Merton College

Contents

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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

| | Grade | | | | |
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report
Sample size: 104 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college 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 students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. 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 included.

Summary

Merton College

Greater London Region

Inspected April 2000

Merton College is a medium-sized general further education college in south London. The college merged with a nearby sixth form college on 1 April 2000, as the inspection began, establishing on two sites the sole college in the borough of Merton. The college has had some success in encouraging enrolment on courses in further education by those who previously might not have considered further study. In preparation for the inspection the college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report. This was its second full self-assessment. All staff took part in the process. The report is comprehensive and well organised. Each section includes data on rates of students' retention and achievements together with the actions required to address the weaknesses identified. Inspectors agreed with much of the report. They considered that some strengths were overstated, and they found some weaknesses that the college had not identified. Some weaknesses were being addressed by the college at the time of the inspection, but it was too early to assess the impact of the actions taken.

The college offers courses in all programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in six programme areas was inspected, together with cross-college provision. Provision at the former sixth form college was not inspected, although an assessment of the planned organisation was made. The college is developing productive links with employers, schools and its local community. Students have access to a comprehensive range of support services. General resources are good. IT resources have improved since the previous inspection. The accuracy and availability of management information have also improved, and data on students' achievements are reliable. Course audits provide effective checks on the standard of course provision. Governors and senior managers are leading the transformation of the college and work closely together to determine strategic priorities. The college has improved rates of students' retention and achievements from a low level, although overall retention rates and some achievement rates remain below those achieved by similar colleges. In a few programme areas most teaching was good. In many of the programme areas the proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding was below the national average for their area. Class sizes were below the average size for the sector. The college should improve: retention and achievement rates; aspects of tutorial support; the quality of some teaching and learning; and procedures for the analysis of student performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, computing and information technology	3
Engineering	4
Business studies	2
Health and social care	2
English, history, psychology and social science	4
ESOL and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Basic skills	3

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	3
General resources	2
Quality assurance	3
Governance	3
Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1   Merton College is the main provider of post-16 education and training in the London borough of Merton. Following the recent merger with a nearby sixth form college, the college has two sites 800 metres apart and both near to Morden town centre. The borough shares boundaries with six other London boroughs. Within a 6-mile radius there are five other colleges, at least 24 sixth forms, and three higher education providers.

2   Students are primarily drawn from Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth although a substantial number travel to the college from further afield. The college draws approximately 44% of its students from areas of high socio-economic deprivation. Of the college's students, 45% are drawn from the very wide range of minority ethnic groups.

3   In July 1999, the college enrolled a total of 5,041 students, most of whom most were on courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Of the 1,680 students on full-time courses, 51% were aged 16 to 18. In 1999, only 38.8% of year 11 students at local schools gained five or more subjects at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above. Unemployment is low. There are few large employers in the area. The college is continuing to develop productive partnerships with local schools, higher education institutions, the local authority, the voluntary sector and the local adult college. It is also collaborating with the local education authority (LEA) to develop Lifelong Learning Partnerships, post-16 provision and a work-related 14 to 16 curriculum. The college has led a number of curriculum initiatives locally, regionally and nationally in areas as diverse as childcare, parenting, motorcycle engineering and musical instrument repair.

4   The college's mission states that 'Merton College seeks to meet the technical, vocational and academic needs of our students, employers and the community by providing an education, training and advice service of quality which is increasingly responsive, flexible, cost-effective and appropriate'. Among its key strategic goals the college aims:

- to increase participation of 16 to 18 year olds

- to improve the performance of all courses

- to invest in college staff to ensure they can and do deliver to the highest standards

- to invest in students and thereby improve students' achievements and satisfaction

- to deliver a curriculum which in its range and flexibility meets the needs of all students

- to work in partnership with local and regional organisations including other training providers and support services, to ensure the provision is appropriate and effective.

The Inspection

5   The college was inspected during April 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999, which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. These were considered reliable. Twelve inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 56 days, carried out the inspection. Four inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the same week. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training in engineering. Where it was

appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading the college's FEFC provision.

6   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 62% were rated good or outstanding. This profile is slightly lower than the average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The figure of 11% for lessons rated less than satisfactory or poor is higher than the average.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	5	3	1	0	11
GCSE	0	2	1	1	0	4
GNVQ	1	3	7	1	0	12
NVQ	0	2	5	2	0	9
Other vocational	8	16	3	3	0	30
Other*	4	14	6	1	1	26
Total (No.)	15	42	25	9	1	92
Total (%)	16	46	27	10	1	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report
*includes access to higher education

7   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The attendance is below the national average. However, inspection was carried out in the last week of the term and the college considers that attendance may have been affected by the impending Easter holidays.

Context

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Merton College	9.0	68
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99:
Chief inspector's annual report

Mathematics, Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

8   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with much of the self-assessment report, but considered some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths
- good management of courses
- a broad and appropriate range of courses
- imaginative teaching and well-planned lessons
- good achievement on the national diploma in computer studies
- effective tutor guidance and feedback to students

Weaknesses
- poor achievements on some information technology (IT) courses
- below average rates of achievement and retention in mathematics
- insufficient open access to computers for IT students
- minimal use of IT in the teaching of mathematics

9   The college offers a suitable range of courses in IT and computing which includes the GCSE and the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in mathematics in addition to courses in numeracy. The IT courses aim to meet the needs of local businesses and the community. Managers monitor the requirements of the students and respond by reviewing the range of courses offered. For example, the mathematics section has recently established the foundation for advanced mathematics course, which is designed for students who require a preparatory course before they embark on GCE A level

mathematics. It is too early to measure the success of this initiative as the first cohort of students has not completed the course.

