

Orpington College of Further Education

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.

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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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Orpington College of Further Education

Greater London Region

Inspected November 1997

Orpington College is a general further education college in the London borough of Bromley. The college's self-assessment process is good and is supported by sound evidence. Self-assessment of the curriculum is based on an effective course review and evaluation system which is understood and supported by staff, and which makes use of evidence obtained from an established system of lesson observation. The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection as a whole fails to emphasise some strengths and understates some weaknesses. However, the judgements are generally sound, providing, in most respects, an accurate picture of the quality of the college's provision.

Since the last inspection, the college has significantly improved the quality of its provision and expanded the range of vocational courses. The college offers courses in 7 out of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in five of these programme areas was inspected, together with cross-college aspects. The college reflects local needs in its offer of courses from foundation level to higher education. The growth in work-related courses reflects productive partnerships with employers and groups such as Bromley Business Partnership, Croydon Chamber of Commerce, Orpington Promotions Group and

South London TEC. Teaching is good. The college has a thorough and comprehensive quality assurance system and the proportion of lessons graded one or two by inspectors has risen by 17 per cent since the last inspection. The health care provision is outstanding. The college has improved its support for students; a new information centre provides comprehensive advice and guidance. Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise to the college and have supported the principal and his senior managers in changing the strategic direction of the college. The college is well managed and managers have clear roles and responsibilities. There have been considerable improvements in accommodation since the last inspection. If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, the college should address: insufficient setting and monitoring of strategic objectives; low pass rates on some courses; underdeveloped use of information technology on some courses; and overcrowding in the library.

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
Computing	2	General resources	2
Business	2	Quality assurance	2
Leisure, tourism and sport studies	2	Governance	2
Childhood studies, health and care	1	Management	2
Humanities	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Orpington College was founded in 1972 to serve the needs of 700 full-time students mainly on general education courses. In 1996-97, the college had just over 3,000 enrolments of whom approximately 50 per cent were aged 19 and over. Approximately 19 per cent of full-time students and 15 per cent of part-time students are of minority ethnic origin. Some 50 per cent of full-time students live in the London borough of Bromley; increasing numbers travel from Bexley, Lewisham and Greenwich.

2 The college occupies its original 11-storey tower block in the town centre of Orpington in the south-east of the London borough of Bromley. It also has teaching accommodation in the neighbouring Lychgate Centre and in Walnut House across the market square from the main site. Community provision is offered at the Midfield Centre in St Paul's Cray and on another satellite site. Both sites are within three miles of the town centre. The college makes every effort to accommodate students with physical disabilities. Students with learning difficulties are integrated with mainstream courses where appropriate.

3 Situated in a densely-populated area, the college competes with other post-16 providers for students. There are over 20 secondary schools within the borough of Bromley, all of which have sixth forms, and there are six other further education colleges within an hour's travelling time of Orpington. The college currently recruits its full-time students from 80 different secondary schools.

4 In addition to its general education provision, the college has developed courses leading to a range of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and other vocational courses at both intermediate and advanced level. Courses in business, information technology, health and social care, and leisure and tourism are well established. There are also work-related courses in art, design and

performing arts. An increasing number of higher education courses are offered. The college is an associate college of Canterbury Christ Church College of Higher Education. The teacher education programmes certificate, diploma courses in management studies and a degree in professional studies are also provided.

5 The college's strategic plan includes 12 key objectives:

- developing with partners a teaching and learning facility in the St Mary and St Paul's Cray, and Ramsden estates
- developing a comprehensive range of part-time day, evening and weekend courses in Orpington and further afield, if appropriate
- developing and embedding a college-wide quality assurance system in line with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) self-assessment model
- marketing a range of short tailor-made courses to local industry, commerce and the general public and offering a range of professional services to the same groups on a full-cost basis
- working with the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and other partners to develop a range of activities aimed at assisting with local economic regeneration, alleviating the effects of unemployment, widening access into further education and working with under-represented groups
- working with local institutions of higher education
- marketing a range of existing courses overseas
- developing an increasing range of vocational courses where areas of demand clearly exist
- continuing the programme of investment in the building stock of the college, including a rolling programme of planned maintenance and the creation of more teaching spaces to meet demand

Context

- preparing the college for self-assessment and inspection
- developing a more participative strategic planning process, involving governors, managers, staff and students, employers and other community partners
- achieving at least a further 8 per cent growth in full-time student numbers and continuing to increase funded enrolments for 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in November 1997. Before the inspection, inspectors studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other FEFC directorates. The college's data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 were validated against class registers and results issued by examining bodies. The college was given about two months' notice of the inspection agenda and the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by a team comprising 11 inspectors and an auditor working in college for a total of 38 days. Inspectors observed 80 lessons and examined students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, students and support staff.

