

West Thames College

General further education college

Inspection dates		10–14 March 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, and a significant minority of lessons are outstanding.
- Students' success on their courses is often high. Students achieve good standards in their college work and develop valuable skills, including practical skills, which they can apply in further study and employment.
- Teachers successfully promote the improvement of students' English and mathematics.
- The college's arrangements to help students prepare for employment are excellent and reflected in the good progression of students into work.
- Highly productive work with an extensive and diverse range of partners ensures relevant and meaningful courses, to meet students' and employers' needs. Students' learning opportunities are extended through purposeful activities and projects, run with college partners.
- Students' opportunities to better understand their chosen careers are significantly improved through the college's excellent programme of course enrichment.
- Governors, managers and all staff have driven forward significant and sustained improvement since the previous inspection. Challenging and ambitious targets for improvement, with students' learning at their heart, are successfully pursued and met.
- Highly effective performance management, linked with the robust teaching observation scheme, has driven the sustained and significant improvement in teaching, learning and assessment.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet outstanding.
- Too few level 3 students achieve high grades in their final assessments or make the progress expected of them, given their previous level of examination success.
- The successful completion of their courses by apprentices is too low, especially within the agreed timescales.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are not good enough.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the continued improvement of teaching, learning and assessment, so that most is outstanding. Build on the existing best practice of teachers, always to plan to meet the needs of all students, paying particular attention to providing sufficient challenge for more able students.
- Ensure that the review of students' progress and the setting of challenging and measurable targets are consistently rigorous for all students. Help all students to improve by always including short-term development targets in learning plans, including the recently-introduced electronic learning plans.
- As part of the college's drive to continue to improve students' success, pay particular attention to raising success rates on level 1 courses and for all apprentices. Also, improve students' achievement of high grades, and increase the extent to which all students reach a higher level of attainment than might be expected from their starting points when they join the college.
- Improve students' attendance and punctuality, initially to the level of the college's targets for improvement.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Students' attainment of qualifications is good. Many of the students come to the college with lower than average prior attainment, as indicated by their previous success in GCSE examinations. Overall, the college's success rates are better than those of colleges in areas of similar social and economic deprivation.
- Since the previous inspection, the college's headline success rate, for classroom-based courses, has improved markedly, year on year, and is now clearly above the national average for similar colleges. This is also the case for success rates on long courses overall, although more markedly so for adult students than for those aged 16 to 18. These improvements are reflected in both students' retention on their courses and in their pass rates.
- Students' success is not consistently good for all levels of courses. In 2012/13, the success rate for level 1 courses was just below the national average and for GCE A levels, more significantly below. However, the relatively small GCE A-level provision has now been ended, other than for sciences, and rigorous performance management is already improving standards of work at level 1. The significant numbers of students aged 14 to 16 have high success rates and often progress to college full-time courses.
- Students' success in foundation English and mathematics assessments is good.
- The college is working to improve its understanding of the progress which level 3 learners make, relative to their prior attainment. Using this measure, and based on currently incomplete information, students make only satisfactory progress, at the best. The achievement of higher grades on level 2 and 3 courses is too low. Whilst the proportion is increasing, further improvement is needed.
- Success rates for the growing apprenticeship provision, and for the reducing amount of workplace learning, require improvement. While the successful completion of these learners is sometimes good, there is considerable variation between subject areas, and the proportion of learners completing within their agreed timescales, although improving, is low.
- The college pays close attention to any underperformance by groups or categories of student. Currently, managers and staff are addressing the poorer performance of White British males at level 1 compared to that of Black minority ethnic students. In 2012/13, the overall success for

students with declared learning difficulties was significantly higher than for those who were not receiving additional support.