10   Mathematics and computing and IT courses are managed effectively by two departments. There is a cross-college co-ordinator for the application of number. However, co-ordination could be improved; opportunities to share good practice in mathematics are sometimes missed. Comprehensive and accurate course files assist curriculum development. For example, the files contain details of the written assessments of lesson observations together with recommendations for improvements. They also record details of mathematics workshops held during lunch breaks, including full records of attendance.

11   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is imaginative and effective teaching. In one class the teacher used pictorial representations to demonstrate the theory being taught, rather than giving conventional notes. This approach allowed students to concentrate on understanding the principles of a topic that had been presented in an interesting manner. In many of the IT classes the tasks undertaken by students linked theoretical issues with situations relevant to students' experience, which helped them to learn. For example, a discussion of the cost of mobile phones was linked to learning about new applications for IT. Teachers produce some high-quality materials for students. There is an appropriate variety of teaching aids which are often used effectively. However, some teaching is less successful. The aims and objectives of some lessons are unclear and some students are left to work on their own with little guidance on how to complete their tasks. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. The attendance in some classes is poor and is below national average for the sector.

12   Some examination results are good, especially those of the national diploma in computer studies and City and Guilds of

London Institute (C&G) 726 IT course for adults. The college recognises that achievement rates in some courses are poor. Retention and achievement rates for GCSE mathematics have been consistently below sector averages. Achievements on the computer literacy and information technology courses also have been consistently below the national average, particularly when studied as additional qualifications. The college runs the C&G course on IT for adults. The course is an example of the college's policy of encouraging adults to return to learning. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' work is thoroughly marked and helpful comments encourage and help students to develop strengths and focus on areas for improvements. Support and guidance systems, particularly in the GCE A level area, are effective and valued by students.

13   Teaching rooms are generally well equipped and suitable for purpose. The college has increased the amount of IT equipment available for students' use by installing computers in a room predominantly used for mathematics. However, many students on IT and computing courses find access to computers outside normal lesson time difficult. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. There is, in addition, a lack of IT provision for the teaching of mathematics; the college is now remedying this shortcoming. Most teaching staff on mathematics, IT and computing courses are well qualified and have appropriate experience. Staff attend a good range of development programmes.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics, computing and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement(%)	746 79 36	787 80 48	629 82 47
GNVQ IT	1 and 2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	36 64 17	50 74 16	74 74 40
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	149 68 31	131 70 26	193 67 25
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	61 80 56	89 69 63	58 69 68
National diploma in computer studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	22 91 100	37 76 100	51 67 79

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 4

14   Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment report, although insufficient emphasis had been given to weaknesses in teaching and learning, and declining retention rates. A few of the weaknesses identified by the college had been addressed by the time of inspection. Inspectors from the TSC observed three lessons for work-based trainees.

Key strengths

- provision of good progression opportunities
- good teaching in practical lessons
- the high standard of much practical work
- well-equipped motorcycle and musical instrument repair workshops

Weaknesses

- ineffective management of some courses
- inappropriate and ineffective teaching in many theory lessons
- unclear assessments on some courses
- declining retention rates on many courses
- consistently low achievement on the national diploma course
- low student attendance in many lessons

15   The college offers a broad range of courses in motorcycle engineering, general engineering and musical instrument repair. In 1999 courses at foundation level in computing, electronics and mechanical engineering replaced the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation and intermediate courses. The curriculum now provides students with progression opportunities from level 1 to level 4. However, the monitoring of students' progression is inadequate. The engineering department has good links with local schools and provides 'taster' courses for pupils.

An employers' forum has recently been established to provide advice on the appropriateness of the curriculum.

16   The college has identified weaknesses in the management of some courses, and taken steps to rectify these. Some aspects remain inadequate. It is too early to assess the impact of some of the actions taken to rectify the situation. For example, there are low numbers of students in many classes and much attendance is low. On some courses, there is poor tutorial provision and ineffective reviews of students' progress. Monitoring of health and safety standards in some engineering workshops is poor. Internal verification of assessment standards takes place, but some assignments are unclear and set at an inappropriate level. Many schemes of work have insufficient content.

17   Inspectors considered that the college had over-estimated the quality of its teaching. Many aspects of the teaching of engineering theory are ineffective and inappropriate. Poorer lessons involved: lengthy teacher exposition; infrequent assessment of students' understanding of the work; excessive note-taking; and few demonstrations to enliven and support the topic being covered. Teachers often failed to employ teaching methods appropriate for the small class numbers, and did not take into account the different abilities of students. In contrast, much teaching in engineering practical lessons is good. In an engineering workshop lesson, a carefully planned and skilful demonstration of the operation of a surface grinder resulted in students being fascinated and stimulated by the machine tool controls and the high standard of the work produced by the teacher. In a musical instrument repair workshop, effective questioning, and links to previous learning, helped students to learn the techniques used to repair a violin.

18   The retention rates on many courses have declined, and are particularly poor on the national diploma course. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Achievement rates on many courses improved in 1998-99.

Curriculum Areas

Achievements on the computer-aided drafting course are now above the national average. However, on the courses for the national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 in motorcycle maintenance, only 43% of those students who started the course achieved the qualification. The college has consulted with examining bodies over changes required for those mature students wishing to pursue qualifications on the part-time musical instrument repair courses. In some practical subjects, the standard of many students' work is high. For example, on the musical instrument repair courses, many students demonstrate outstanding skills in making and repairing stringed and brass musical instruments. The standard of engineering artefacts produced on a level 1 engineering course is high.

The standard of written work of some students is poor. Teachers' comments on marked work include little helpful advice on how improvements may be achieved.

