diversity issues a high priority and promote them well in many lessons. However, the college acknowledges the need to improve the recording of equality and diversity activities within lesson plans and schemes of work.
19. College procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning by observing lessons are rigorous and accurate. Observers have an appropriate focus on whether effective learning is taking place and judgements are moderated thoroughly. The college is committed to improving satisfactory and inadequate teaching and has effective mechanisms to support teachers to improve their performance. The college makes good use of observations to identify areas for improvement and to share good practice, focusing on particular themes in lessons, such as equality and diversity or meeting the needs of individual students.

20. Learning resources are excellent. The college promotes the development and use of ILT to enhance learning particularly well. Development of the VLE is a key part of the college's long-term strategy and vision for learning and there is a clear framework and timetable for its continued implementation across the institution. The college provides much support and training for ILT and reports on its use effectively through the course review process. Good examples of the use of ILT in the curriculum include using the VLE as an interactive tool for marking students' work, the use of digital photography to record evidence and incorporating the use of web-assisted video sites in practical lessons to demonstrate skills.
21. Assessment is very good. Teachers mark students' work carefully and give them detailed, probing and evaluative comments to encourage them to extend their ideas. Teachers also take care to correct any spelling and grammar mistakes. Internal verification processes are rigorous and accurate.
22. Results of the effective initial and diagnostic assessments are used by teachers to compile detailed profiles of the students in each group. Teachers use these profiles to ensure that students are extended and challenged in lessons, as well as supported.
23. The extensive range of provision meets the needs of users extremely well. The majority of subject areas provide courses from entry level to higher education, providing coordinated progression routes. In many subjects, students have a broad range of options to best suit their needs and career aspirations, with specialist skills often available. The college has developed a wide range of additional provision for vulnerable students and those from under-represented groups. Of particular note is the work to provide opportunities for local school children who have been, or are at risk of being, permanently excluded from school.
24. Staff work very well to identify and meet the needs of local and national employers. They have an excellent understanding of employment markets and use this information intelligently to anticipate future demands for particular skills. Close liaison with employers helps to maximise employment and work placement opportunities for students.
25. The college provides a diverse range of activities to enrich the lives of students. Activities include social, cultural, sporting and enterprise-based work. Care is taken to ensure students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated into all aspects of college life. For example, the college's Highbury Theatre Company put on productions involving these students. Multicultural festivals and activities contribute well to social integration, with students both organising and participating in activities. Events and competitions give students the opportunity to experience realistic and challenging work environments. For instance, hairdressing and beauty therapy students are recording a radio programme with a local radio station.

26. The college has established itself as the partner of choice for a wide range of groups and partnership work is outstanding. Staff collaborate closely with many organisations, to their mutual benefit and that of students. For example, excellent work with Portsmouth City Council has resulted in the creation of a 'one-stop shop' in the city centre which is valued by students and potential students as a good source of information and support. Staff have worked particularly well with local agencies to identify and provide support for young people not in education, employment or training, looked after children and children missing from education. The college has also worked well with a mental health charity to provide education and training for people recovering from illness. Outcomes for all these groups are very positive.
27. The college is very outward-facing in terms of what it provides and it makes a significant contribution to community cohesion. Much collaboration is geared towards sustainable development. For example, construction staff offer training on solar power and rainfall gathering systems and other departments focus on procuring resources from suppliers who use sustainable sources.
28. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Well-qualified staff and careers advisors have extensive links with schools to promote recruitment and to ensure students are on the most appropriate course. Students receive good advice about suitable progression pathways. Learning mentors provide very good support for students on personal, welfare and financial issues. Flexible and personal support is provided, such as arranging individual timetables to reduce travel costs for students. College counsellors are available for students and extensive links are in place with relevant agencies when referrals are appropriate. Vulnerable students and looked after children receive very effective help and support. The reporting of students' progress to parents, carers and employers is good.
29. Staff ensure that all students identified as needing additional support receive it quickly. Teachers and support staff liaise very well to provide excellent additional support. Personal learning plans have specific targets and action plans and are used well to monitor and record student progress.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

