

Itchen College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Itchen College

South East Region

Inspected January 1999

Itchen College is a sixth form college located east of Southampton. The college produced, as part of its annual quality assurance cycle, an evaluative self-assessment report. The report reviewed the progress made since the production of the previous year's report, and was used to inform the development of the college's strategic objectives. The college used external agencies in the validation process and the draft was circulated to college governors for comment and approval. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses, but found that the report did not acknowledge some of the college's strengths and did not always place sufficient emphasis on weaknesses, particularly in some student achievement and retention rates.

The college offers a comprehensive range of courses to local school-leavers. It has become a centre for many activities in the area. Strong links with the local community have encouraged adults and others from groups which have not usually entered further education to attend courses. Four curriculum areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Most courses are well managed and there is much good teaching; the profile of grades awarded to lessons observed is better than the national average. The pass rates on some courses are above the national average for sixth

form colleges. There is effective careers education and guidance provision. The college's quality assurance system is comprehensive. Since the previous inspection, significant improvements have been carried out to the college's accommodation and IT resources. Communications within the college are good. The commitment and expertise of governors contribute positively to the achievement of the college's mission. The college should improve: students' achievements on some courses; retention rates on many courses; the availability of additional learning support; library accommodation and bookstock; management information systems; and financial reporting.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Support for students	2
Business studies	2	General resources	2
English and communication studies	2	Quality assurance	2
Psychology, sociology and religious studies	3	Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Itchen College is a sixth form college which draws its students mainly from the area of Southampton to the east of the river Itchen and from districts adjoining Eastleigh and Fareham. It occupies a site of 3.3 hectares in a residential area close to the M27 and M3 motorways. Since 1991, when the college took over the management of adult education for the east side of the city, it has diversified its provision considerably. It has a mission to be a force for change by producing high-quality lifelong learning opportunities for all sections of the community.

2 The city of Southampton is a new unitary authority designated a Learning City and the college is involved in various initiatives to promote lifelong learning. The college is a member of several collaborative partnerships within the city and in the wider area of Hampshire. The collaboration within Southampton aims to provide a comprehensive service of education and training for all areas of the city. The partnership is also exploring opportunities for widening participation for both 16 to 18 year old and adult students.

3 Itchen College offers general and vocational courses in eight of the 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). These include 37 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), 17 subjects at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), as well as general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). In addition, the college runs an access course for higher education, national diploma nursery nursing courses, and various courses in basic education.

4 In November 1998, there were 1,907 students, of whom 913 were between 16 to 18 years old. Students come from nine partner schools and other maintained and independent schools within a radius of about seven miles.

Of the college's students, 23% come from disadvantaged areas within Southampton. The majority of adult provision is in the evening, although there is a significant daytime provision of access to higher education courses and NVQs in business. The college also provides courses for adults operated in partnership with the nearby Eastpoint Centre and with Hamble School. It accommodates many of the community activities of the area and has a thriving sports and performing arts centre, which is fully used throughout the year. The strong links with the community have enabled the college to widen enrolments from groups which have not usually entered further education.

5 The college has restructured its management since the last inspection and is now managed by a principalship consisting of the principal and deputy principal. It is organised into three divisions which are responsible for 16 to 18 year old students and a fourth division responsible for adult and continuing education and training. Divisional directors are responsible for the curriculum within their own division and fulfil an important quality assurance role. The two remaining directors have responsibility for marketing and external liaison, and information and resources, respectively.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during January 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors considered the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information from other directorates of the FEFC. This included data on students' achievements for the three years from 1995 to 1997 which were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). This was supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements in 1998. These data were checked against class registers and pass lists from the examining bodies.

Context

7 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The findings of this inspection will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

8 The inspection was carried out by a team comprising eight inspectors and an auditor

working for a total of 38 days. Inspectors observed a total of 46 lessons, examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. Members of the team met governors, managers, staff and students.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 78% were judged to be good or outstanding, and 2% less than satisfactory. These figures are better than the national profile recorded for colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	18	6	0	0	27
GCSE	3	3	3	1	0	10
GNVQ	1	3	0	0	0	4
Other*	1	4	0	0	0	5
Total (No.)	8	28	9	1	0	46
Total (%)	17	61	20	2	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

*includes NVQs, basic education and access to higher education courses

Context

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. College data indicated a higher average attendance of around 87%, but staff indicated that an outbreak of influenza had adversely affected attendance during the inspection.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Itchen College	12.0	79
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 2

11 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in GCSE mathematics, sciences and human physiology and health; GCE A level mathematics, physics, and chemistry; and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment but found a few weaknesses in teaching and learning that had not been identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- good use of stimulating practical work
- theory applied to real-life situations
- good students' achievements in GCE A level biology and chemistry

Weaknesses

- failure of some teachers to use an appropriate variety of teaching methods
- low retention rates on some courses
- pass rates on some courses below the national average

12 The college offers an appropriate range of GCSE, GCE A level and GCE AS courses in mathematics and the sciences, together with an access course to higher education in biology. C&G numeracy and GCSE mathematics courses are offered to evening students. The college's curriculum management structure ensures effective linkage between science subjects and mathematics. However, evening courses are administered separately from the daytime courses, and this inhibits the sharing of materials between those teaching during the day and teachers of evening courses. Generally, teachers are able to share good teaching practice through the observation of their peers at work in the classroom.