19   The motorcycle and musical instrument repair workshops are well equipped. The college noted in its self-assessment report that the furnishing of some of the engineering laboratories is dated and some electronic equipment is in need of replacement. Students have access to good IT facilities. Some teaching rooms were inappropriate for the lesson. The range of books and journals held in the library is adequate. Teachers are qualified for the subjects they teach, and are continuing to complete internal verifier awards.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G motorcycle maintenance qualifications	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	77 82 79	51 76 72	75 75 67
C&G computer-aided design qualifications	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	63 65 61	76 50 32	52 75 97
GNVQ intermediate electronics and mechanical engineering	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 85 64	13 77 40	10 60 67
C&G musical instrument repair qualifications (full-time course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	15 100 93	17 71 75	17 59 80
National diploma motorcycle maintenance	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	30 63 31	11 82 22	22 41 33
NVQ motorcycle maintenance	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	54 80 56	90 56 76

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

20   Inspectors observed 12 lessons that included full-time and part-time courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, which was thorough and comprehensive.

Key strengths
- good and appropriately varied teaching
- good rates of retention and achievement on most courses
- effective tutorial support for individual learners
- good course management

Weaknesses
- poor achievement on level 3 courses
- poor and erratic attendance on many courses
- poor punctuality to lessons

21   The range of provision is broad and aims to meet the needs of the local community. There are courses in business, business administration and professional studies. There is evidence of good interdepartmental working and efficient deployment of staff. Enrolments have declined in business and administration courses in recent years and developments have focused on 'fast track' administration and access programmes as suitable alternatives. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are good links developing with local businesses. For example, a large number of customer service NVQs are provided in the workplace. This scheme involves people who might not have considered further study, and achievement rates are good. Students' progress is monitored and evaluated through regular meetings with industry and partners.

22   Courses are well led and well managed. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Departmental organisational structures are changing, but staff are clear about their current roles and responsibilities. Staff work well together as a team. Data on students' retention and achievements assists course developments and staff are familiar with the ISR. Quality assurance procedures follow college guidelines, and there is a genuine commitment to continuous improvement. Processes and procedures are well established, and minutes of meetings, verifiers' reports and other quality documents are comprehensive.

23   There is much evidence of good teaching. Lessons are well planned and include a wide and appropriate range of learning activities. Students are aware of the tutorial support available to them. A programme of group and individual tutorials effectively supports students in their learning. Clear records are kept of attendance and of the progress made by students. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that key skills are successfully taught within the vocational subjects.

24   Rates of students' retention and achievements are good in most courses, notably access to higher education, GNVQ intermediate and NVQs at levels 1 and 2. The rates of achievement and retention on the GNVQ advanced are below the national average. This shortcoming is acknowledged in the self-assessment report and plans for improvements have been drawn up. There is already some evidence of improvement, for example, the retention rate this year is better than for previous corresponding periods. Attendance is generally below the norm for the sector, and poor punctuality to lessons hinders the learning process. College-wide policies have recently been implemented to address these issues, but it is too early to assess their impact.

25   Students are well motivated and have appropriate aspirations for their futures, both in employment and further studies.

For example, GNVQ advanced students have visited a number of large organisations in and around Manchester. These visits have helped them in their studies. In many theory lessons teachers use a practical focus effectively. For example, in one lesson Young Enterprise groups presented reports on practical projects that they had undertaken. These presentations were observed by an external panel of business people, who questioned the groups on how and why they had done particular tasks, and what they had learnt. Students benefited from this experience. Most full-time students are involved in work placements, which they valued highly and this is noted in the self-assessment report.

26 Many assessments and portfolios of work are of a good standard, and demonstrate sound IT skills. Most work was well presented and appropriate to the level of study. The relevance of many assignments to current issues sought to encourage learning. All assessed work was thoroughly marked and returned promptly to students.

27 Departmental accommodation is good. Classrooms are clean, tidy and well maintained. All have overhead projectors, large whiteboards and modern furniture. The computing and IT facilities are good. Most computers are networked and have Internet access. The library is adequate and other electronic sources of information are readily available. Staff are well qualified and there are opportunities for staff development. The department has a good business administration practice office. This facility provides a modern, real-work environment within the college for students on business administration courses and provides a valuable support service to the college staff and students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ business	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement(%)	9 69 78	16 100 50	18 75 72
GNVQ/NVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	104 81 64	121 88 64	256 90 92
GNVQ/NVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	94 74 68	55 60 48	60 55 57
GCE A level business	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	62 79 46	50 71 42	72 65 35
Access to higher education in business	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	11 100 82	27 85 91

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

28   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. At the time of inspection, weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were being addressed and progress had been made in a number of areas.

Key strengths
- effective course organisation
- a broad range of course provision
- good teaching
- good rates of retention and achievement on adult courses
- innovative local course developments

Weaknesses
- low student numbers on the GNVQ advanced course
- poor achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate course

29   The college offers a wide range of programmes from level 1 through to level 4 which includes GNVQ at intermediate and advanced levels. Access to higher education courses in health and paramedical studies courses are offered on a full-time and part-time basis at the college and in the workplace. Counselling programmes are available at certificate, advanced certificate and diploma levels. Childcare and education courses include: the National Open College Network (NOCN) award in preparation for childcare; the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) certificate and diploma in nursery nursing; and the advanced diploma in childcare and education. There has been some interesting and innovative curriculum development. For example, the NOCN parenting courses were

developed at the college and are provided at a number of local sites. Such developments have attracted a number of students to return to further education. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

30   Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that course organisation is effective and meets the needs of students. Handbooks for students, work placement objectives, assignment schedules, details of lesson objectives and student progress records are all well developed. However, the arrangement which combines first-year and second-year students on the GNVQ advanced course is unsatisfactory; students have experienced difficulties with the development of appropriate skills.