30. Leadership and management are outstanding. The Principal, senior managers, governing body and staff focus relentlessly on the core college aim of enabling students to achieve. A culture prevails where high expectations and aspirations are normal. The celebration and reward of success are key features of the college. Planning is thorough and comprehensive. Managers take careful account of national and local priorities, including employers' needs, while reaching out to groups of vulnerable students, such as those with mental health issues or offenders. Teachers and support staff agree challenging targets that are mostly achieved. Support staff contribute fully to the achievements of students and the success of the college. For example, staff absence has fallen as a result of arrangements introduced by human resources' policies.

31. Curriculum management is very strong and managers are highly effective in driving improvements, sharing good practice and working effectively as a team. Managers are responsive and supported very well to develop their entrepreneurial skills and so broaden provision, including internationally.
32. Governance is outstanding. The governing body is highly effective in supporting and challenging the strategic direction of the college. A well-structured governor liaison scheme enables them to become more involved with staff and students. Many are highly knowledgeable about the work of the college. Governors have a broad set of skills and experience, enabling them to monitor academic and financial performance rigorously.
33. Procedures for safeguarding are good. Staff and students feel the college provides a safe learning environment. Each campus has effective designated managers who meet regularly and have established rigorous procedures for safeguarding and health and safety throughout the college. However, a small minority of learners do not have a good understanding of the college's safeguarding processes. All staff and governors have received appropriate training on safeguarding procedures. Rigorous checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of all staff, governors and volunteers working in the college. Safeguarding information is maintained on a comprehensive single record which also contains details of safeguarding training for each individual.
34. Extensive liaison takes place with external agencies, including particularly strong links with the probation service and local police. These partnerships help staff to keep students safe and aware of dangers. All potential students are invited to declare any criminal record they may have when enrolling and support is provided to those who choose to do so if required. An uncompromising approach is taken to ensure safe working practices and staying safe. Health and safety is prioritised and careful risk assessments are carried out for all relevant activities. Staff have a very clear understanding of issues relating to bullying and harassment, including cyber-bullying.
35. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff plan awareness-raising activities with students well. The college is a very inclusive community and social and educational inclusion is exemplary. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritage is higher than in the local community and has increased since the previous inspection, as has the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college recognises that the proportion of staff of minority ethnic heritage is slightly lower than the local population. It is taking steps through local and national agencies to rectify this, including measures such as an innovative internship programme.
36. The monitoring and analysis of data on the performance and satisfaction of different groups of students is extremely detailed. No consistent attainment gap is found for any group of learners in the college. Any areas of difference are tackled effectively, as staff have a very good understanding of the reasons

behind any discrepancy. Staff review all policies and procedures very thoroughly to assess any adverse impact on particular groups.

37. Staff use the views of students and employers very well to promote improvements. Issues raised are dealt with promptly. Student representatives attend a wide range of college meetings, including senior management team meetings that have a focus on students' views. Students are involved in the appointment of new teaching staff. Staff engage with a wide and increasing range of employers. Meetings comprising employers and staff ensure courses meet the needs and expectations of employers. Staff respond responsively to employers' requests, such as varying the attendance patterns of students to suit their business need.
38. Quality assurance procedures are highly effective and lead to rapid improvements. The self-assessment process is thorough, detailed and accurate, with much agreement between the college's judgements and the findings of inspectors. Curriculum area self-assessment reports highlight good practice very well and actions for improvement are monitored regularly. Subject area review meetings, led by the Principal, focus closely on the performance of students and result in a very clear picture of why students may be underperforming. The Principal and senior managers meet monthly with course teams of underperforming courses to monitor the effect of agreed improvement actions. Management information is accurate and used very effectively by staff at all levels to inform performance and actions. Plans are underway to evaluate the impact of staff development more effectively and to improve the attendance of part-time staff at college development days.
39. Resources are managed very well and the college provides outstanding value for money. Governors and managers have overseen the building of a high quality college estate while achieving a position of outstanding financial health.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 1