7 Seventy-five per cent of the lessons inspected were rated good or outstanding and 3 per cent were less than satisfactory. According to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*, 61 per cent of all lessons inspected for the year 1996-97 had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. According to the same report, 8 per cent of lessons inspected in all colleges had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. An average of 13.1 students attended each of the lessons observed. This compares with a figure for all colleges in 1996-97 of 10.8 as reported in the chief inspector's annual report. The following table shows the inspection grades awarded to the lessons and tutorials inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	14	21	8	2	0	45
GNVQ	5	9	6	0	0	20
Other vocational*	4	7	4	0	0	15
Total	23	37	18	2	0	80

*includes BTEC national diplomas and certificates

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 2

8 The inspection of mathematics and science covered all aspects of the college's provision in these subjects. Sixteen lessons were observed. The inspection findings accord generally with the self-assessment report, although the report did not highlight important strengths.

Key strengths

- a good range of practical work in science
- well-planned, effectively-managed courses
- assessments of an appropriate standard
- good progression by students to further and higher education

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of information technology in students' work
- insufficient opportunities for students to study part time
- unsatisfactory retention rates on some science courses

9 The college offers a range of full-time courses for the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in the major science subjects and mathematics, and a more limited range of part-time courses. There are no vocational courses at foundation level. This restricted range of provision was not identified as a weakness in the college's self-assessment report.

10 Courses are well planned and effectively managed. Students are informed about course content and assessments. Teachers share teaching materials to good effect. Course teams set targets for examination pass rates, students' attendance and retention. The majority of successful students progress to higher

education. This was not noted as a strength in the college's self-assessment report.

11 The self-assessment report recognised that teaching is generally good and that some students need to improve the organisation of their course files. Lessons have clear objectives and teachers effectively use a range of visual teaching aids to support students' learning. Science students undertake a range of practical assignments. There was limited evidence of the use of information technology in students' work. Students are set appropriate coursework, which is marked regularly and includes helpful written feedback from teachers on how the work could be improved. There is ample evidence of science students developing appropriate practical skills and scientific concepts.

12 Examination results in science are generally good, although they vary from year to year and across subjects. In 1997, the pass rates for the two-year GCE A level courses in biology and physics were above the national average for students aged 16 to 18, but below in chemistry. GCE A level and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are close to the national figures. Retention rates are low on some science courses.

13 Students have no difficulty in contacting tutors. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report rightly identifies some minor weaknesses in students' attendance and punctuality. Teachers are appropriately experienced, though there is a need to update the industrial experience of some science teachers. Specialist resources are appropriate.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in science and mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level biology	Retention (%)	*	76	66
	Pass rate (%)	*	70	81
GCE A level physics	Retention (%)	*	84	76
	Pass rate (%)	*	65	80
GCE A level chemistry	Retention (%)	*	81	74
	Pass rate (%)	*	50	38
GCE A level mathematics	Retention (%)	*	88	75
	Pass rate (%)	*	54	62
GCSE mathematics	Retention (%)	*	79	72
	Pass rate (%)	*	28	31

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Note: all figures are for students aged 16 to 18

Curriculum Areas

Computing

Grade 2

14 Ten teaching lessons were observed covering all aspects of provision. The inspectors generally agreed with the college's self-assessment of the provision.

Key strengths

- a good range of well-planned, well-managed courses
- effective teaching methods
- good progression within the college and to higher education and employment
- key skills integral to GNVQ and information technology courses
- high pass rates in GCE A level computer science and intermediate GNVQ courses in information technology
- bright, spacious, well-furnished accommodation

Weaknesses

- a lack of appropriate variety in some teaching
- underdeveloped use of information technology
- disturbance to some classes by late arrival of students

15 The quality of teaching is good. Lessons have clear objectives and are planned thoroughly. Courses are well managed. Some teaching lacks appropriate variety and students are not sufficiently exposed to development trends in computing such as multimedia or the Internet. These weaknesses are recognised in the self-assessment report and strategies are in place to address them.

16 The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time courses, with well-established routes for both internal and external progression. The productive links with employers are highlighted in the self-assessment

report. The work experience programme on the GNVQ advanced information technology course leads directly to many students obtaining employment.