- Students enjoy their studies, working in an environment where respect for others is developed and practised. Their standards of work, and the skills they develop, are good. In health and care and early years, for example, students' practical skills and their understanding of their work are excellent, and in the performing arts, students develop impressive talents, honed in public performance. Students often make good, and sometimes better than expected, progress on their courses. Students often develop confidence and facility in their use of English and mathematics.
- Students' attendance is satisfactory, although attendance and punctuality in too many lessons observed by inspectors were poor. Students are well motivated and develop the confidence and enthusiasm to study further. Many progress between levels of study: 90% from level 1 to level 2 courses in 2012/13 and 70% from level 2 to level 3. Increasing numbers apply and progress to higher education.
- The college engages in excellent work to foster students' progress to employment. Within subject areas there is good evidence of students' significant progression to course-related employment. However, in this respect, the college does not have a comprehensive picture of the impact of its work. It is currently building on a pilot scheme, trialled last autumn, to provide fuller information.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Nearly all of the lessons seen by inspectors were good or better, including a significant minority that was outstanding. The college provides a vibrant, lively environment where students aspire, and respond well, to the often high expectations of their teachers and the celebration of achievement.
- The college's continued focus on what constitutes good learning has markedly improved the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Most teachers plan learning to accommodate the varying needs of students, using innovative and diverse resources, including new technologies. Teachers resourcefully choose students' topics and activities that link learning to relevant industrial and commercial practice. For example, media students exhibited lively debate and thoughtful understanding as they explored critical influences on companies' decisions in linking their products to celebrities, and the consequences if celebrities fell from public grace.
- Teachers often plan learning which is well sequenced, sufficiently challenging and has clearly defined aims, shared with students. Students' participation in lessons is high, with teachers positively reinforcing and summarising key learning points. In many lessons, students make good progress, working at, or ahead of, their expected level of attainment. In a small minority of lessons where learning is less evident, teachers insufficiently accommodate the needs of all students, particularly the more able.
- Students benefit from high quality accommodation and learning resources. Teachers are vocationally experienced and well qualified. They know their students well, are accessible and responsive to student requests and queries. Specialist in-class support is planned well. Learning support assistants and teachers work collaboratively to ensure that students meet their individual potential and learning targets.
- Good arrangements for students' independent study promote learning. All learning programmes include independent study in the learning centre, supported by knowledgeable learning centre assistants, providing guidance on resources and research methods. Students value working in this way and its positive influence on their assignment work. Interactive web-based learning programmes help students study and, for example, help them develop the skills to apply successfully for jobs.
- Diverse and mature partnerships, within the private, public and voluntary sectors, provide exceptional opportunities for students to extend their learning. For example, media students were invited to shoot a promotional video for a local media company, now used on the company

website. Travel and tourism students were invited to test and evaluate a national airline’s arrivals system as part of the rebuilding of Heathrow Terminal 2. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities follow internships with a local multi-national pharmaceutical company, sampling a range of jobs and often gaining employment with the company. Although the college is working well to make work experience universal for its students, not all programmes yet provide a work placement.

- Expert staff provide good information, advice and guidance, helping students join appropriate courses, or being referred elsewhere, if appropriate. Good initial testing evaluates their starting points. Fruitful transition arrangements, including open days, interviews with specialist teachers and visits to college, prepare students well for life at college. Student learning advisers provide good on-going advice and guidance, giving specific assistance to help students decide on what is next for them as they near completion of their courses.
- Teachers often develop suitably interesting and challenging assessments and assignments for students. They give constructive and detailed feedback and provide specific examples on what students need to do to improve further. Teachers use students’ qualifications on entry to the college and early progress evaluations to help establish students’ predicted grades on their courses. On the majority of courses, teachers consistently review students’ progress and set challenging and measurable progress targets. However, too many of the recently implemented electronic learning plans do not reflect teachers’ feedback on students’ progress or work, and insufficiently identify short-term development targets to help students improve.
- Students’ English and mathematics are developed well. Specialist teachers, working within subject areas, facilitate a seamless approach to teaching and assessing these subjects. Subject teachers often skilfully embrace English and mathematics within their lessons and they systematically correct spelling and grammatical errors. A valuable interactive study programme for English and mathematics is used by students across the college, as part of their independent study programme. Staff are developing learning resources to better contextualise English and mathematics assignments to students’ subject areas.
- All staff promote a culture of equality and inclusion. Students enjoy their courses and feel safe in the college. The college’s positive approach in valuing the individual is apparent to students. Teachers often make good use of opportunities to promote and develop students’ wider and deeper understanding of equality and diversity.