Context

40. At the time of inspection, 63 students, mainly 16 to 18 year-old and predominantly female, study a range of full-time BTEC courses in health and social care from entry to advanced levels. Approximately 109 adult students, one of eight of whom were male, were taking NVQ programmes at levels 2, 3 and 4 and leadership and management for care services at level 4. Eighteen local school pupils study part-time courses. In addition, other short courses are provided, such as the certificate in health and safety and a range of distance learning and bespoke employment-related programmes.

Key Findings

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. Success rates are high for the majority of courses. They improved dramatically for BTEC courses in 2008/09 and this position was maintained in 2009/10. For work-based learning provision they are significantly above national averages and continuing to improve.
- Students enjoy their learning, use their time productively in lessons and produce a high standard of work. Some students demonstrate a particularly high level of understanding relative to the level of their course. Students develop good employability skills through their lessons, tutorials and work experience.
- Staff are keen to ensure that the time students spend in college has a positive impact on the choices they make in their personal lives. For example, some students now cook healthier meals at home. Students make a significant contribution to the local community through fund-raising and voluntary work, which has developed their understanding of other people's lives.
- The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good. Staff and students have excellent working relationships. Staff encourage students to aim high and support them well in lessons. They use ILT confidently in lessons and independently for research. However, in a few lessons teachers do not stretch and challenge students sufficiently.
- Students receive prompt and constructive feedback on their work and effective use is made of peer and self-assessment to encourage students to improve their own skills.
- Care, guidance and support are excellent. Staff provide students with intensive support and set clear goals and boundaries for their success. Students at risk of underperforming are identified quickly and provided with strategies to succeed, such as an individualised timetable or support from a mentor. However, retention rates for first diploma students, and students' attendance rates generally, remain no better than satisfactory.
- Staff have established strong and productive links with a wide range of schools,

employers and community groups. They work collaboratively with employers to develop courses. Visits from organisations such as the Association for the Blind enhance the learning experience of students.

- Outstanding leadership and management drive improvements. Staff share the same vision and values to promote the success of their students. A culture of continuous improvement prevails. The sharing of good practice is encouraged and new or inexperienced teachers are supported well.
- Excellent working relationships are fostered between teachers and students, who treat each other with respect. Any inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated and is dealt with effectively, and students feel valued and safe in college.
- Safeguarding procedures and the promotion of equality and diversity have a high priority. All staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. Students know how to report problems they may have and are aware of relevant issues such as cyber-bullying. Staff challenge stereotypical attitudes effectively through a range of activities, although sometimes equality and diversity issues are not promoted in lessons when the opportunity arises.
- Rigorous quality assurance monitoring processes are well understood by all staff. The self-assessment process is accurate. Staff place considerable emphasis on improving the standard of teaching and learning. Staff use students' achievement data very effectively to monitor the effectiveness of provision.
- Employers' views are gathered very well through formal surveys, telephone conversations and assessor visits to the premises. Students are consulted extensively through focus group meetings, on-line surveys and act as representatives for their course. The views of users inform future planning and action is taken to address their concerns.
- Teaching accommodation and specialist resources are exemplary. The nursery room, palliative care room and dental surgery are used well and stocked with relevant, contemporary learning aids and resources.

What does Highbury College need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning further by ensuring students are challenged and extended more fully in lessons to develop higher level skills of evaluation and analysis.
- Develop more targeted support mechanisms for first diploma students to improve their retention rates and raise students' attendance rates generally.