17 A strength that is not sufficiently emphasised in the college's self-assessment is the effective and enthusiastic management at both unit manager and course co-ordinator levels. Policies and procedures are clear and are comprehensively observed. Course teams meet regularly, minutes are circulated and actions plans are monitored. Punctuality, attendance, retention and achievement are monitored and performance targets are set for courses. Courses are delivered by enthusiastic teachers who are committed to their work. Some lecturers do not have an appropriate computing qualification.

18 In general, the standard of assignments is appropriate. The marking of students' coursework on the recently-introduced GCE A/AS level in information technology helps students to make progress. Key skills form an integral part of GNVQ programmes. Occasionally, poor punctuality on the part of students disturbed the start of lessons.

19 Pass rates on computing courses are generally good, and are frequently well above national averages. However, the pass rate on the advanced GNVQ course was well below the national figure for 1997. Retention rates have gone down on some courses but are good overall; a few are poor. Students' achievements are accurately evaluated in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level computer science	Retention (%)	*	74	63
	Pass rate (%)	*	89	83
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	88	60
	Pass rate (%)	*	67	65

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

20 Eleven lessons were observed, covering all subjects within the business programme area. The college's self-assessment report identified strengths, weaknesses and priorities for action, and reference was made to supporting evidence. The inspection generally confirmed the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in the college's report.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses, with good schemes of work
- students' sound grasp of subject
- effective teaching in academic and vocational courses
- high level of motivation and enjoyment in the best classes
- generally good attendance by students
- good pass rates in some external examinations

Weaknesses

- the failure of some teachers to cater for the full range of abilities amongst students
- the poor oral communication and group working skills of some students
- poor punctuality amongst students in a few classes
- insufficient sharing of good practice by teachers
- the underdeveloped skills in information technology of some students

21 The business programme area offers GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced levels, and some GCSE, GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and GCE A level courses. National vocational qualification (NVQ) courses in administration and secretarial skills are offered

at levels 2 and 3, and specialist qualifications in accounting are also provided.

22 Business courses are well structured, with coherent schemes of work which enable the appropriate topics to be covered and course objectives to be achieved. As the self-assessment report recognises, the best lesson plans contain clear aims and objectives, an outline of the course, a review of the resources available to students and a specification of the learning outcomes. Teachers have up-to-date knowledge of the subject, enthusiasm and commitment to their work. In a few lessons teachers failed to challenge students sufficiently or to take adequate account of the range of abilities and learning needs of students in their group. The self-assessment process acknowledges the need to widen the range of teaching approaches used by teachers.

23 Assessment procedures are well established and effective. The marking of students' work and the feedback given by teachers to students is good. The teaching of the key skills in information technology and communication has been addressed partially by the development of an integrated programme of assignments for vocational courses.

24 Students demonstrate a good level of subject knowledge and understanding, and high levels of motivation. Some students show a poor level of oral communication and lack skills in group work. The majority of students have a good attendance record, although the persistent poor attendance and punctuality of a small number of students are identified in the self-assessment report.

25 Some GNVQ portfolios demonstrate a high standard of content and presentation. Good pass rates have been attained by students on GNVQ business courses. Results at grades A to C on the GCE A level business studies course in 1996 and 1997 were well above national averages. Results in GCSE accounting were poor in 1996. Other pass rates have been around the national average.

Curriculum Areas

26 The business curriculum is well managed. There are regular team meetings and action plans are documented and monitored. Course review and evaluation are sound. The provision of equipment and learning resources is generally satisfactory. The best handouts, task sheets and overhead projector slides used in classes are word-processed, and provide effective illustrations of the topics being discussed. Some staff make limited use of information technology in the preparation of materials.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	*	87	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	79	91
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	83	67
	Pass rate (%)	*	73	79

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Leisure, Tourism and Sport Studies

Grade 2

27 Eleven lessons were observed, covering the full range of GNVQ programmes and GCE A level sport studies. The inspection team's judgements accord broadly with those in the college's self-assessment report. However, the report understates the quality of course planning and lesson preparation, students' achievements on the advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism programme, and the intensive GCE A level sports studies course.

Key strengths

- effectively-planned and well-managed courses
- generally good teaching
- effective assessment procedures with regular reviews of students' progress
- opportunities for students to develop additional skills and qualifications
- good pass rates in advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism and GCE A level sports studies courses
- excellent specialist resources

Weaknesses

- the poor quality of some visual aids for the support of learning
- the lack of relevant vocational knowledge on the part of teachers of key skills
- poor pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ leisure and tourism course

28 The college offers GNVQ leisure and tourism courses at intermediate and advanced levels as well as a GCE A level sports studies course. The full-time provision addresses the needs of 16 to 19 year olds and provides appropriate progression routes to other courses

in the college, and to higher education and employment. The programme area has also developed part-time courses for adult students who wish to work in the travel industry.