Health and social care, early years and playwork

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes
Apprenticeships

Outstanding

- Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment are reflected in excellent outcomes for students. Their success rates have improved over time, are now high, and significant numbers complete their programmes with high grades. Progression is excellent. Students acquire professional caring skills of a high standard, enabling them to progress to further college courses, higher education or employment.
- Teachers make exceptional use of their experiences in health and care employment to enthuse and motivate students. As a result, students understand the care sector well and acquire the valuable skills they will need for employment and promotion in their work.
- Teachers provide students with work that challenges them to engage with creative and innovative learning and assessment opportunities, and students enthusiastically produce work of a high standard. For example, in a level 3 lesson, students skilfully examined a complex scenario, proposed a relevant sociological theory, cited supporting and opposing thinking and conducted a valuable debate.

- Teachers manage a range of stimulating individual and group activities and students develop the essential knowledge, skills and confidence required by employers in the care profession. In a level 1 lesson, a student commented that the course had given them something that they had never experienced before, a sense of belief in themselves.
- Teachers pose difficult questions, testing students’ knowledge thoroughly, and ensure that the students reflect, and analyse, before providing accurate and insightful responses. Through their answers, students relate their knowledge of theory and practice to their chosen routes in the care profession and to salient professional practice.
- The college facilitates a wide range of high quality work placements for students. Students confidently practise the caring skills they have learned and observe practitioners, who provide exemplary role models. As part of their study programmes, students further develop their knowledge of a wide range of people’s needs, through many different planned enrichment and voluntary activities.
- Teachers identify students’ skills and knowledge exceptionally well at the beginning of a course and use this information to set aspirational targets for all students. Teachers set work and assignments that ensure students meet their targets.
- Teachers’ feedback on course work and assignments is detailed and comprehensive. It clearly tells students what they need to do in order to improve the quality of their work. Students value the feedback they receive as it inspires and encourages them to produce work of a higher quality.
- Students develop good English and mathematics. Subject teachers successfully teach the English and mathematics students need in the care profession. As a result, students confidently apply mathematics to caring tasks, such as working out how many parts of formula to water are needed to make up a new-born baby’s feed. In another instance, students were interrogating a range of datasets to inform their proposed hypotheses as part of a debate around health inequalities.
- Pastoral care and learning support in lessons are excellent, recognising students’ needs and responding to them swiftly. Teachers and specialist support staff provide highly relevant advice and support which prepare students very well for progression to employment, higher education or further training.
- Teachers very skilfully broaden students’ understanding of social diversity and other challenging topics related to the health and caring profession. For example, through reviewing the outcomes from a public inquiry into the racially-motivated murder of a young person, students gained essential insight to, and deeper understanding of, community cohesion and regeneration.

Science	Good
16-19 study programmes	
19+ Learning programmes	

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which is reflected in the often good success of students and the good proportion of high grades for students on GCSE and level 3 vocational courses. These require improvement on the smaller GCE AS- and A- level programme. Overall, students on level 3 vocational courses make better progress than predicted from their qualifications on entry. Teachers set high standards for students. They have taken well-considered and successful actions to bring about improvements. Students’ attendance and punctuality remain in need of improvement.
- Students’ progression between levels is good, from pre-GCSE through to levels 2 and 3. Progression to higher education and employment from level 3 courses is high.
- Teachers plan well-structured lessons that build and extend students’ knowledge, skills and understanding. Students are attentive and well motivated. They work well together in carefully allocated pairs and groups and are confident in presenting their findings to their classmates, for

example on the role of maceration in digestion. Teachers consolidate learning well before moving on. Most students make good progress and enjoy learning.