31   Much teaching and learning is good. In most lessons, students were involved in an appropriate variety of learning activities which were vocationally relevant and appropriately demanding and where the pace was well judged. For example, on a childcare course the teacher introduced a range of activities associated with spring and summer festivals that could be used with young children. Equality of opportunity and appropriate safety issues were well integrated with the lesson. The lesson combined the introduction of action rhymes and activity ideas with important social messages. The teacher also helped the students to deepen their understanding of appropriate behaviour, improve their use of language and develop their personal skills. Learning was clearly taking place and the teacher presented a good role model. In another lesson students were using IT effectively and the teacher supported students as they worked on a range of activities that extended the progress they had made over the previous weeks. However, some lesson objectives were not made sufficiently clear to students and opportunities to allow students to discuss and compare experiences were sometimes missed. In one lesson students received insufficient support in preparing

presentations. Assignment briefs are generally well designed and students' written work is of a good standard. Marking is consistent and feedback constructive; positive comments and praise are used appropriately.

32   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that rates of retention and achievement on most courses are good and compare favourably with sector averages. Retention rates for the CACHE diploma in nursery nursing course are lower than the sector average, although achievement rates compare favourably. Achievement rates for the GNVQ intermediate course are poor and below the sector average.

33   Library stocks of books and learning materials are satisfactory. There is a useful range of periodicals and multimedia resources. Access to IT has been improved in response to student reviews and staff have received training to support these developments. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory. There is good use of wall displays to strengthen learning in a vocational context. Students report general satisfaction with their courses. They see them as vocationally relevant, and praise the caring and sensitive approach of the staff. Staff are well qualified. They have a wide range of experience and expertise which is wholly relevant to the vocational courses offered.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NOCN parenting certificate	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement(%)	40 100 42	151 98 87	124 87 83
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	42 83 77	32 81 65	46 70 85
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	20 75 40	17 88 57	14 64 44
Certificate in counselling skills	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	31 74 57	55 91 70	28 93 100
Access to health and paramedical studies (full-time course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	22 82 100	24 42 90	25 72 88
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	58 76 65	69 57 95	51 69 85

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

English, History, Psychology and Social Science

Grade 4

34 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. The college's self-assessment report overstated some strengths. The extent of some weaknesses in teaching, learning, and students' achievements were underestimated in the self-assessment report. Some progress has been made in addressing weaknesses since the self-assessment report was produced.

Key strengths
- strong student endeavour in many lessons
- initiatives to share good practice

Weaknesses
- ineffective teaching
- poor rates of retention and achievement on many courses
- insufficient attention to promoting learning
- unsatisfactory practice in provision of feedback on students' work

35   The range of the humanities provision aims to meet the current needs of the community. The recent merger with a local sixth form college is providing an encouragement to teams to work together across the college. Most courses offer a variety of study modes. The GCSE in English, for example, is available during the day to full-time and part-time students, as well as in the evening. There are flexible and appropriate arrangements for the access to higher education provision. For example, social science students on the access to social work course benefit from the direct link between the theory modules and their work experience.

36   The standard of the management of courses is uneven. This inconsistency means that students have very different experiences. Some courses are poorly planned and reviewed. This weakness has been recognised by the college and actions were being taken to address the problem at the time of the inspection. Analysis of rates of achievement and retention is leading to some changes in provision. Some course leadership is good. The better managed areas are developing a team approach to course development through the sharing of best practice, and by observation of lessons by other teachers. In general students are not provided with appropriate guidance in their studies. All courses have schemes of work although some are not sufficiently informative for new or part-time teachers. Few schemes of work identify: learning objectives; key skills training; differentiation according to student ability; or the IT resources that are required.

37   Some teaching is dull and fails to encourage learning. Lengthy exposition by the teacher does not include checks that students understand what is being said. Students have few opportunities to discuss the work, to question the teacher or to develop their understanding. The most effective teaching is well organised. Students understand the purpose of each lesson. Even the best lessons inadequately attend to the quality of student learning. This weakness is understated in the self-assessment report. Occasionally teachers do prepare interesting tasks and suitable supporting material. For example, in an English revision session students, guided by questions prepared by the teacher, made presentations on different poems. The exercise succeeded in developing their understanding of the poetry. In ineffective lessons, too many students remain disengaged. Students are not clear or confident about how to tackle tasks. They have poor skills in, for example, recording and organising their work. Little attention is given in lessons to improving these skills, to helping with private study, or to encouraging the use of IT as a learning tool.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college that students' attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory. The college has started to address these issues and administrative staff are now providing teachers with information which highlights poor attendance. The retention rate on many courses is poor. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report and the college is now reviewing the appropriateness of some of its courses. In the GCSE English and in the GCE A level English course, retention rates are significantly below national averages, while across all areas inspected only the access course exceeds the national pass rate in one year out of three. Many pass rates are below national averages, although 1999 pass rates for the two-year GCE A level courses show a modest increase in achievement. In lessons, many students concentrate well and work hard, but their efforts are not generally reflected in the examination results.

39 The marking of students' work is often unsatisfactory. Most feedback is poor and negative. It does not provide useful or helpful comments that would help students to build on their strengths or address issues. However, some good practice does exist. For example, in GCE A level English, teachers provide a helpful coversheet that analyses the strengths and weaknesses of a student's work, together with comments on content and expression; the advice given is constructive.