13 Inspectors agreed with the college that most lessons are well planned. Teachers often maintain the interest of students by relating theoretical topics to real-life situations. For example, in a GCE A level mathematics lesson, students investigated how a farmer could make the best use of fencing to enclose animals by applying newly learned mathematical techniques. In a GCSE science lesson on electrical principles, the teacher related the theoretical concepts being covered to the hazards of incorrectly wiring a plug. Teachers in some other science lessons effectively combined stimulating practical work to illustrate the topic of the lesson. The few less successful lessons lacked a variety of appropriate teaching and learning activities. In these lessons, a minority of students became inattentive. In some lessons, students worked well together in small groups, questioning and supporting each other. They show competence in the well-organised practical work, and due regard is given to safety procedures. Teachers provide specific advice to students on how to succeed in examinations.

14 Relationships between teachers and students are good, encouraging students to ask for help in developing their understanding. Some students can obtain additional support within the extension studies programme but timetable constraints do not enable all students to benefit from this provision. There are effective links with some local industries, enabling some students to take part in relevant, paid work experience. Students value this opportunity to gain experience in their chosen career. A positive feature, acknowledged in the self-assessment report, is that students are encouraged to study GCE A levels in mathematics and the physical sciences through a number of bursaries available from local industries and the Nuffield Foundation.

15 Students' achievements in GCE A level chemistry and GCSE science are good and above the national average for sixth form colleges.

Curriculum Areas

However, pass rates in GCE A level mathematics and physics are below the national average. Too many students leave early, and these weaknesses are recognised by the college. It is college policy to encourage students without a good grade in GCSE mathematics to repeat their examinations. The results for GCSE mathematics do not include those students who achieve a pass early in the year. In both 1996 and 1998 this was a significant number. Attendance and punctuality are generally good. Students demonstrate good oral communication skills and discuss their work with confidence. Most students' written work is neatly presented and well set out; they record the development of their solutions clearly. Diagrams are used appropriately to convey ideas. Teachers set assignments at an appropriate level and mark

students' work thoroughly. However, where answers are incorrect, teachers do not always indicate the correct methods of solution. Most reports from external moderators note the accurate and consistent standards in marking.

16 Teachers are well qualified and competent. They have a sound knowledge of their specialist subjects and of the syllabuses they teach. The college acknowledges these strengths. Accommodation is generally well designed although not all laboratories have the benefit of movable furniture. Teaching rooms and laboratories are in good decorative order. Wall displays are colourful and indicate the subject identity of each area. There is enough equipment for all students to carry out practical work properly.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in science and mathematics, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE mathematics (daytime)	2	Expected completions	219	195	176
		Retention (%)	71	49	51
		Achievement (%)*	26	39	44
GCSE science (daytime)	2	Expected completions	46	50	36
		Retention (%)	80	72	64
		Achievement (%)*	59	58	48
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	33	54	51
		Retention (%)	67	72	71
		Achievement (%)	95	97	94
GCE A level mathematics	3	Expected completions	64	96	78
		Retention (%)	84	73	77
		Achievement (%)	78	83	75
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	27	41	49
		Retention (%)	74	66	53
		Achievement (%)	80	81	100
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	29	46	30
		Retention (%)	72	52	50
		Achievement (%)	52	83	73

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*grades C or above

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering courses in GNVQ business studies at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, GCE A level business studies, NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 in business administration, and RSA Examinations Board (RSA) computer literacy and information technology. Inspectors agreed with most of the main findings of the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- thorough course planning
- well-prepared teaching materials
- effective use of information technology (IT)
- good students' achievements in GNVQ foundation, GCE A level business studies and NVQ business administration
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- work experience linked closely to course objectives

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on all courses
- some low pass rates in GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses
- inadequate provision of specialist library books

18 The college offers a range of business studies courses for full-time 16 to 19 year old students, which includes GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and GCE A level. Additionally, a small number of courses are offered for part-time day and evening students, which include NVQs in business administration. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that most courses are well

planned and managed. There are thorough schemes of work for most courses. Course teams meet regularly to review the management and quality of business courses, although students' representatives rarely avail themselves of the opportunity to attend. The minutes of these meetings demonstrate that critical self-assessment is a strong feature of the review process. However, the resulting action plans often fail to specify deadlines and do not identify those responsible for rectifying weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that the recently introduced programme of lesson observation is promoting good practice in the classroom.