- Teachers use well-prepared resources and often make good use of information and learning technology (ILT) to enliven lessons and elucidate points, such as when covering the use of gene therapy in treating disease. Students demonstrated their practical skills in a physics lesson, working carefully to explore the relationship between force and extension in a spring. In most lessons, teachers provide good additional materials to make sure all students are engaged and learning. They make skilful use of questions to check learning and extend understanding, although at times too few students are encouraged to ask questions.
- The college provides effective additional support for students who need it. Teachers use their knowledge of their students well in planning lessons.
- Teachers continually assess students’ progress in lessons using a variety of techniques, including questions, checking completed tasks, and quizzes. Students’ assessed written work is well presented and of a good standard. Most teachers give detailed, helpful feedback and not only correct spelling, punctuation and grammar but also give helpful comments to improve students’ vocabulary and use of English. Students who fall behind with their work or find a topic difficult benefit from extra help and support from teachers. Teachers and students make good use of the virtual learning environment for this purpose, developing students’ skills in independent learning.
- Students know their targets for improvement and what they need to do to achieve these. Teachers continually monitor students’ academic and personal progress, such as attendance and the contribution they make in lessons. Course leaders hold productive weekly meetings with tutors to discuss and agree actions for students at risk of leaving their course. High student retention rates confirm the success of these actions.
- Teachers assess students’ skills in mathematics, English and science at the start of their courses and use this information effectively. Teachers provide good language and number support in lessons, not only correcting errors but also helping students improve their pronunciation and vocabulary. They reinforce the use of technical terms well.
- Initial guidance ensures students are on the right course; ongoing advice helps them plan their future. In lessons, teachers relate topics well to their applications in industry, such as the use of Le Chetalier’s principle in the manufacture of ammonia. A good range of well-planned work-related activities, such as visits to the National Physical Laboratory, visiting speakers (including past students) and work placements broaden students’ horizons and raise their aspirations.
- The college promotes equality and diversity well and helps prepare students for life in a diverse community. Students report a harmonious environment and say that bullying and harassment are rare. The tutorial programme deals well with topics such as homophobic bullying. The department has closed gaps in performance between different groups of students. The diversity of the department’s staff provides a good role model for students.

Hair and beauty therapy

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes
Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and lead to consistently good outcomes for the majority of students. However, the achievement of a minority of level 1 and 2 students dipped below national averages in 2012/13, requiring improvement. The majority of students make good progress and there are no persistent achievement gaps between different student groups. Students at all levels effectively develop essential client-care skills and work very well with their teachers and each other. Students’ attendance requires improvement.
- Managers and teachers successfully promote to students a strong ethos of high achievement and aspiration. Very well resourced, industry-standard salons are maintained well by staff and

students, who take a pride in their environment. Prominent displays of students’ excellent work, ‘student of the month’, attendance awards, and group tracking, showing students’ progress towards achievement, convey a culture of high expectations. Aspiration and ambition are also well supported by an extensive and well attended student enrichment programme, including visits to high profile television studios, tailored to the level and interests of the students.

- The large majority of lessons very effectively develop students’ skills and knowledge of technical aspects of hairdressing, beauty therapy and make-up, such as foil highlights and the digestive system. In the best lessons, teachers use their individual knowledge of students to plan thoughtfully a range of activities that maintain students’ focus and capture their interest, such as shaving balloons in a barbering lesson or creating a ‘Moulin Rouge’ look in a theatrical makeup lesson. Teachers ensure students develop good safe working practices.
- Teachers and other staff provide a positive experience for students. Students benefit from such key features as focused support, expert skills demonstration and peer assessment. Through a continuous focus on self-assessment, students develop their critical sense and are able to make improvements to their work. In practical sessions, students work enthusiastically and develop good skills. They are supported well by teachers, who use their occupational expertise to sharpen students’ skills and knowledge, such as how to wash a wig or how to use hot stones effectively in advanced massage lessons.
- In the small minority of less successful lessons, teachers fail to use detailed assessment criteria well enough to promote consistency in students’ standards of practical work, and direct too few questions at individual students to thoroughly check their learning. Whilst most hairdressing, beauty and make-up students develop good skills and knowledge, those of a small minority of level 2 students are barely satisfactory, considering the amount of time they have been in training.
- Assessment is thorough and effective. Teachers use their good knowledge of students and of students’ learning goals to provide targeted assessment opportunities in practical lessons. Comments in marked work effectively enable students to improve. However, the incremental development of students’ knowledge and skills, and the review of their progress, are hampered by the insufficiently systematic setting of improvement targets.
- Initial advice and guidance, and teachers’ use of initial assessment to plan teaching and learning, are good. Students benefit from the expert advice of hairdressing and beauty specialists at interview and complete a very useful industry-based project prior to their enrolment.
- English and mathematics are embedded well in lessons and their importance is highlighted in classroom display material. Errors in spelling and grammar are routinely corrected in marked work, enabling students to make improvements. Employability skills are a key focus in lessons and teachers create opportunities to ensure that students develop the wider skills they will need to succeed at work, including the use of an ‘Am I employable today?’ self-assessment. In spite of these opportunities, the systematic provision of work experience for all students is underdeveloped, although many are employed part time in the industries.
- Equality and diversity are well promoted. Although these themes are not always explicitly highlighted by teachers, students of different ages and nationalities work harmoniously together and students for whom English is a second language, ably supported by both their teachers and their peers, participate fully in college life and achieve very well.