29 The leisure, tourism and sport courses are effectively managed. Course teams meet regularly to consider issues relating to course content and organisation, and to students' attendance, punctuality and overall performance. Action plans are produced in response to course review and evaluation. Priorities for action, identified in the self-assessment report, have in some cases been implemented. Key skills are an integral part of all GNVQ assignments.

30 The standard of teaching is good. Inspectors agreed with the college identifying the professional expertise and commitment to their work of teachers as a notable strength. However, the report did not identify some weaknesses in teaching and learning. For example, some students are insufficiently challenged and some poor visual aids and handouts are used by teachers to support learning.

31 Assessments are well organised and effective. Written feedback from teachers explaining how students could improve their work is helpful and supportive. Marked work is returned to students within agreed timescales. GNVQ portfolios are well presented and the standard of work is generally good. Greater emphasis is now given to the integration of information technology skills with assignments. However, the information technology skills of some students require further development.

32 The self-assessment report does not emphasise sufficiently the strength of students' achievements, particularly the good results on the advanced GNVQ programme in leisure and tourism. Pass rates are also high on the intensive one-year GCE A level sports studies course. The pass rate on the intermediate GNVQ programme in leisure and tourism was low in 1996. Inspectors concluded that this was

Curriculum Areas

not given sufficient emphasis by the college in its self-assessment although the successful progression of students from the intermediate programme to related employment was noted.

33 Specialist resources are particularly good. The college has a successful partnership with the Walnuts Leisure Centre in Orpington where students benefit from a full range of professional sports facilities. The college's new travel agency is a major development that is effectively used to support learning. The access students have to information technology facilities is adequate.

Examples of students' achievements in leisure, tourism and sports studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced, leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	*	56	67
	Pass rate (%)	*	67	86
GNVQ intermediate, leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	*	73	72
	Pass rate (%)	*	44	48
GCE A level sports studies	Retention (%)	*	95	90
	Pass rate (%)	*	81	88

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Childhood Studies, Health and Care

Grade 1

34 During the inspection 13 lessons were observed, covering the full range of health care provision, including part-time courses. Significant improvements have taken place since the last inspection. In general, the college's self-assessment report and supporting evidence reflect the high quality of the provision and an action plan has been formulated to remedy the few weaknesses. The report, however, does not identify a few issues which need to be addressed in teaching and the promotion of learning.

Key strengths

- pass rates which are mostly well above national averages
- good or outstanding teaching
- courses that are well planned and effectively managed
- the high level of oral and written skills amongst students
- the comprehensive course handbooks for students
- good progression within the college and to higher education and work

Weaknesses

- some teaching methods used to deal with mixed-ability classes
- good practice which is not fully shared between teachers
- limited liaison between course teams and employers

35 The curriculum area offers care studies at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Specialist qualifications in pre-school practice and in dental nursing are also offered. Within the provision on offer there are full-time, part-time, day and evening courses. A high

proportion of students progress to other courses in the college, or move on to higher education, or obtain employment.

36 Much of the teaching is good and a significant proportion is outstanding. The outstanding practice should be disseminated more widely. The self-assessment report recognises that key skills are an integral and effective part of the vocational curriculum.

37 Courses are efficiently and effectively managed. The responsibility for monitoring and improving quality lies with programme managers who act swiftly to deal with any issues that arise. Data obtained from performance indicators are used to plan future courses. As the self-assessment report notes, the attendance and punctuality of students are closely monitored and remedial action is taken where necessary. There are insufficient links between course teams and employers, a matter being currently addressed.

38 Students' achievements are excellent. Pass rates in all courses are above national averages. Students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Assignments are clear with well-laid-out assessment procedures outlined in the course handbooks. Grading is fair and feedback from teachers to students provides clear advice on how their work could be improved.

39 The teaching and learning programme is enhanced by the high-quality classrooms, and the excellent demonstration materials and samples of students' practical work which are displayed in the classrooms.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in childhood studies, health and care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma childhood studies	Retention (%)	*	94	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	97	92
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	*	88	76
	Pass rate (%)	*	57	85
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	86	85
	Pass rate (%)	*	55	53

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

40 Sixteen lessons were observed, covering courses in English, law, philosophy and politics. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's evaluation of the quality of provision contained in the self-assessment report and noted that due attention had been given to strengths and weaknesses. However, the report does not identify some shortcomings in teaching and the promotion of learning.