Construction

Grade 2

Context

41. At the time of inspection, there were 1,212 students on construction courses. Craft courses include brickwork, carpentry, plastering, painting and decorating, tiling and groundwork, with 345 full-time and 317 part-time students. Plumbing programmes had 171 students, gas installation had 267 and 152 were studying the built environment. Also, 181 school pupils aged 14 to 16 from 19 local schools attended part-time courses. The majority of construction provision is located at the Northarbour Centre, with built environment courses at the Highbury Campus and school pupils taught at the Apex Centre in Havant.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Success rates are well above the national averages for the large number of students taking foundation and intermediate level courses, although they are below them for the smaller number of advanced level students. Overall outcomes in work-based learning are satisfactory, but low for advanced apprentices.
- The standard of students' work is very high. Carpentry and joinery students on intermediate courses demonstrate knowledge of roofing structures far in excess of what is expected. Similarly, plumbing students have high levels of practical competence in installing bathroom and heating systems. Many students have acquired wide-ranging knowledge on technical aspects of their trades.
- Progression rates for students are high. They are outstanding for school pupils aged 14 to 16, with around one half of those undertaking the programme in 2009/10 continuing to study at the college when leaving school. Many students starting at foundation level progress to intermediate and advanced courses and some secure places at university.
- Students make an outstanding contribution to the community. For example, students from all subject areas of construction renovated a local vicarage to a very high standard. Another project involved them installing energy-saving equipment in a residential home for people with autism, and measuring the effectiveness of energy-saving initiatives by comparing bills with an identical house before renovation.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students enjoy both practical and theory sessions. Theory lessons involve a variety of activities that maintain the interest of students and teachers use ILT effectively. Teachers plan practical sessions well, with students agreeing individual objectives with the teacher at the start of the each session. Students wear appropriate personal protective equipment and follow the correct procedures when using potentially dangerous equipment.
- The breadth of construction courses is very good, covering a wide variety of trades and professions from entry level through to foundation degree.

Employers' needs are met well, for example by changing the timings of day-release programmes in order to meet varying work patterns. Individual timetables are arranged for students to fit in with childcare and work patterns.

- Construction staff have outstanding links with industry. Collaboration with large national companies and sole traders has increased the availability of work placements for many students, and in some cases has led to employment. Employers from specialist companies make presentations regularly to students. Partnerships with schools are very good. Pupils from 19 local schools, including pupil referral units, attend the Apex Centre studying entry-level qualifications.
- Care guidance and support are good. Students are recruited onto foundation and intermediate courses which match their aspirations and abilities, although this is not always the case for advanced level provision. Thorough initial and specialist diagnostic assessments help staff identify where students have additional learning needs. Students benefit from good support and they are clear about what to do if they need help either with their studies or personal issues.
- Leadership and management are good and very effective in securing rapid improvement in success rates. Students are only withdrawn after exhaustive efforts to provide support or find alternative provision. Management of programmes for 14 to 16 year-olds is outstanding with individual progress closely monitored and communication with schools frequent and detailed.
- Safeguarding procedures are outstanding. The recreational area in the main construction centre provides a focus for all welfare issues and staff are readily available to support students on personal or academic issues. Specialist speakers from the National Health Service and other agencies visit frequently to speak on a variety of health and welfare subjects. Very high standards of students' behaviour are evident.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Equality and diversity have a high profile and staff work regularly with girls' schools and community groups to attract under-represented groups into construction.
- The self-assessment report identifies accurately the main strengths and areas for improvement in construction. Staff and students are involved closely in the process. Meetings involving courses representatives are well-attended and discreet meetings are arranged to gather the view of female students and those of black and minority ethnic heritage. Staff make changes as a result of feedback from students, for example to catering and prayer room arrangements.
- All centres offer a secure and welcoming learning environment where students feel safe. Accommodation is exemplary and there is a good supply of capital equipment and consumable materials. Construction provision provides very good value for money.