Performing and visual arts 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes	Good
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- Managers’ improvement measures have driven a significant revival in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and in students’ corresponding rates of success, both of which are now good. Students on level 1 and 2 programmes achieve especially well. Whilst an increasing

number of students progress to higher education, the proportion achieving high grades requires improvement.

- Students' retention has improved significantly across programmes and is now often high; but their attendance and punctuality, whilst improved, are too low.
- Vibrant teaching and learning develop students' skills and knowledge well. Teachers use inventive approaches, ensuring the sound development of students' performance skills in dance and theatre and thorough knowledge and technical understanding in music and animation. Students perform contemporary plays with conviction and confidence.
- In the best lessons, teachers expect high standards and are unequivocal in their expectations of students' sustained participation. In theatre lessons, teachers enable good skills development in articulation, vocal qualities and character analysis, paying attention to key performance attributes. Art and design level 1 students are supported particularly carefully through coaching techniques, to develop practical skills, producing original three-dimensional models. Students are not yet sufficiently fluent in the use of specialist technical language when they describe and analyse their own and each other's work.
- In a small proportion of lessons, time is not well used by teachers and they do not use their good class profiles enough to help meet students' individual needs. These students make slower progress in developing and retaining knowledge and, sometimes, do not tackle challenging tasks often enough.
- Teachers plan tasks that reflect the creative industries, with a focus on problem solving in realistic scenarios, promoting valuable learning. Music technology students work to specifications of live bands' requirements, devising stage plans using analogue and digital equipment, and devising rehearsal schedules for a rock band and a hip-hop duo. Animation students complete detailed research into conceptual art, developing unique three-dimensional gaming platform environments.
- Students collaborate well in lessons; for example, in a dance lesson, all worked diligently, building contemporary choreographic phrases and providing peers with feedback on alignment and posture. Students work well across disciplines; for example, music technology students partner with music performance students to plan music events, working in sound engineering, staging and performance roles and developing organisational skills effectively.
- Teachers make good use of ILT to illuminate learning in music technology and animation. Content-rich resources are available on virtual learning environments and often used frequently by students, but less so by art and design students.
- Students' learning is enhanced by very good accommodation. Students have purpose-built theatre and dance spaces, well-equipped music technology production areas and recording studios, and specialist art and design workshops and studios. These are safe, well presented and enlivened by inspiring displays of learners' work.
- Students learn through exciting work-related enrichment activities: performing in high-profile external venues; composing for a string quartet; acting in commercials; and exploring 'green-screen' techniques at a leading international film studio. Students benefit from the college's programme of employability lessons, but too many students do not yet have tailored work experience alongside professionals and employers.
- Students receive good guidance and study support from personal tutors and teachers. Additional support needs are well met. Good support enables students with complex lives and particular learning needs to achieve well.
- Assessment is effective, but is not consistently recorded or shared with students. Teachers provide sufficient written feedback to help students improve and assess students' progress in practical skills development, providing useful verbal feedback. However, whilst targets for improvement are set, and teachers discuss these with students, teachers use them insufficiently to plan suitably rigorous assessment.

- Teachers promote good development of spoken English through a good range of learning activities, including script work, annotation in sketchbooks and presentations of detailed research projects, but mathematics is less well developed.
- Equality and diversity are clearly embraced. Teachers and students value the spectrum of contributions. Resources and materials offer a fair representation of the work of diverse artists. Projects support students’ understanding of different influences, but further work is required to integrate aspects of equality and diversity more fully into learning.