Key strengths

- well-planned and well-managed courses
- teaching which is generally good, and in some cases outstanding
- pass rates in GCE A level politics and English literature courses which are above national averages
- good progression by students to higher education

Weaknesses

- low expectations of students in some GCE A level English literature lessons
- failure to involve all students in some lessons
- poor punctuality amongst students in a few classes

41 The college offers a range of humanities subjects including environmental studies, geography, history, psychology, sociology, French, German and Spanish, in addition to the subjects inspected. All the subjects are offered at GCE A level; some are available at GCSE level and in access to higher education courses.

42 Overall, the quality of teaching in the subjects inspected is good. Some teaching was outstanding. The self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses seen in teaching and learning. In the best lessons teachers had high expectations of their

students, conveyed their enthusiasm for the subject, sustained students' interest and stimulated them to seek to achieve high standards in their work. Good relations between teachers and students encourage learning and students are, generally, attentive and responsive. In some law lessons there was undue reliance on the dictation of notes by the teacher and, on occasion, students had to concentrate on a single task for too long. In a few English literature lessons, teachers had low expectations of their students, and there were insufficient opportunities for students to speak and debate.

43 Targets for students' achievements are set and monitored. Course teams meet regularly, and most meetings are minuted. Assessment is well organised and fair, and there are procedures for comparing and moderating marking standards. Most of the comments written on students' work give an accurate evaluation of the quality of the work and useful guidance on how to improve.

44 Much students' written work is of a good or high standard. Some work has weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and expression. Pass rates in GCE A level politics and English literature usually exceed national averages; in politics, by a substantial margin. Pass rates in GCE A level philosophy have improved steadily. GCSE English pass rates at grades A to C exceed national averages. Progression to higher education by students is good. However, retention has declined on most courses.

45 The library stock of books and other materials is intensively used by students. The stock for politics and English courses gives good support to students; the law stock is adequate.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level, government and politics, intensive	Retention (%)	*	84	80
	Pass rate (%)	*	96	100
GCE A level English	Retention (%)	*	87	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	97	90
GCE A level philosophy	Retention (%)	*	100	65
	Pass rate (%)	*	42	93
GCSE English	Retention (%)	*	83	68
	Pass rate (%)	*	53	73
GCE A level law	Retention (%)	*	92	67
	Pass rate (%)	*	60	45

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

46 There was a close match between the strengths identified by inspectors and those indicated in the college's self-assessment report. However, a few weaknesses were not identified by the college. The evidence supporting judgements in the self-assessment report was comprehensive and sound.

Key strengths

- the clear procedures from initial enquiries by students through to enrolment
- high-quality documentation to support staff advising and guiding students
- effective and consistent interview procedures
- the improvements made to the tutorial system and on-course support provided for students
- good-quality guidance for students progressing to higher education
- generally good careers advice for students on vocational courses

Weaknesses

- limited screening for students on general education courses
- the variable quality of tutorial support
- overcrowding in the library
- insufficient careers advice for students on general education courses

47 Since the last inspection, the college has made significant improvements to its student support services. The college aims to provide a safe and secure environment for its students. There are clear procedures covering initial enquiries from students through pre-admission guidance to interview and enrolment. A series of open days and 'taster' events helps students

to decide which course to choose. Guidance staff have high-quality support files which include a range of well-designed course leaflets enabling them to deal effectively with enquiries. Interviews are efficiently organised and consistency is ensured through an interviewer's guide. Induction procedures have improved since the last inspection. Late enrollers receive effective induction to the college.

48 The self-assessment report identifies as a strength the introduction of comprehensive screening to help identify students who are in need of additional learning support. The new basic skills centre plays a key role in providing learning support for students. In 1997, the screening process revealed that 32 per cent of students enrolling at the college required support. These 285 students received on-course help, and approximately 30 of them are receiving one-to-one support. On-course support takes the form of a specialist teacher in key skills working alongside the subject teacher. Students on GCE A level courses are not currently screened.

49 The improvements to the tutorial system in the last two years are correctly emphasised in the self-assessment report. However, while agreeing that the tutorial system is sound, the inspection team saw some variation in the delivery of tutorials on a few courses. Tutorials are generally well related to the students' work in college and where relevant, support activities carried out during work placements. Pastoral co-ordinators support individual tutors and monitor their work. On one day each year, classes are cancelled to allow tutors to meet and discuss common areas of concern. There are other occasions during the year when tutors come together to discuss and to share good practice.