19 Inspectors' observations of lessons confirmed the college's self-assessment that most teaching is good and none is weak. Lessons are carefully planned by teachers. In the better lessons, teachers made clear links to previous learning and the students participated fully in the lesson. In these lessons teachers used a range of methods, including individual tasks, work in pairs or small groups and structured plenary sessions where the key learning points were summarised. Lessons started promptly and purposefully but in a few lessons, teachers failed to summarise and consolidate students' learning at the close of the lesson. Students are positive about the college experience and enjoy good relationships with teachers and among themselves. There is effective use of IT in business studies. It is integrated with programmes, there is good access to computers and students are proficient in their use. There is the opportunity to gain computer literacy and information technology accreditation. Many students use the internet as a resource in their assignments.

20 As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, students benefit from a well-integrated programme of work experience, although contacts with the world of business beyond this are slight. There is some good practice in integrating careers education and guidance with courses through assignment work, with

Curriculum Areas

considerable preparation and follow-up work consolidating the experience. For GNVQ courses, key skills are planned into the coverage from the outset. Assignments and worksheets are thoroughly prepared. However, in a few instances, worksheets were used in a mechanical way which prevented the class from learning as a group and working supportively together.

21 Students' achievements in GCE A level, GNVQ foundation and NVQs are good. The college's self-assessment report recognised that the pass rates on the GNVQ advanced course are poor. Retention rates have been declining on all courses over the last three years and are poor on the GNVQ advanced course. Most of the work produced by students across all courses is of a good standard. The presentation of some students' work is outstanding and demonstrates effective use of IT. Students' work is assessed accurately by teachers and the

supporting comments are helpful; there is evidence that students revisit their work in the light of this feedback. The portfolio work of students is well organised, and teachers regularly review the progress of students to assist them in meeting submission deadlines.

22 All classrooms are appropriately equipped with overhead projectors and whiteboards. The rooms are well maintained and there is some good use of specialist display. Students have easy access to modern computers and software in an area adjacent to the business rooms, and this facility is well used. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the library bookstock is small and is used infrequently by business students. The range of books, magazines and newspapers for students on lower level vocational courses is severely restricted. Teaching staff in the business department are well qualified and many hold vocational assessor awards.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in business studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	14	18	15
		Retention (%)	88	86	75
		Achievement (%)	86	67	93
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	23	23	19
		Retention (%)	82	92	73
		Achievement (%)	87	52	63
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	19	32	29
		Retention (%)	63	76	57
		Achievement (%)	74	47	59
GCE A level business studies	3	Expected completions	44	33	37
		Retention (%)	75	73	69
		Achievement (%)	88	94	97

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

English and Communication Studies

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 11 lessons, covering GCSE English, GCE A level English language, English language and literature, English literature, and communication studies, and the literary studies access to higher education course. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements given in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- well-produced study guides and support materials
- thorough marking of students' work
- good students' achievements on GCE A level and access to higher education courses
- high standard of students' written and oral work
- efficient management of courses
- attractive and spacious specialist classrooms

Weaknesses

- poor students' achievements in GCSE English
- low retention on GCSE English and some GCE A level English language courses
- library bookstock not related to students' needs
- inadequate computers in the subject area

24 English and communication studies courses are well managed. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, schemes of work are detailed, indicating what is to be taught, the teaching methods to be used, and the required

resources. Accurate records of students' achievements and their progress are maintained. Annual course evaluation is thorough; there is systematic use of performance indicators which include value-added analysis of results. However, some action plans arising from the reviews do not distinguish sufficiently between targets and the measures needed to achieve them. Staff work well together. There are regular meetings of course teams and subject teachers. These are effectively minuted to record appropriate action points. The range of courses at GCE A level provides students with good opportunities to choose the right courses for their needs, although there is little choice for students wishing to study English below this level.

25 Lessons are well planned and teachers use effectively an appropriate variety of methods to stimulate students' learning. For example, soundless extracts from soap opera episodes were successfully used in a communication studies lesson to indicate the importance of non-verbal forms of communication. During an English literature lesson, students were asked to handle a human skull and give their reactions to this as an effective and stimulating introduction to a poem describing such an experience. Teachers encourage students to participate in lessons through discussion and group work. The group work was purposeful, and usually the groups produced reports which benefited all students. Students receive informative course handbooks and well-produced handouts which explain tasks clearly and give valuable guidance as to how students should set about them. As the self-assessment report indicated, teachers mark students' work carefully. Marking is moderated within course teams. The comments on students' work generally provide helpful advice for improvement. Occasionally, the comments fail to give sufficiently detailed guidance and sometimes errors of expression are not corrected. Teachers often help individual students at times outside timetabled lessons, and this support is valued by students.

Curriculum Areas

26 Students' achievements in GCE A level courses have been above the national average for sixth form colleges over the last three years, as recognised by the college in its self-assessment report. Outstanding pass rates were achieved in GCE A level English literature and English language and literature in 1998. However, students' achievements in GCSE English have remained consistently poor, with declining and unsatisfactory retention rates. The retention rates on GCE A level English language courses have also been below the national average over the previous three years. Most students' written and oral work is of a high standard. Samples of students' work inspected showed that many GCE A level and GCSE students produce mature and enterprising writing.