Foundation English 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes Apprenticeships	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, as reflected in the outcomes for students at most levels of foundation English, apart from level 2, where they are low, and below national averages. The proportion of high grades in GCSE English is at the national average. Students are positively challenged as they are usually enrolled to an English course one level higher than their entry results would suggest. Students gain confidence in using their existing skills and most make good progress, building on these to develop new knowledge and skills. Students use these to good effect in their vocational learning.
- In many lessons, experienced teachers plan skilfully to address the needs of students with a wide range of abilities. Learning activities are varied and teachers make good use of questioning and individual coaching to challenge individuals to make further progress. In one lesson, students worked on persuasive language by debating what they would like to put into ‘Room 101’. Most students participated with confidence in the very lively and interesting debate.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of students. The speed of learning is slower, with a too limited a range of learning activities to involve all students with varying needs. Often in such lessons, materials are unimaginative and uninspiring, reinforcing students’ tendency not to participate well. Teachers do not always link their different activities sufficiently to enhance understanding or consolidate learning.
- The college has a comprehensive strategy in place to improve attendance and punctuality in lessons. However, this is not yet having the desired outcome, as both are poor in many lessons, with some consequent disruption to learning.
- Teachers in the majority of lessons use the internet and the virtual learning environment well to promote learning. In one lesson, the class watched a video on euthanasia, which the teacher used as basis of a discussion on whether it should be legalised or not. Some students shared their personal experiences with the class, adding another dimension to the discussion. This led to a very detailed and convincing discussion for both sides of the argument.
- Teachers carefully identify the needs of individual students at the start of their courses. They use this information well to cater for individuals’ academic abilities as well as a range of personal issues, disabilities, and potential barriers to learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers use it well to set clear targets for individual students and review progress regularly.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not use the information well, resulting in students at different levels working on the same tasks without clear individual targets. Teachers use e-ILPs to record individual student targets, but these are not suitably precise or measurable and are not reviewed regularly enough to support students’ progress.
- Teachers’ assessment of students’ progress is good. Feedback to students is clear and constructive, helping students to improve the quality of their work and grade. In a small minority of lessons, feedback on students’ work is encouraging but not always detailed enough to help students progress further.

- In the better lessons, teachers take opportunities as they arise to explore, confidently, current issues in equality and diversity. They use good examples to foster respect, support and tolerance. For example, in a lesson where most students were male, a film clip showed how the media put pressure on women to look a particular way, and students discussed why the pressure was more on women than men. The teacher encouraged students to draw on their personal experiences as well as challenging them to consider these issues in a wider context.

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

14-16 part-time provision

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the achievement of qualifications and the good development of students’ language and employability skills. Those who learn English in vocational contexts also acquire good subject knowledge. Students benefit from high expectations and make good progress in lessons. For example, in one lesson, students learnt how to compare and contrast tabloid and broadsheet newspapers as well as developing the language that they needed to express their ideas in English.
- Students enjoy their lessons very much and the standard of work is good. Teaching staff have appropriate qualifications and use their skills well to promote learning. They plan coherent sequences of activities which enable students to learn effectively. For example, in one lesson, students acquired new language and study skills when they went online to check the meaning and pronunciation of new words. The students enjoyed the final activity very much when they tested each other on their learning.
- Teachers choose relevant topics that meet the needs of the students well. All language programmes have a clear focus on the development of employability skills. In addition, students benefit from sessions with employability advisers. Students learn valuable skills such as how to apply for jobs, write a CV, and explore what type of job they would like to do.
- Teachers provide good feedback on learning in lessons. The focus on pronunciation, stress and intonation is particularly good and helps students develop their understanding of spoken English and their own production of the language.
- In a small number of lessons the quality of the planning and teaching is outstanding. This enables students to learn English particularly effectively, as well as concepts and an understanding of United Kingdom culture. However, also, in a small number of lessons the pace is slow and teachers use open questions to which only stronger students respond. As a result, less advanced and confident students do not participate enough.
- The quality of target setting is inconsistent. Many targets are clear and meaningful to students and help them progress well. However, in some cases, targets are much too broad, such as ‘work on spelling’. These are not sufficiently specific for the student to know what to work on.
- Strategies to meet the individual needs of students vary in quality. In many lessons teachers plan activities effectively so that they meet the needs of students across a range of skills and abilities. This enables students to work to their full potential. However, in a few lessons, the strategies used are too limited; they lack variety of both content and level. This has a negative impact, especially on the learning of more advanced students who are not sufficiently stretched and challenged.
- Resources are good and teachers use them well to promote learning. Students have access to a broad range of enrichment activities, both within and outside the college. A favourite annual event is a visit to a locally-based national TV studio where students have the opportunity to do a presentation to camera. They take the recording away which enables them to review how well they use English.