50 A generally effective counselling service, highlighted in the self-assessment process, operates every day from morning to early afternoon and there is an evening session providing a more limited service for part-time

Cross-college Provision

students. The service is valued by staff and students. Five members of staff are qualified counsellors. Much improved guidance has been introduced in the last two years for students making higher education applications, seeking jobs or making enquiries about further training opportunities. Procedures for monitoring students' attendance and following up absenteeism have improved the attendance figures since the last inspection.

51 A student liaison officer provides an extra channel of communication between students and teachers and helps to support students with problems. The liaison officer organises an extensive programme of 'theme weeks' on matters of concern to students such as smoking, drugs, sexual issues, eating disorders, self-defence and alcohol. Money raised at student events is used to help students in financial difficulty. Careers advice and guidance is good. In 1996-97, over 700 students were given careers interviews.

General Resources

Grade 2

52 The college's self-assessment report includes many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors, but underestimates the significance of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-maintained accommodation
- the effective and appropriate use of teaching space
- the securing of external funding
- the expansion of the information technology centre
- improvements in the library service
- good-quality staff work rooms

Weaknesses

- some poor accommodation in the Lychgate Centre
- restricted access to information technology in classrooms
- limited resource-based learning facilities
- overcrowding and limited bookstock in the library

53 The college occupies two sites in the centre of Orpington. It has significantly improved the building on the main site and acquired a second site close by. The quality of accommodation is generally good and the buildings are well maintained. The temporary building on the main site was refurbished after incorporation and still provides a reasonable standard of accommodation. The self-assessment report recognises that there is pressure on teaching space. The college has secured external funding from a national computer company which it has used to create a room to be used for specialist business training.

54 Since the last inspection the college has improved its library service. However, with only 85 study spaces, it remains small. Although there is effective liaison between the librarian and curriculum managers, the bookstock is inadequate in some subject areas.

55 The college is developing its information technology policy. The college has increased its investment in information technology and the provision of computers has improved since the last inspection. However, access to information technology across the college is variable and some equipment is dated.

56 The college has provided more areas where students can meet socially. On the main site, there is a cafe and an attractive common room. The general canteen is small but the availability of alternative venues in the nearby shopping centre means that it does not become too crowded. The lack of a lift at Walnut House

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means people using wheelchairs cannot use the information technology centre or the adjoining basic skills unit. The college acknowledges and has attempted to remedy this situation by providing limited information technology and basic skills facilities within the library which is accessible to wheelchair users.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

57 The college is committed to continuous improvements in standards. The quality assurance policy has students' achievements as its central concern and aims to ensure that all staff are responsible for maintaining and improving the quality of the college's provision. A quality manager reporting to an assistant principal has overall responsibility for quality assurance. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and identifies the college's many strengths. The report overstates a few strengths and fails to record a few of the weaknesses revealed by the inspection.

Key strengths

- thorough and comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- a commitment to continuous improvement
- the involvement of all staff in self-assessment
- courses and service reviews which are informed by surveys of students' views
- the established and effective appraisal system
- lesson observations which are used effectively to support teachers and evaluate the quality of teaching
- staff development which is clearly linked to the college's strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- quality assurance not clearly linked to strategic objectives
- quality assurance not linked to commitments made in the college's charter
- slow development of service standards for college services

58 The college has had a system for course review and evaluation for many years which has been developed into a thorough and comprehensive self-assessment of all curriculum areas. The self-assessment report acknowledges the many strengths of the process. All teaching staff were involved in 1996-97 in a consistent and rigorous process of assessing and grading the quality of their courses. Evidence has come from student questionnaires, lesson observation by line managers and a review of students' achievements. The self-assessment report recognises that the central management information system does not always provide timely information. Following the review, course teams are required to devise an action plan and set targets for improvements.

59 The self-assessment reports on courses, which are based on the reviews, are evaluative and generally accurate and include action plans which are mainly realistic and precise. Reviews have led to improvements in the tutorial system, in the planning and the delivery of teaching, and in students' achievements.

60 The self-assessment report justifiably identifies the college's lesson observation system as a strength. Observations are used to: support and develop teachers; monitor the quality of teaching and so inform the course reviews; and provide evidence for the college's self-assessment. All observations are carried out in accordance with policies and criteria which have previously been agreed. They lead to feedback to the individual teacher and, in the case of the observations for course review, to a

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grade agreed between the observer and the teacher. Observation is welcomed by most teachers and has proved valuable in sharing good practice in teaching.