40 Students learn in pleasant, well-maintained rooms offering adequate space and equipment. The multi-purpose rooms are less suitable for the course-specific displays that are a good feature of specialist accommodation. The teaching staff are appropriately qualified within their specialist areas.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, history, psychology and social science, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First certificate in English	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement(%)	20 75 20	25 76 11	22 73 36
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	96 57 35	87 66 33	78 61 26
GCE A level (one-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	34 85 93	31 58 78	35 51 61
GCE A level (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	94 72 65	90 61 65	95 66 68
Access to social science	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	32 63 80	20 90 62
Proficiency certificate in English	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	23 52 33	16 75 0	15 47 67

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

ESOL and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

41   Inspectors observed 23 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses in the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key strengths
- much good and some outstanding teaching in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) lessons
- well-planned teaching of ESOL courses
- good rates of retention and attendance
- effective progression from ESOL provision to other college courses
- effective vocational work for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- a highly supportive learning environment
- commitment to a wide range of students from the community

Weaknesses
- lack of individual negotiated plans with clear learning goals
- insufficient planning and teaching to meet individual needs for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- lack of appropriately differentiated learning experiences for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

42   Full-time and part-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are based within the two departments across the college, and supported by the department of general education. As the self-assessment report identified, the college has enlarged the scope of provision and extended its range of programmes. Specific courses are designed for over 70 students who have a range of difficulties. Most students progress to other courses or to employment. There are strong and effective links with local organisations.

43   The English teaching provision for speakers of other languages is taught through the 'progress unit' at the college. The unit seeks to ensure that students in need of further learning support can learn with minimum fuss and disruption to their studies. It aims to give students the confidence to achieve their potential. There is a broad range of full-time and part-time courses at three levels offering good progression routes to students of all ages, backgrounds and nationalities. Course management is good. A cohesive team ensures that there is continuity in students' learning. There are comprehensive course files containing useful documentation that helps course planning.

44   There is an effective initial assessment of the additional learning needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the information gathered is not used to assist planning and teaching. Much teaching was good, although some schemes of work were not sufficiently detailed. There is effective vocational work in catering and photography, a strength that was not identified in the self-assessment report. In catering, lessons improve students' self-confidence, as well as their communication and numeracy skills. For example, a teacher enabled the students to prepare the entire menu and later serve the food to the customers in the restaurant, while a student on a level 2 course acted as their mentor and demonstrator. Teachers are skilled in creating a supportive learning environment. For instance, in one lesson the teacher coped expertly with two difficult students ensuring that they were attentive and responsive in the lesson.

45   In most ESOL lessons, teaching is good. Teachers gave clear aims and objectives at the beginning of the classes. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers use a wide variety of resources and methods to maintain students' interest and that they teach language skills well. For example, in one lesson overhead transparencies, a cassette recorder, a map, air tickets, underground tube timetables and pictures were all effectively used to teach language structures on the topic of travel and holidays using group or pair work activities. However, in some cases the lack of suitable reading materials meant that some students struggled with reading tasks while others were not sufficiently challenged. Tasks set by teachers and the materials used were both challenging and relevant to students' needs. In one ESOL class, the teacher used authentic objects such as a first-aid kit and a respirator to broaden the students' vocabulary and develop their writing skills. In some lessons, the emphasis on the development of reading, writing and grammar was at the expense of speaking skills. The college is aware of this issue.

46   Most students are highly motivated, gain in confidence and progress well. The standard of the students' work is generally good. In ESOL courses, when students' work is marked, constructive and encouraging feedback is given, especially at the higher level. However, the students do not have individual plans with clear learning goals. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that many students progress to other courses. Six weekly reviews encourage students to assess their own progress and keep records. Peer assessment was used effectively in a role-play activity about students' use of body language and voice when reading to children. Not all students are working towards certification, but amongst those taking the examination the pass rate is good, and in 1999 it was above 85%. Some students gained a first-class award.

47   Teachers work hard and are committed to their students and their tasks. In ESOL, teachers are well qualified and most have specialist qualifications in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and teaching ESOL. Most teach across all levels as well as providing language support on other college provision and in the 'drop-in' workshop. On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities the majority of staff do not have specialist qualifications. There is a wide range of specialist books and other resources in the ESOL resource room. However, resources for students to use in the classrooms are insufficient. Good resources for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities illustrated ethnic diversity. The teaching accommodation is spacious, modern and well furnished, and provides a pleasant learning environment. Specialist resources for catering and photography are excellent. There are colourful posters and displays of students' work on the walls.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

48   Inspectors observed eight lessons in literacy and numeracy at entry level and level 1. The inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths identified by the college's self-assessment, although it was difficult to identify clearly the basic skills provision within the report. Some additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- effective initial screening of all full-time students
- good courses for adult students
- effective basic skills support for students within vocational courses
- good joint planning and development between basic skills and vocational areas

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning for individual students on vocational courses
- infrequent assessment and recording of students' learning on vocational courses
- unsatisfactory monitoring of progress in learning
- unproductive use of specialist tutor time for student support

49   The college offers a range of provision for students who have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills. The provision includes support for students on vocational courses, courses for adult learners and a summer school. Some vocational programme areas also provide accredited basic skills opportunities. A Prince's Trust programme includes literacy and numeracy support for those for whom it is appropriate.

50   Full-time students who have weak literacy and numeracy skills are accurately identified through a screening programme. This programme is now being extended to part-time students. The information that is gained enables course tutors to help these students and to allocate additional basic skills support to them. Details of the students are kept on a database which, at the time of the inspection, was incomplete. The college recognises the strength of the working relationship that exists between vocational and specialist basic skills staff. Together they are developing their teaching and appropriate resources. This joint enterprise includes the contribution of a significant number of vocational teachers who have obtained a qualification in basic skills teaching.