- Support is good throughout the students' time at the college. Students receive good support in lessons and advice on further study and job options. They benefit from the college's careful planning of progression routes. Students' progression within the ESOL programme and on to mainstream vocational courses and GCSEs is good.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well in the classroom. The college provides a supportive environment which encourages tolerance and respect.

Business

16-19 study programmes

16-19 study programmes

Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, leading to the good outcomes achieved by students. Teachers have high expectations of all students, inspiring and motivating them to succeed. Students enjoy studying at the college and are well supported by all teachers and support staff. A very large majority of level 3 students progress to higher education. Student attendance remains below college targets despite innovative actions for improvement.
- Students successfully develop skills relevant to the world of business, such as teamwork, communication and problem solving. The development of English is well embedded across all courses. For instance, in one lesson, students wrote the definitions of the 'SMART' concepts, for example Specific, Measurable and Achievable, on the whiteboard to check their spellings and then applied the term to business situations. Similarly, mathematics, pertinent to business, is developed and used confidently by students.
- Teachers plan most lessons well, allowing students to make good progress. In the best lessons, teachers skilfully question all students to extend their knowledge and check on learning. For example, at the end of a marketing lesson, all students were asked to explain what they had learnt about different sampling techniques and the practical problems businesses face, to which they responded with sound answers. In the less effective lessons, opportunities are missed to stretch and challenge the more able students.
- Productive links with local and regional businesses are outstanding. Most vocational students undertake two weeks purposeful work experience to develop employability skills and apply business theories in human resources and creative product promotions in real business situations. Many students take part in business competitions with local businesses and develop good research skills with a local youth steering group. Employability advisers work well with teachers and students to embed employability skills effectively into the curriculum.
- Teachers' marking of assessed work is good, with spelling and grammar errors routinely identified. Most students submit assignments electronically, helping them to develop good practical ICT skills in preparation for work. All students receive timely developmental feedback.
- Teachers regularly use electronic individual learning plans to effectively review and monitor students' progress. In the best practice, targets are negotiated between the student and the teacher, allowing the student to take a greater sense of responsibility for their own progress and development.
- Students have good access to resources in the learning centre to further develop understanding of business. However, the virtual learning environment for business courses lacks suitably broad and creative resources to encourage independent and deeper learning, especially for more able students. Only a minority of teachers use technology to show film clips and to create interesting activities that engage students. Too many teachers use it simply to display information, and fail to exploit its potential for dynamic learning.
- Information, advice and guidance prior to the start of students' courses are good. All students are interviewed by subject specialists to ensure students make fully informed choices. Taster sessions are provided for school leavers with support from college ambassadors.