61 The college's value-added system sets targets for students' achievements which are based upon entry qualifications. Although the system helps to raise expectations amongst teachers and students, it is not yet being applied consistently across all courses and some teachers are not convinced of its value.

62 The self-assessment report does not recognise that some college services have been slow to develop quality assurance systems. Staff responsible for student services and learning resources have devised performance indicators and conducted surveys of students' perceptions. As a result, they have produced self-assessment reports, and action plans that specify clear responsibilities and timescales. In contrast, staff responsible for premises, finance and personnel are only just developing self-assessment systems.

63 All reviews are subject to a quality audit by a group of senior managers who interview unit managers and validate the whole process. Although the academic board is responsible for maintaining the quality of the curriculum offer, there is no single group which has overall responsibility for overseeing the quality assurance process. The self-assessment report claims that the quality review cycle is a reliable and integral part of strategic planning. There is no evidence to show that the quality assurance system is linked to the monitoring of strategic objectives or to the commitments in the charter. A quality review group has been established to debate issues arising from quality reviews. The membership is representative of all areas of the college and benefits from the presence of a governor with expertise in quality assurance.

64 As the self-assessment report indicates, the priorities for staff development are set by the college's strategic objectives. Individual needs are identified through a thorough appraisal

system. There are clear processes for applying to attend in-service training and for evaluating the effectiveness and value for money of the experience. Much of this training is delivered in-house. Teachers who do not have a qualification in teaching undertake the college's own certificate in education. Thirty-eight teachers of vocational courses have achieved relevant training and development lead body assessor awards.

Governance

Grade 2

65 Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report identified most of the strengths of governance but did not identify one important weakness.

Key strengths

- efficient and effective procedures for the conduct of corporation business
- well-qualified governors whose expertise is well used
- the strong local knowledge and connections of governors
- the supportive and constructive relationship between the corporation and the college
- good attendance by governors at corporation meetings

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement by governors in setting and monitoring strategic objectives
- the governors' self-evaluation process which is at an early stage of development

66 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

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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 developed an open and effective process for the recruitment of new governors, including the use of a search committee, and this is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The report also recognised that the college has efficient, effective procedures for the conduct of the corporation's business. The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure, including committees which deal with finance, employment policy, remuneration, and audit. Each committee has clear and appropriate terms of reference.

67 The clerking arrangements for the corporation are generally sound. Corporation papers and minutes are comprehensive. The corporation has established a register of members' interests but, in a few instances, the declarations by governors lack sufficient detail in terms of their financial and personal interests. The financial health of the college is monitored adequately by the finance committee.

68 Over the last three years, the college has increased substantially the volume of its vocational course provision. Governors have supported the principal and his senior managers in effecting this change to the college's character. Governors are not sufficiently involved in setting key objectives and in monitoring the college's performance in relation to the strategic plan.

69 There is a good mix of long-serving and new governors, some of whom were appointed through external advertising. Governors are well qualified for their role and have a wide range of relevant experience and expertise. They have good local knowledge and contacts. These attributes have had a significant effect on the overall character of the college and are used appropriately to benefit the college and its students. Induction is provided for new

governors; the self-assessment report acknowledges the need to monitor its effectiveness in order to develop further training for governors. Governors receive briefings at corporation meetings to help them understand the work of the college. The self-assessment report emphasises that governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between their role and that of managers, and acknowledges the supportive and constructive relationship between the corporation and the college. Attendance by governors at meetings is good.

70 Governors show an interest in the students' experience at the college and are developing a knowledge of the college's activities. A recent innovation provides governors with the opportunity to visit the college to observe aspects of its everyday work, for example, guidance interviews and management meetings.

Management

Grade 2

71 The inspection findings accord generally with the college's self-assessment report. However, inspectors identified several strengths and weaknesses which were not recognised by the college.