51   Teachers support many students who have low levels of literacy and numeracy. This support concentrates on helping students through the difficulties that they are experiencing as they undertake their course. It includes helping them to improve their reading and spelling. The teacher acts as a reader and scribe. This approach enables students to progress towards the achievement of their course qualification. The college recognises the strength of this support.

52   Teaching is generally satisfactory. On courses for adults it is good. The most effective teaching is based on clear objectives and programmes that are based on the accurate identification of individual students' needs. The tasks to be undertaken and resources required to achieve these objectives are negotiated with the students. Whenever possible the planning takes account of a student's particular interests. For example, some adult students who were developing their literacy skills negotiated projects around such topics as childcare in the context of a comparison of aspects of life in England and in Lebanon. In another example, a worksheet concerned with making reports on faulty tools was prepared at an appropriate

literacy level for an engineering foundation course. This worksheet consolidated the vocational objective of the lesson while helping to develop students' literacy skills. Insufficient planning by vocational staff on the contribution to be made by specialist basic skills staff sometimes led to less effective teaching, and insufficient use of teachers' time. Some teachers pay too little attention to the difficulties that students have which have been identified through initial assessment. There is also insufficient assessment and recording of students' progress and achievement on which further teaching is based.

53   Adult students develop their basic skills and achieve appropriate certification. They also gain both the confidence and the skills that enable them to progress to other courses. Many students attending the summer school similarly progress to other part-time and full-time courses. There are opportunities for some students on vocational courses to achieve qualifications in basic skills. Other students achieve certification for basic skills development as part of foundation level courses and as part of the Prince's Trust course qualifications. On some other vocational courses students do not follow programmes that lead to certification.

54   The college does not monitor the effectiveness of its basic skills provision adequately. It has identified this weakness through self-assessment. Basic skills teachers providing support on vocational courses are not explicitly included in the teaching observation programme. The underdeveloped individual planning and assessment process does not include arrangements for the evaluation of students' learning. Achievement data were produced by the college within its vocational course analyses. It was not possible to extract information in such a way that a separate table could be produced for this report.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

55   Inspectors found that many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered normal practice and that the college had underestimated the significance of some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the extensive student support services
- effective initial guidance and information
- a good range of enrichment activities
- good induction arrangements

Weaknesses

- some ineffective tutorial practices
- insufficiently thorough evaluation of the impact of student support
- poor take-up and delays in providing additional learning support

56   A good range of student support services is available. Prospective students receive attractive prospectuses and leaflets that give clear information about courses and entry criteria. Activities involving pre-entry advice are well developed. The college has some productive links with local schools. It conducts a useful programme of visits and 'taster' days. The marketing section is working to raise the profile of the college and develop a new corporate image. Inspectors agreed that the advice centre provides comprehensive initial information and guidance including counselling and welfare, financial and careers advice. The advice centre has recently been relocated in the attractive new entrance to the college. There is clear evidence that this prominent position for the centre has increased the number of enquiries and provides better access for students.

57   Induction is well organised for full-time students and support staff are increasingly involved in this process. Student questionnaires show a high level of satisfaction with induction. Induction for part-time students is less effective. Students receive a well-produced student planner that includes comprehensive information about college life.

58   Learning support is effective in some sections of the college. For example, in the GNVQ intermediate business course, comprehensive records are maintained and rates of retention and achievement are improving. However, good practice is not shared. There is no effective and comprehensive system for individual action planning. Such planning as does take place relies on informal arrangements. There is little thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of learning support across the college. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

59   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that not all staff are clear about, or encourage their students to take up learning support. Staff at the advice centre and tutors provide academic support on a 'drop-in' self-referral basis. All full-time and some part-time students are screened for assessment of their reading and numeracy skills by the progress unit. However, once students with specific learning needs have been identified, support is then not consistently provided. Of the 284 students identified this year as needing support, only 176 have received or are in receipt of on-course support. Evening students are not routinely screened for learning support. During the autumn term of 1999, 92 evening students requested and received support in a range of subjects. Adult students have been the most frequent users of this service.

60   The college has a well-developed tutorial programme but some tutorial groups are too large for effective pastoral support to flourish.

Full-time students have a minimum entitlement of one hour a week. Tutorial support for part-time students is integrated with teaching time. Inspectors observed some effective tutorial sessions where students received personal support and help with their studies. However, inspectors agreed with the college that tutorial procedures are not systematically followed in all departments. Tutorials are uneven in quality and monitoring is not always effective. Attendance in many tutorial sessions is low. There is no evaluation of the impact of the tutorial system on rates of retention and achievement.

61   Students speak positively about the secure, supportive environment in the college and the dedication of tutors to their students. Tutorial materials are being developed by the support service for life skills teaching and confidence building. The recent appointment of a youth worker has enhanced the work of the student support team. There is a wide range of enrichment and sporting activities, publicised in a well-produced newsletter, 'What's up Merton'. Additional activities are well organised and include, for example, day trips, a visit to Holland and a residential for a foundation group. A talent contest attracted approximately 400 students. The college charter and the punctuality and attendance contracts are translated into a range of different languages. Rooms are set aside for prayers.

62   The recent appointment of a careers adviser who works both in the advice centre and across the college with tutors, has strengthened guidance provision in the college. Support for students progressing to higher education is good and the college has a service level agreement with the local careers service, to provide specialist support on a regular basis. The college is expanding its successful childminding provision. There will be an increased number of childcare places for students and staff of the college. The access fund is supporting childcare costs. A growing

number of students receive financial help to support their continuing attendance at college. Since the fund has been extended to 16 to 19 year olds, the numbers have further increased.