27 The specialist classrooms for GCE and GCSE full-time students are attractive. Appropriate wall displays give a subject identity to the accommodation. The size of rooms allows teachers to use varied teaching methods with even the largest classes. The computers in the department are out of date and are of limited use for both staff and students. The library bookstock does not meet the needs of students. The number of books which are relevant for the particular courses on offer is small, and reflects low levels of funding in recent years. These deficiencies are recognised in the self-assessment report.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in English and communication studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English	2	Expected completions	158	200	128
		Retention (%)	94	79	64
		Achievement (%)	32	43	46
GCE A level communication studies (two year full time)	3	Expected completions	29	49	55
		Retention (%)	79	80	75
		Achievement (%)	74	95	93
GCE A level English language (two year full time)	3	Expected completions	47	51	78
		Retention (%)	74	69	73
		Achievement (%)	91	97	88
GCE A level English language and literature (two year full time)	3	Expected completions	27	23	19
		Retention (%)	74	74	75
		Achievement (%)	90	94	100
GCE A level English literature (two year full time)	3	Expected completions	50	57	30
		Retention (%)	78	83	80
		Achievement (%)	87	98	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Psychology, Sociology and Religious Studies

Grade 3

28 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering full-time and part-time GCSE, GCE A level and GCE AS courses in psychology, sociology and religious studies. Whilst inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, the self-assessment report did not place sufficient emphasis on students' achievements.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses
- high-quality course handouts to support students' learning
- good-quality learning environment

Weaknesses

- failure of some teachers to ensure students' involvement in the learning
- students' achievements on some courses below the national average
- low retention on many courses
- small amount of specialist resources

29 Management of the provision is the responsibility of two college divisions. Responsibility for psychology is with the science curriculum area whilst sociology and religious studies are managed by the social sciences area. Much of the provision caters for the needs of full-time 16 to 18 year old students, but evening courses are also offered in psychology and sociology. Modular courses have recently been introduced. The college entered students for the GCE A level in religious studies for the first time in 1998. Curriculum management is effective. Course documentation for both staff and students is comprehensive and is of high quality in sociology. Course and lesson planning is effective. Inspectors agreed with the college that

most schemes of work are detailed and assist good teaching practice. Some teachers of social sciences are employed on part-time contracts, and much reliance is placed upon these teachers for the development of the curriculum. One course leader is a part-time member of staff.

30 Most of the teaching is satisfactory or better. Inspectors observed good teaching in each of the three areas inspected.

Contemporary issues concerned with the environment, ethics, poverty, gender and social change are dealt with across all the subjects. Students are made to think critically and imaginatively. Many students benefit from the effective variety of teaching methods used by teachers. In the better lessons, teachers frequently assessed and checked students' understanding and learning. In other lessons, some teachers did not engage students' interest in the content of the lesson. Teachers set individual and small group learning tasks and give support to students while they do them, although some students are unresponsive to this approach. In some lessons, the pace of learning was slow, and teachers did not take sufficient account of the individual needs of students with differing abilities. Good-quality teaching materials and lesson handouts are used by some teachers. However, there is often over reliance upon the use of these materials, limiting independent learning; a weakness not recognised by the college.

31 Students' achievements in GCE A level psychology approximated to the national average in 1997 and showed a slight improvement in 1998. However, pass rates for GCE A level sociology for all ages remain below the national average, and this weakness was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. In religious studies, the GCE A level results are around the national average. Pass rates in GCSE sociology for 16 to 18 year olds were above the national average for sixth form colleges in 1997. There is low retention on many of the courses. Retention for GCE A level psychology for all age groups has declined.

Curriculum Areas

In GCE A level sociology, retention has improved slightly, but remains unsatisfactory. The standard of most students' assessed work is satisfactory and some assignments are outstanding. Teachers' written comments on students' marked classwork and homework are helpful and encourage students to improve their performance. Clear assessment criteria are given to students, although detailed commentary to explain the mark awarded is not always provided. Teachers of psychology use a particularly effective process in feeding back to students an analysis of their performance.

32 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Classrooms in the areas inspected are well furnished and provide comfortable environments conducive to learning. The library stock in sociology is dated and has lacked investment. Students enrolled on evening classes have restricted access to computers and library resources. There are few IT-based learning resources for social science students.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in psychology, sociology and religious studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE psychology	2	Expected completions	48	35	48
		Retention (%)	60	66	48
		Achievement (%)	70	18	52
GCSE sociology	2	Expected completions	36	40	30
		Retention (%)	78	75	83
		Achievement (%)	61	67	52
GCE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	62	134	91
		Retention (%)	77	49	52
		Achievement (%)	91	77	81
GCE A level religious studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	12
		Retention (%)	*	*	67
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
GCE A level sociology	3	Expected completions	53	74	54
		Retention (%)	72	58	67
		Achievement (%)	69	70	69