- Equality and diversity are well embedded, with appropriate displays in classrooms and corridors. The themes are embraced in interesting and engaging ways. In a tutorial, for example, students took part in a lively discussion on the barriers to equality faced by women, prompted by International Women’s Day. This was then contextualised to businesses, with students presenting their views on such themes as health and safety, age and culture.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have relentlessly and successfully focused upon increasing students’ success through the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. The vast majority of teaching and learning are now good or better and students’ success rates have risen significantly, often to above the averages for similar colleges. All staff have contributed towards this excellent progress and to improving weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Where progress is insufficient, as in raising attendance, managers have clear and appropriate actions underway.
- Leaders and managers have a comprehensive and coherent plan to become an outstanding college, which is well understood and supported throughout the college. Open and consultative management encourages all staff to make a valuable contribution. Managers at all levels have well-defined responsibilities, precisely aligned to developmental goals. Top-level review meetings ensure that progress towards targets is rigorously evaluated and that managers are held to account. Subcontracting partners of the college are well embraced within the college’s overall secure management arrangements.
- Governance is very strong. Governors play a pivotal role in monitoring the college’s performance and in challenging senior managers to further improve provision. Detailed analysis of all key performance indicators empowers them to intervene swiftly if necessary. Governors have raised expectations throughout the college by setting challenging, ambitious and measurable targets for improvement. They work with the Principal to ensure that the college is central within the local community to the improvement of the employment prospects of young people and adults.
- Managers ensure that the college’s scheme for judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is rigorous and reliable. Lesson observations are evaluative and promote the development of good practice. Observations are equally robust for apprenticeship and workplace provision.
- Performance management and staff appraisal are robust and applied consistently and fairly. The small number of teachers and assessors who fail to meet required standards are supported well to improve.
- Managers use self-assessment very well to evaluate the quality of the provision, including subcontracted courses, and to determine routes for improvement. Development plans are rigorous. Self-assessment reports are evaluative, with a key focus on improving learning. A very small minority of reports, at curriculum level, are too descriptive and lack this focus. Managers actively seek students’ views and use them to help improve.
- Managers have formed excellent partnerships with large local employers, benefiting students enormously, and they are highly adept at using information and data from the local community to plan training and the curriculum in the best ways possible. For example, as a result of an identified lack of skills in logistics, the college now provides logistics training, with some students now referred through Jobcentre Plus. Managers recognise the need to build further the college’s capacity to offer more, and better performing, apprenticeship programmes. High quality training opportunities are being developed with prestigious local employers, for example clay modelling for a multinational vehicle manufacturer where this is a current skills shortage.
- Curriculum leaders understand well the new requirements of study programmes for students aged 16 to 18. The development of English and mathematics is fully embedded into students’ vocational programmes and students often benefit from work placements, expertly tailored to their own aspirations. Students also advance their employability skills through a well-structured

programme of visits, speakers and sessions dedicated to, for example, interview practice or the writing of curriculum vitae.

- The college more than meets its statutory requirements under equalities legislation. Staff at all levels are quick to deal appropriately with the small number of incidents of harassment or bullying. Managers make all reasonable adjustments to ensure that all students have equal access to learning. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are to be found across the range of college courses.
- Staff and students demonstrate high levels of mutual respect. Celebration of the diverse backgrounds and lifestyles of students and staff is varied and numerous. For example, students contributed to a competition to design posters representing their own ideas around diversity and the best entries now form a colourful and inspiring diversity calendar.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Staff at all levels ensure that safeguarding is a priority. All staff are checked against the relevant registers and rigorous risk assessments are carried out where staff are appointed dependent upon criminal record checks. All staff are appropriately trained and receive regular updates and briefings to keep them well informed and maintain their vigilance. Security on college sites is robust, yet discreet, contributing towards students feeling safe and to enjoying their learning.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

West Thames College

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	-	2	3	-	-
Outcomes for learners	2	1	1	2	-	2	3	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2	2	-	2	2	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	1	1	1	-	1	2	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	1
Early years and playwork	1
Science	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Performing arts	2
Visual arts	2
Foundation English	2
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	2
Business	2

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college							
Age range of learners	14+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 2910							
	Part-time: 4652							
Principal/CEO	Marjorie Semple							
Date of previous inspection	November 2010							
Website address	west-thames.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	359	153	544	177	676	517	-	5
Part-time	115	717	35	579	28	188	-	12
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	24	230	20	178	-	-		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	21							
Part-time	183							
Number of community learners	-							
Number of employability learners	-							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Avere Limited ■ Beacon Education Partnership Limited ■ Cute Dog Consulting limited ■ Dynamic Training UK Limited ■ Gurdwara ■ Knights Training Academy Limited ■ T & L Training Limited ■ TLE Limited 							

Contextual information

West Thames College is a medium-sized general further education college, in the London Borough of Hounslow, with its main campus in Isleworth and a skills centre in Feltham. Hounslow has many, predominantly very small, businesses, but also hosts the headquarters of some very large multinational companies. At nearly 75%, the employment rate in Hounslow is above the average for London, with the nearby Heathrow airport as a major employer. Hounslow's population is more ethnically and linguistically diverse than many London boroughs. At 19%, it has the third highest proportion of Asian/Asian British and Indian residents in the United Kingdom. Over 140 languages are spoken and 36% of residents do not speak English as a first language.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

David Martin HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on students' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the college. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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