General Resources

Grade 2

63   Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The college had begun to address some weaknesses by the time the inspection took place.

Key strengths
- effective management of resources
- the high standard of most accommodation
- effective arrangements for the development and maintenance of resources
- greatly improved IT resources
- good refectory services for staff and students

Weaknesses
- inadequate space in the library
- insufficient technical support for IT developments

64   The college is situated on the edge of Morden Park within 10 minutes walk of the Northern line underground. On the 1st April 2000, the college merged with a sixth form college and is in the process of establishing a sixth form centre on its site. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that in all aspects of resources the college has responded effectively to changes in demand and need. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to accommodation, the deployment of staff and the quality of IT equipment. Managers are effective in monitoring and reviewing progress against demanding service standards. However, there is not yet sufficient technical support for new

developments in information and communications technology. Plans are currently being implemented to help to address this issue.

65   New extensions to the building at the Morden Park site have greatly improved accommodation and facilities. The new building work enhances the attractive, well-cared-for and effectively maintained site. Development of the site includes a welcoming and effective reception area, a new advice centre, and a number of new IT suites. A new business centre, which includes an enterprise unit, enables the college to promote and develop its commercial training work. In addition to the new building work, refurbishment has improved many classrooms and administrative work areas. These strengths were recognised in the college's self-assessment report. An open access centre, opened in September 1999, provides students with additional opportunities to improve their basic IT skills. The centre is already heavily used. Because of the recent merger, an interim estates strategy is being implemented. The strategy includes a range of options that are being considered by senior managers and members of the corporation. In the meantime, improvements planned for some accommodation and the updating of some equipment have been put on hold. Since the last inspection, the accessibility of the college for students with disabilities has been improved; most areas of the college are accessible to students with restricted mobility. The college's self-assessment report acknowledges that one area of the college is not easily accessible to wheelchair users. It notes that students who are wheelchair users are timetabled in areas which they can reach.

66   The college has made major improvements to its information and communication technologies. Since the last inspection, it has invested over £500,000 in new computers and software and is implementing a well-organised and clearly understood strategy. The number of computers available to students has increased from around 250 in 1996 to 380 at the time of the inspection. There is a computer workstation to every five full-time equivalent students. The new sixth form centre is already linked by modern network facilities. Improvements have resulted in a high level of IT resources to support both curriculum and administrative functions, although a few students still have difficulty in finding available computers to use outside timetabled lessons. Pilot projects in IT are being carried out in a number of programme areas. Results from these projects are helping the college to identify training needs, allocate resources and support plans for key skills development. An information and communications technologies committee, with subgroups responsible for curriculum and business support, ensures that middle managers have an understanding of developments. A computer manager, responsible for information and communication technologies across the college, has a good overview of resources and regularly monitors developments against an agreed annual action plan. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that IT resources are good. All staff have access to a workstation and electronic mail is improving communication. The college recognises the need for further IT training for some staff.

67   Four years ago inspectors were critical of the college's main library. Some improvements have been made to the bookstock and a few additional workstations have been installed. Facilities for CD-ROM and access to the Internet are available in the library. Links between departments and the library staff are good and students receive effective support with their assignments and projects. In a recent survey of students' views, around 65% of students considered the service which they received to be good or very good. However, there is an overall lack of space in the library, and the inadequate number of study spaces for students to work quietly, identified in the last inspection, has not been addressed.

68   Communal facilities for staff and students are generally good. A large college refectory provides staff and students with cold and hot meals and, compared with the last inspection, a greater variety of food is being offered. Some students expressed disappointment that they did not have a common room or social facilities. Whilst the college has not had its own sports facilities, it has hired local pitches for its football and basketball teams. However, following the recent merger with a local sixth form college it has acquired a range of new sporting facilities. Full-time students are given free vouchers for the nearby swimming pool and gymnasium.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

69   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional weaknesses. Some strengths identified by the college were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. A few weaknesses had already been addressed prior to inspection.

Key strengths

- the strong commitment of the college to the improvement of provision
- a thorough system of course audit
- well-documented course review procedures

Weaknesses

- the lack of impact of quality assurance procedures on overall retention rates
- inconsistency in internal verification
- insufficiently thorough application of quality assurance procedures

70   The college has a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Procedures are comprehensive, and linked to strategic planning. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality assurance system is understood by staff. However, procedures are not always applied with consistency and thoroughness. Recent changes in organisational structure and staffing have delayed progress on some important developments. This situation is recognised by the college and governors have agreed plans to address this issue. Inspectors judged that many of the strengths claimed in the self-assessment report were overemphasised, and in some instances, had not resulted in improvements.

71   The academic board's quality assurance committee which has cross-college representation leads on curriculum developments. The implementation of quality assurance procedures are the responsibility of a senior manager, working with other managers. Cross-college groups, including those for GNVQ, key skills and course audit groups, contribute to the quality assurance procedures. Self-assessment is an integral component of the quality assurance system. Extensive reviews lead to the production of the self-assessment report. The college was the first in London to achieve the Investors in People award and has since gained re-accreditation. It has gained the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) quality mark. Franchised work is subject to the full quality assurance procedures of the college. There are service standards for all non-teaching departments of the college. These include specific performance indicators, which are effectively measured.

72   There is a comprehensive system for lesson observations involving teaching, support and senior staff. Senior staff check the judgements that are made on the teaching. The process is resulting in some improvements, although grades awarded by inspectors for lessons which they observed remain below the national average for the sector. Lesson observations also form part of the staff appraisal system. The lesson observations are intended to be discussed by curriculum teams so that good practice can be shared, but opportunities to have such discussions are sometimes missed.