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

33 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of support for students but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- detailed pre-course guidance
- extensive and effective liaison with partner schools
- comprehensive tutorial system
- rigorous monitoring of students' attendance
- good careers education and guidance

Weaknesses

- few students receiving learning support relative to those identified as being in need
- limited support for part-time students

34 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that effective guidance is given to prospective students. The admissions policy and procedures are clear. Liaison tutors ensure that students from partner schools receive appropriate information and guidance. The process is co-ordinated by the director of marketing, and there is a schools liaison officer who also interviews all late applicants. Additional liaison tutors interview students from schools outside the local area. Rigorous assessment of the process is carried out by the senior manager. Students confirm that the interview and guidance process is thorough and informative. Full-time applicants are invited to an introductory conference in July of each year. The conference is well received and those attending are able to sample some of the courses and subjects on offer. College open evenings are held twice yearly and are well supported.

35 There is an effective and comprehensive induction programme which includes appropriate methods for identifying the literacy and numeracy skills of new students. A considerable number of students are identified as needing learning support in these skills. However, only a small number of students receive specific support. Those students identified as in need of support, but who are studying for mathematics or English qualifications, or for qualifications that include such elements, do not receive additional support. This approach has yet to be evaluated. Some students who are retaking qualifications rely significantly on the informal support given by teachers. Learning support is provided by the college's study development centre. This centre is currently located in a temporary building separate from the main college building, and its location does not encourage students to go there for 'drop-in' learning support. There is little support in the evening for part-time and adult students. Childcare support is available on one afternoon each week. The Eastpoint centre has a crèche but it is some way from the Itchen site.

36 The college has revised its tutorial system to help improve retention, although it is too early to say whether this will have a positive effect. Inspectors observed a number of individual tutorial sessions and found most of them to be effective and thorough. Surveys of students' views indicate that they value the tutorials highly. Additionally, effective half-yearly assessment meetings are arranged between students and subject tutors to discuss their progress towards achieving their qualification and target grade. There is a comprehensive programme of group presentations arranged and designed by senior tutors, aimed at supporting students in their personal, social and career development.

37 Pastoral care for full-time students is good. The college employs an external counselling and advice service. Students are aware of the

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college's disability statement and equal opportunities policy. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' attendance is rigorously monitored. 'Cause for concern' notes are sent by subject teachers to tutors if students are absent from lessons or fail to submit work; tutors then take effective follow-up action. The college fosters strong links with parents through parent evenings and a parent handbook. The college council has recently been affiliated to the National Union of Students to form the Itchen College student union.

38 The destinations of students who have completed their courses are comprehensively monitored, with the assistance of the careers service. The college makes effective use of this information in its marketing activities. The college recognises that there have been low retention rates on a number of courses and is making significant efforts to find out why some students leave their courses early. Statistics produced by the college indicate that of those students who do not complete their courses, a significant proportion take up employment in the surrounding area. The college is currently piloting a project with the careers service to work with those students identified as being at risk of not completing their courses.

39 There is a strong working partnership between the college and the local careers service. This is exemplified in the partnership agreement. The careers centre is prominently located and well resourced. Advisers from the careers service are available to students five days each week. All full-time students and part-time students are entitled to a careers interview. Students are provided with good support in their applications for places in higher education. The college helps students make the transition into employment by encouraging work placement and work shadowing. Local employers are used as visiting speakers on two career days organised each year. The attendance of students at these events has been improved through linking the event with fulfilment of part of the

Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network qualification.

General Resources

Grade 2

40 While inspectors agreed with the overall strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, they considered that it had understated one of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- availability of use by the local community
- good-quality, well-maintained buildings in a pleasant environment
- new sports centre and associated accommodation
- improved access for students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- inadequate college library
- little access to IT and library facilities for adult evening students

41 The college's mission statement contains an explicit commitment to serve all sections of the community. In recent years, the college has encouraged greater community use of its premises and facilities. On average, some 400 adult students use the college's educational programmes and recreational facilities each weekday evening, and another 500 people do so at weekends.

42 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the overall quality of accommodation is modern and appropriate to the college's needs. The majority of the permanent accommodation was built in the 1920s and 1930s. A two-storey science block was added in 1964. Further adaptations in 1992 provided an attractive students' centre, refectory and well-designed careers area.

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A large number of temporary buildings, constituting some 40% of teaching space, were replaced in 1994 by a purpose-built teaching block. A new and impressive sports centre was opened in 1997 providing the opportunity to convert the former gymnasium into a modern fitness suite and adjacent dance and aerobics studio. An additional study and social area for students and a modern seminar room completed the project. This development included a lift which provides access for students with restricted mobility to the whole of the science block and to the performing arts studio. A second lift scheduled to be built in the year 2000 will provide access to the remaining teaching and resources areas. The most recent development is a new reception area. General teaching rooms are fit for purpose and contain the necessary teaching resources. Specialist areas have a satisfactory level of equipment. The refectory and students' social area are crowded at break times. A grassed area provides a full-size football pitch and two hard-surface tennis courts.