What does Highbury College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on work-based learning programmes, particularly at advanced level, by ensuring more rigorous recruitment and initial assessment practices are carried out.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 1

Context

42. Beauty therapy and hairdressing courses are provided for full-time and part-time students from foundation to advanced levels. During the inspection, there were 63 school pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools and pupil referral units, 364 students were aged 16 to 18 and 226 were adults. There were 72 apprentices. Some 3% of students are male and 5% are from minority ethnic groups. Programmes are offered at the Highbury Arundel Centre in the city centre and the Highbury Campus.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. Success rates for beauty therapy programmes are all well above national averages with several courses having 100% success rates. They are high for hairdressing courses also. Success rates for apprenticeships over the last three years have been at least satisfactory and currently for 2010/11 they are high. Success rates for 14 to 16 year-old students are outstanding.
- Students develop very good employability skills, adhering to professional dress codes and displaying high levels of customer service. Students develop particularly high levels of practical skills with innovative work being produced by students preparing for competitions. Progression is good from one level of programme to the next and to employment.
- Students feel extremely safe in college. Safe working practices to protect both students and clients are followed strictly. For example, students protect the skin of clients carefully when colouring and always disinfect tools when appropriate. Students' healthy lifestyles are promoted well in tutorials and lessons. Students raise funds for national and local charities, work with people from disadvantaged groups and carry out demonstrations in the local community.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Learning is well-planned. Students set their own challenging targets, make particularly good use of their time and peer-assess finished work. When planned activities are finished early students undertake additional work. In an outstanding session observed by inspectors, students carried out skilful demonstrations of long-hair work to each other.
- Teachers use a wide variety of innovative strategies to assess learning. For example, students worked together to produce a labelled model of hair. Resources to support teaching, and the availability of clients, are particularly good. Teachers make good use of ILT. Students upload assignments on the VLE for teachers to mark and make podcasts of their work. Staff are well qualified, experienced and commercially competent.
- Assessments are very well planned. Salon managers direct clients carefully to those students whose work needs to be assessed. Students' progress is

monitored rigorously. Good verbal and written feedback is given and students know what they need to do to complete their course within planned timescales.

- The overall range of provision is good. Students may progress from entry to higher level qualifications and further pathways to level 4 or higher education are being developed. Managers discontinued evening part-time provision recently, reducing opportunities for part-time adults. The college has very effective and close working relationships with local schools. Good links with the local hairdressing and beauty industry provide work tasters and employment opportunities for students.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding, helping students to fulfil their potential. Initial assessments identify students with support needs and comprehensive profiles of the group enable learning and pastoral support to be arranged. Staff are responsive to the changing circumstances of students, arranging personalised timetables to take into account factors such as finances, pregnancy, childcare and medical needs.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The provision is well-managed with staff responsibilities made clear and good communication between staff. Staff monitor the progress, punctuality and attendance of students closely. Strategies to retain students are very effective. Governors take an effective, active role in the work of the department. Safeguarding is good and staff promote safety when using the Internet well.
- Students understand the diverse needs of clients, adapting treatments for clients with disabilities when appropriate. Session plans highlight equality and diversity issues, although the wider understanding of equality issues among students is no better than satisfactory. Staff monitor the participation and success rates of different groups thoroughly and no discernable differences are found.
- Self-assessment is evaluative, critical and accurate. Staff are involved closely in the process and good use is made of students' views. The quality improvement plan is reviewed regularly. There are many examples of improvements being made that benefit students. Staff carry out joint observations of lessons for 14 to 16 lessons with deputy head teachers, and this has led to improved practice. Staff routinely share good practice across teams.
- Resources are good and well-managed. Staff use products carefully to minimise wastage and there is a strong emphasis on energy efficiency. Potential products are researched and sourced from sustainable manufacturers. Accommodation for hairdressing and beauty therapy is of a good standard and is used efficiently. However, there are fewer ILT facilities in salons at the Highbury Arundel Centre. Value for money is outstanding.

What does Highbury College need to do to improve further?

- Increase the availability of ILT facilities in practical rooms at the Highbury Arundel Centre to further enrich the experience of students.
- Extend current provision to provide further progression routes for part-time adult students.

Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Grade 1

Context

43. Courses offered include qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy, functional skills in mathematics and English, ESOL, speaking and listening, and Skills for Life. Literacy and numeracy courses are taught at three college centres and ESOL provision is based at the Highbury City of Portsmouth Centre. There are 923 students following literacy and numeracy programmes. Of these are 786 are full-time and 137 are part-time students. There are 209 students following ESOL programmes, 141 on full-time and 68 on part-time courses.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. Pass and retention rates are consistently high and well above national averages. Many students progress successfully from non-accredited courses to achieve nationally recognised qualifications. Intermediate key skills programmes for students on vocational courses have improved significantly since the last inspection and are above national figures.
- The standard of students' work is high and many make outstanding progress towards attaining their individual learning goals. Students with low levels of literacy, numeracy and language skills consistently exceed academic and personal learning outcomes. Students successfully progress onto vocational programmes, access to higher education courses or gain employment. Students are making positive progress with functional skills qualifications.
- Students feel very safe and secure at the college. They value the security arrangements within the college. Cultural diversity is celebrated and students contribute to raising cultural awareness across the college. Students show much respect for each other and staff.
- Highly effective planning integrates the development of literacy, numeracy and language skills into vocational, citizenship and employability themes. Students also develop these skills through a wide range of community projects, events and trips. For instance, one group planned and carried out renovation work to a local community building. These opportunities are an integral part of many ESOL courses and some literacy and numeracy programmes.
- Teaching and learning are good in literacy and numeracy and outstanding for ESOL provision. Teachers make exceptional and innovative use of technology to support learning. Learning is highly interactive and many activities and homework are accessible on the college's VLE and are used by learners in college or at home. However, in less effective lessons there is insufficient focus on meeting individual student needs, particularly for lower level literacy and numeracy students.
- Initial and diagnostic assessments identify the appropriate level of course for each student. Literacy, numeracy and language staff work collaboratively with

vocational and student support staff to provide individualised advice and guidance to students on the most appropriate progression pathway. This raises aspirations and motivates students.

- Partnerships with external agencies including social services and community groups are outstanding. Close collaboration with relevant agencies helps to develop relevant learning programmes. Teaching staff have an innovative partnership with a mental health agency and deliver learning programmes to students with mental health issues. Collaborative working provides exceptional support for vulnerable students, enabling them to continue with their learning.
- Care, guidance and support are exemplary. Staff have developed a very supportive environment for students. Comprehensive information is shared effectively between all teaching and support staff which enables them to provide students with more targeted support strategies. Curriculum teachers work closely with counsellors, learning mentors, additional learning support staff and career advisors, who are very skilful at understanding and supporting specific student needs.
- Exceptional leadership and management provide a clear and well-defined strategy and direction. Managers communicate excellently with staff and students to promote high levels of motivation and commitment. The curriculum transition to functional skills courses and ESOL qualifications is being managed extremely well while ensuring high student outcomes are maintained.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Literacy, numeracy and language staff support the embedding of equality and diversity awareness into curriculum design and carry out staff training across the college. Safeguarding practices are good and well understood by all staff. Staff are experienced and knowledgeable in how to support the needs of vulnerable students.
- The self-assessment process is systematic, rigorous and accurate. All staff contribute to the process and are clear about the contribution they are making to promote improvement. There is a strong team approach with excellent communication strategies and shared values.
- Specialist facilities such as catering kitchens and computing facilities are available to enhance the ESOL curriculum. Other accommodation is of a good professional standard. Value for money is outstanding.

What does Highbury College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning further by developing a wider range of learning strategies to better meet the individual needs of students, especially those on lower level literacy and numeracy programmes.

Information about the inspection

44. Five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the college's collegiate executive director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, surveys and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
45. 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)
Highbury 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	2528	11	1635	788	0
Part-time learners	2873	454	81	1309	1015
Overall effectiveness	1	1	1	1	2
Capacity to improve	1				
Outcomes for learners	1	1	1	1	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1				
How well do learners progress?	1				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	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				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	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?	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?	1				
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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