Key strengths

- a clear and effective management structure
- effective external links with a range of commercial and public bodies
- good use of market research information and local knowledge
- success in meeting enrolment targets
- the development of vocational provision
- the well-managed curriculum and business support units
- effective deployment of staff
- a clear and appropriate budget planning process

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Weaknesses

- a computerised management information system that does not meet managers' needs
- failure of the college's internal audit service to develop plans to cover all the college's systems
- lack of formal strategic planning and evaluation in relation to whole-college objectives for curriculum development, teaching and learning
- insufficient monitoring of the implementation of equal opportunities policy

72 The college, its staff and resources are well managed. The college management team comprises the principal and three assistant principals responsible, respectively, for curriculum and students, finance, and staff and resources. There are nine curriculum units, each with a unit manager, and five business support units dealing with cross-college functions and the management of community education. The management structure has recently been reorganised. The number of senior managers and curriculum units has been reduced with the intention of improving lines of communication and strengthening the management of strategic planning. Staffing structures and lines of responsibility are clear. The managers of curriculum units meet regularly to share issues of common interest, as do managers of business support units. Curriculum and business support units are well managed.

73 The compact nature of the college contributes to teaching staff feeling able to approach senior managers to express their views and be listened to which, in turn, helps to develop good working relationships throughout the college. These strengths are acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report. Following an in-depth study of communication by external consultants, a working party is

developing recommendations to improve communication throughout the college. Some improvements have already been introduced, such as a weekly early morning briefing for unit managers and business support managers.

74 Since incorporation, the college has achieved its objective of changing its educational character from a primarily academic institution to one where a significant proportion of courses are vocational. It has put considerable energy into developing productive links with local businesses and public bodies, the TEC and higher education institutions. It has made good use of market information and the extensive local knowledge and contacts amongst the staff and governors to extend and develop its course offer. Courses have been developed at centres away from the college which effectively widen participation amongst groups that have traditionally not enrolled at the college. These strengths were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

75 The strategic plan has 12 key objectives, each with supplementary operating objectives. Seven are concerned with the college's future course offer and its relationship with external organisations. Other key objectives concern quality assurance, inspection, building stock and the need to develop a more participative strategic planning process. There are few references amongst the key objectives to aspects of curriculum development such as the teaching and promotion of learning. Performance indicators for each objective are not always clearly identified. There are no formal operational plans for the curriculum units or the business support units that would demonstrate how the college's strategic objectives and policies are to be carried forward. Despite these shortcomings, there are a number of cross-college initiatives to develop the curriculum and to improve teaching and learning. These are generated by working groups whose members bring views and recommendations to the academic board or the business support managers' group.

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76 The college has an equal opportunities policy and a disability statement. There is evidence of activities which support equality of opportunity, such as support for students with physical disabilities and sensory impairments. The course review process gives course teams the opportunity to comment on ways in which they promote equality. However, there is limited monitoring of the implementation of the policy and no specific reports to governors on the issue. Equality of opportunity is not commented upon in the self-assessment report and some strengths in this area of work have been overlooked.

77 The college has recognised in its self-assessment that computerised management information is not yet fully accessible to managers, and does not yet fully meet their needs. Managers' needs have been identified and a development project set in train. There have been some improvements recently in the quality of information available.

78 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college's average level of funding for 1997-98 is £14.12 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £16.72 per unit in 1997-98. The budget planning process is clear and appropriate to the college. However, the 1996-97 budget presented to governors for approval was not accompanied by a written commentary which explained, for example, the assumptions made. Monthly management accounts are provided for the finance committee. Budget holders receive timely financial reports. The college's accounting system does not meet its financial reporting needs fully and management has started to take action to deal with this. The college's internal audit service has not developed plans to ensure coverage of all the college's systems.

Conclusions

79 The college's self-assessment process is effective and the inspection team found that the self-assessment report was supported by sound evidence. Many of the findings in the report are in agreement with the inspection team. However, the report underemphasises some strengths and understates a few weaknesses revealed by the inspection. In some of the curriculum areas insufficient emphasis is given to the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements. Self-assessment of college services is still developing and the quality of reports is variable.

80 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	65
19-24 years	10
25+ years	24
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	0
Intermediate	34
Advanced	62
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	493	366	28
Agriculture	4	2	0
Business	380	185	19
Hotel and catering	97	19	4
Health and community care	182	26	7
Art and design	230	82	10
Humanities	573	417	32
Total	1,959	1,097	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	87	20	0	107
Supporting direct learning contact	13	0	0	13
Other support	38	0	0	38
Total	138	20	0	158

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,690,000	£4,280,000	*
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£13.71	£14.20	£15.85
Payroll as a proportion of income	77%	78%	*
Achievement of funding target	118%	114%	*
Diversity of income	16%	9%	*
Operating surplus	-£74,000	-£234,000	*

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	559	566	553
	Average point score per entry	3.8	4.1	4.2
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	67	83	139
	Percentage achieving qualification	87%	72%	63%
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	122	128
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	64%	64%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	middle third

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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