43 The overall fabric of the building is in good condition and maintained to a high standard of cleanliness. In 1996, the college commissioned a condition survey of its buildings. This provided the basis for the college's planned maintenance programme. The college's accommodation exceeds its current needs and there is scope for further rationalisation and reduction of teaching space. Students' artwork is effectively displayed throughout the college and directional signs are good. There is a central inventory of all college equipment which is regularly updated. There is, however, no equipment replacement policy.

44 The self-assessment report recognised that the library, which is part of the information and resources centre, does not meet the needs of the college's students. Inspectors judged that the college underestimated the impact of this weakness. The library is very small and the overall appearance is uninspiring. There are insufficient and inadequate study places. It is

inaccessible for wheelchair users. While students speak positively of the help they receive from centre staff, there is no qualified librarian. The centre has suffered from very low investment over several years. Consequently, there has been little improvement in the bookstock since the last inspection. The number of books is 9,000, the same as that recorded at the last inspection. Some updating has been carried out. However, there is no analysis of the frequency with which books are used or taken out on loan. Many of the books are dated and there is negligible provision for foundation and intermediate students. The college's bookstock, whether in the centre or held in departments, has not been fully catalogued. The library has few newspapers and periodicals and only 26 CD-ROM titles. The information and resources centre provides some 20 modern computers with a good range of software and access to the internet, as well as a reprographic service for both staff and students. These facilities are very popular with students and are well used. Due to restricted opening hours, adult evening students find it difficult to use the college's IT and library facilities.

45 To supplement the limited space in the library, the college provides small study rooms for students in other areas of the college. Some of these contain departmental learning resources and some have computers, although most of these are not of modern specification. The college's accommodation strategy highlights the urgent need to increase significantly the accommodation for a new resources centre. Plans are being formulated.

46 Over the last two years the college has made significant but much needed improvement in the quality of its IT facilities. Of a total of 200 computers, there are now 115 modern machines, providing an adequate ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students. Students benefit from internet access, which is available through 80 networked computers. The college's IT policy includes further gradual acquisitions to replace outdated machines.

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Measures to ensure that all electronic systems will remain effective through the year 2000 are well advanced.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

47 The college's self-assessment report on quality assurance identified most of the strengths and weaknesses noted by inspectors. Some of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. However, the report did not recognise that the standards in the quality assurance manual insufficiently emphasised the quality of teaching and learning or actions to improve students' retention and achievements.

Key strengths

- quality assurance policy and procedures leading to some improvements
- measurable standards agreed by staff for all aspects of provision
- good links between quality assurance and strategic planning
- effective staff review leading to staff development linked to the college's strategic objectives
- self-assessment which acknowledges perceptions of students and other users of services

Weaknesses

- lack of clarity in some standards
- lack of effective action to improve retention

48 The college has a quality assurance policy which commits the college to continuous quality improvement. Rigorous procedures are clearly detailed in a quality assurance manual. The procedures have evolved over six years. Following the last inspection, a quality assurance group was established to make the

implementation of procedures consistent and comprehensive. All staff are committed to and contribute to quality assurance. These strengths were recognised by the college in its self-assessment report. The quality assurance cycle is linked to strategic planning, the review of strategic objectives and staff development. The quality assurance group is responsible for monitoring and developing the procedures. Responsibility for monitoring performance lies with the college management group, which regularly discusses reports. Improvements resulting from the quality assurance systems include some increases in qualifications gained in comparison with sixth form colleges nationally, and in the increased point score for GCE A level candidates.

49 There are annual reviews and self-assessment reports for all courses and college services. These reports are detailed and thorough. The evidence includes the views of students and other users of services. Questionnaires on different aspects of the provision are regularly circulated to students. Results are analysed centrally. The review reports also include action plans which are monitored by senior managers. Reports are discussed at division and course team meetings. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, these reports consider performance against college targets for students' achievements, retention and attendance, but inspectors found that action points are not always followed up. Some course teams effectively use the views of students gained in 'focus' groups to supplement their information. 'Focus' groups have also been well used to gain the perceptions of parents and of staff about management. Course reviews include performance indicators and an analysis of the value added to students' achievements. Lesson observation has been included as part of quality assurance procedures with an agreed protocol and guidelines for good practice. All teachers had been observed and lessons graded by the time of the inspection. Observation is followed by detailed discussion.

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It has been well received and is beginning to spread good practice.

50 Each area of the college has developed a set of defined standards it wishes to achieve, based on the identification of desired features. During the development process, staff in each section consulted users of their service and the standards were agreed by a quality assurance working party which was representative of all members of staff. Most of the standards are clear and measurable. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, a few standards lack clarity. The college has attempted to develop standards for teaching and learning. However, inspectors considered that the standards are generally targets for achievement and do not define teaching standards that may be necessary to bring about improvements in examination results and retention. Some course teams abnegate responsibility for improving achievements and reports lack measures that need to be taken to address poor achievements through improving the quality of teaching and learning. There has been a lack of effective action to improve retention.

51 The self-assessment report underestimated the strength of the thorough review and development process for all individual members of staff. The process is very well established; it involves a two-yearly review meeting with the line manager, a follow-up interview the following year and an annual meeting with the principal for teachers and the deputy principal for support staff. The review includes questions on each individual's contribution to the college's development plan, identifies staff development needs and results in an action plan. Almost all staff have undergone review and development. The process involves lesson observation for teachers.

52 Staff development is linked to individual needs identified through the review and development interviews and to the college's strategic objectives. Sessions have been introduced on a variety of topics including

updating teachers' skills in the use of IT. The majority of teachers attended sessions on good practice in teaching and learning and on lesson observation.

Governance

Grade 2

53 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, though they identified some additional weaknesses and considered that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- governors' range of skills and experience
- clarity of understanding and observance of the distinction between governance and management
- systematic monitoring of the finances of the college
- register of interests extending to all budget holders

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of the quality of the college's provision
- infrequent appraisal of the principal
- inadequate access to governors' minutes and other papers

54 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has a determined membership of 20, comprising 11 independent governors, a TEC representative, two parent governors, two staff

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governors, two co-opted governors, a student governor and the principal. There is one vacancy at present. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the current membership of the corporation provides a wide range of skills and experience that are complementary to the needs of the college, including finance, general management, personnel and educational expertise. A search committee is responsible for identifying potential new governors using an informal skills profile determined by the committee. Vacancies have been filled promptly through the use of informal networks.

55 The commitment of governors to the college is high, and is reflected in a good level of attendance at corporation and committee meetings. Governors attend college events and activities wherever possible and support the college in serving the needs of the local community. The corporation has established nine committees covering all aspects of the college's operations. Most operate within defined terms of reference, although these are unclear in some instances. The finance and general purposes committee meets monthly during term time and reviews the latest set of management accounts. All other committees, and the full corporation, meet at least termly. The education policy committee reviews reports on examination results and retention. It also receives reports on performance from curriculum departments, but currently only two independent governors attend this group. The college has plans to address this. The corporation has established a register of interests which covers all governors and all budget holders. It is updated annually.

56 There is an effective partnership between the governors and senior management, and the distinction in roles is clearly understood. There is frequent contact, both formal and informal, between the chair and the principal. The self-assessment report identified as a weakness that governors do not consider academic

performance sufficiently. There is little detailed discussion at corporation meetings of the quality of the provision. Training is being provided which partially addresses the lack of awareness by some governors of specific aspects of the college's activities. Training includes activities held in college which familiarise governors with the operations of the college and emerging sector issues, and access to external courses.

57 Following the retirement of the previous clerk in the summer of 1998, the corporation took the opportunity to make an external appointment. The clerk is responsible for servicing the corporation, the finance and general purposes and the audit committees. All other committees are clerked by the chairs of the relevant committees. Agenda papers and minutes are generally good but there are instances of decisions and discussions of the corporation not being clearly recorded. The corporation has approved a policy on access to minutes which requires access to be through prior arrangement with the clerk. This arrangement is inappropriate. The code of conduct for governors is out of date and there are no standing orders that regulate the conduct of meetings.

58 In July 1998, the corporation approved submission to the FEFC of the three-year strategic plan to July 2001. The financial forecast included within the plan showed a decline in the financial health of the college. There is no indication that, at that time, any specific action was being proposed to redress this. Recent revisions to the forecast indicate that the original submission was overly pessimistic.

59 The corporation has conducted two annual reviews of its own performance against agreed quality standards. The methods employed include a questionnaire completed as a part of the college's self-assessment review and the monitoring of governors' attendance. The appraisal of the principal is currently in process for the first time in three years. The process

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has been undertaken by the chair and vice-chair of the corporation and a staff representative. It is intended to review progress against a set of general targets in two years time. This process requires further development. The previous absence of appraisal was recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 2

60 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, though they considered that some strengths had been overemphasised. Some weaknesses have been addressed since the preparation of the report.

Key strengths

- commitment of staff to the college's mission, values and strategic aims
- use of comprehensive market research to inform college developments
- effective internal communications
- constructive links with a wide range of external organisations
- sound financial position

Weaknesses

- inadequate management information system
- underdeveloped financial reporting and monitoring against targets

61 The college has developed a clear mission and strategic direction which is understood and supported by staff. The mission is systematically reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with staff and other groups. The strategic plan is prepared according to an annual timetable which includes consultation with governors through the strategic planning board prior to submission of the final draft to

the corporation. The college recognises that the process of establishing strategic objectives does not include a sufficiently wide range of staff, including some middle managers, and action is being taken to remedy this situation.

62 The college management structure underwent major reorganisation in 1996. The principal and deputy principal form the principalship, which has a predominantly strategic role. The college management group of nine senior staff has responsibility for operational issues and for monitoring college performance. There is a comprehensive system of internal committees, although the lines of reporting are not always clear. Inspectors agreed with the college that certain aspects of the structure require further refinement in order to clarify accountability. The management style of the college is generally open and consultative and this is welcomed by staff.

63 Developments at the college are informed by useful market research, which has resulted in the introduction of some new courses. Some market information is shared with other providers of post-16 education in the area. The college also uses labour market information provided by the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and Southampton City Council, particularly in the development of programmes for adults. Valuable information is also provided by the private careers service contracted by the college.

64 Clear lines of communication ensure that staff are kept well informed. This strength was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The principal briefs all teaching and some support staff each Monday morning. A weekly information bulletin is distributed to all staff. There is a well-structured programme of divisional and cross-college meetings, the dates of which are included in the annual college diary. In response to an issue identified through consultation, the deputy principal meets with support staff on a regular basis. A comprehensive staff handbook containing

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college policies, procedures and general information is widely available.

65 Itchen College is well regarded in the local community and actively encourages individuals and organisations to use college facilities. College staff regularly take leading roles in local initiatives. Co-operation with the other two further education establishments in the city is intended to rationalise provision and improve opportunities for students. Inspectors agreed with the college that constructive links have been established with a wide range of appropriate external bodies. Excellent relations exist with the Hampshire TEC and the college collaborates with other organisations in a number of TEC-funded projects. The college also liaises closely with Southampton City Council, Hampshire County Council and local employers, some of which fund bursaries for college students. Good links exist with local schools to facilitate smooth transition from school to college.

66 The management information system is insufficiently well developed to meet the needs of the college. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. The college has not conducted a systematic analysis of managers' needs. The information system is currently co-ordinated by three staff who have extensive teaching commitments and other duties. The college is proposing to introduce a new system later this year. It is intended that there will be appropriate training available for staff to enable them to use the system effectively.

67 The college has an appropriate equal opportunities policy, the implementation of which is co-ordinated by a cross-college group. In 1998, a comprehensive annual report on equal opportunities issues was produced. However, the principles of equalising opportunities are inadequately considered in some aspects of the college's activities.

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. As

recognised in the self-assessment report, the college is in a sound financial position. Key financial ratios are all ahead of the sixth form college sector averages published by the FEFC. The college is aware of the need to ensure that value for money is obtained throughout the college's operations. An appropriate set of financial targets, consistent with the college's current sound financial position, has recently been established in the strategic plan. However, achievement against these targets has not been monitored by management or reported to the corporation.

69 Management accounts are produced promptly each month and are considered by the college's finance management group. The format and content of these have evolved little since incorporation and are not consistent with current good practice. The college recognises that changes may be appropriate and a working party has been established to consider possible improvements. The college's internal auditors have identified a number of weaknesses in the systems of financial control and these are being addressed by management.

Conclusions

70 The college's self-assessment report was comprehensive, evaluative and well presented. The evidence used to support the identified strengths and weaknesses was clearly referenced. Useful reviews of progress since the previous self-assessment report were given in each section. Action plans for each section named those responsible and provided timescales. Some sections were more detailed than others. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made by the college, but identified a few additional strengths and some additional weaknesses. Between the development of the report and the inspection, the college had made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses. The grades awarded by the college for one curriculum area and a cross-college aspect were considered to be overgenerous.

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71 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	43
19-24 years	12
25+ years	44
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	11
Intermediate	34
Advanced	46
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	9
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	207	248	26
Engineering	7	0	0
Business	143	221	21
Hotel and catering	40	7	3
Health and community care	56	11	4
Art and design	51	61	6
Humanities	320	358	39
Basic education	6	9	1
Total	830	915	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 23% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	60	6	0	66
Supporting direct learning contact	7	0	0	7
Other support	26	0	0	26
Total	93	6	0	99

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,187,000	£3,224,000	£3,234,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£19.01	£17.98*	£17.40
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	73%	76%
Achievement of funding target	108%	114%*	100%
Diversity of income	9%	8%	11%
Operating surplus	£28,000	£37,000	-£95,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*subject to minor revision

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	186	276	291	62	198	354
	Retention (%)	63	64	70	42	74	65
	Achievement (%)	85	94	84	88	83	82
2	Expected completions	915	941	903	306	301	257
	Retention (%)	74	75	77	54	60	60
	Achievement (%)	92	87	95	92	71	81
3	Expected completions	–	1,086	1,598	–	200	257
	Retention (%)	–	67	69	–	54	58
	Achievement (%)	73	80	83	68	79	75
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	0	1	–	0	24
	Retention (%)	–	n/a	100	–	n/a	79
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	82
Short courses	Expected completions	21	246	261	278	218	405
	Retention (%)	95	35	99	71	68	87
	Achievement (%)	90	95*	95	82	89	80
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	30	46	87	82	119	111
	Retention (%)	63	70	77	55	41	46
	Achievement (%)	37	93	98	100	98	97

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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