73   There is a thorough system of course audit for scrutiny of the self-assessment process. Audits of courses provide checks on the judgements made about the quality of course provision. A team comprising teaching and support staff carries out these audits and makes recommendations to course teams on ways of improving the quality of the provision. Although the process has led to some improvements, the self-assessment report overemphasised their extent.

74   Over the last two years there has been an overall improvement in students' achievements at all levels, although the achievements of some curriculum areas remain low. The college accepts that achievement rates need to improve. Retention on many courses is below national averages for the sector. In particular, it is low for students' aged 16 to 18 on level 2 courses and for students of all ages on level 3 courses.

75   Course reviews include analyses of rates of students' retention and achievements. They are compared with national averages for the sector. Action plans resulting from some course reviews clearly identify the issues and actions to be taken. A thorough mid-year review takes place between the course leader and departmental head, to ensure progress is being made. However, many action plans do not clearly indicate the weaknesses to be addressed. There is no consistent policy for internal verification within the college. The internal verification process for GNVQs operates effectively. Internal verification in some other programmes is applied less consistently, which has led to some inadequate student assessments.

76   Course team leaders and departmental managers usually agree course targets for rates of students' achievements or retention. Course teams are not involved directly in this process. There is a college-wide target for students' attendance. Although the college has recorded value-added data for GCE A level students for several years, it has not used this information to monitor standards or set individual targets with students. Inspectors considered that the process of setting course targets could be improved.

77   Comprehensive surveys of the views of students have led to improvements, such as better access to IT facilities for students. The college does not thoroughly assess its performance against the commitments made in the student charter. There is no overall check or evaluation on the outcomes. Whilst the governing body does not receive explicit reports on students' complaints, it does receive papers from the academic board where these issues are discussed. The college acknowledges this situation and has plans to carry out fuller evaluations of charter commitments.

78   There is a comprehensive staff development programme which identifies training activities. The staff development budget comprises 2.3% of the college payroll. Much staff development on teaching and learning is ineffective, and inspectors observed a number of curriculum areas where weaknesses have clearly been identified. The college has a well-established staff appraisal process. The results are used in planning the staff development of teaching and support staff.

Governance

Grade 3

79   Auditors and inspectors generally agreed with the college's self-assessment, but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths
- knowledgeable and experienced governors
- effective oversight of the college's new vision and future strategy
- efficient clerking and administration of board and committee business
- challenging yet supportive relationships between governors and senior staff
- effective oversight of the college's finances

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- poor level of attendance at corporation meetings
- insufficient direct contact between the board and the college
- underdeveloped induction and training opportunities for new governors
- inadequate arrangements for governors to monitor academic performance

80   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.

81   The college benefits from the diverse range of skills and experience of the governors. Members, many of whom are longstanding, have a good knowledge of the college, the local community and the national context in which the college operates. After considering the requirements of the revised instrument of government, the corporation has redetermined its membership at 20. There is provision for seven business governors, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, a student governor, three local authority nominees, three local community nominees and the principal. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the current membership does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the student body.

82   Corporation meetings are held termly. Further meetings are called when necessary to address any significant additional items of business. All significant matters for decision are referred to the corporation. Committee meetings precede corporation meetings so that matters arising can be put before the corporation, and to ensure appropriate compliance with external requirements. Until very recently the corporation had four

standing committees covering finance and general purposes, audit, search, and remuneration, which have appropriate and clearly defined terms of reference. In its creation of the performance committee in March 2000, the corporation has recognised the need to improve members' understanding of the curriculum and to increase governors' involvement in monitoring rates of students' attendance, retention and achievements.

83   The search committee has not reviewed the contribution of existing governors when they have been under consideration for reappointment. There has been a poor level of attendance at corporation meetings. The average level of governors' attendance at corporation meetings was 57% in the 12 months prior to the inspection. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report, and were an issue in the previous inspection report.

84   In December 1998, the college appointed an independent and experienced clerk on a part-time basis. The standard of clerkship is generally high and the clerk is well regarded by governors. Agendas, minutes and supporting papers are of a good standard and provide a sound basis for decision-making. The advice of the clerk has been instrumental in recent developments to improve the conduct of the corporation's business such as the introduction of new standing orders. However, the corporation has not yet established clear arrangements for appraising the clerk.

85   Meetings are well conducted and governors work in an open and accountable manner. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. The working relationship between governors and management is challenging yet supportive. Members have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The papers and minutes of corporation and committee meetings are available in the college library. A summary of corporation business is also provided occasionally in college newsletters.

86   Inspectors generally agreed with the college's self-assessment that governors have maintained an effective oversight of the finances of the college. The financial reports provided to governors are of a good standard. Arrangements for approving the decisions of the remuneration committee involved the inappropriate use of postal voting.

87   As noted in the self-assessment report, governors have had effective oversight in the development of the college's new vision and future strategy. Although some governors have an involvement with the curriculum areas of the college and others respond to invitations to college events, inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the limited direct contact between the board and the college is a weakness.

88   As the self-assessment report acknowledges, induction and support for new governors are underdeveloped. There are insufficient training opportunities for governors, and no training plans. At present the induction process is limited to meetings for the new governor with the clerk, the principal and the chair of the corporation. There is also no formal assessment of governors' training needs nor any ongoing training programme. The college has not conducted a formal skills audit that could be used in making decisions about recruitment and development. The requirement to remedy these weaknesses is included on the corporation's action plan.

Management

Grade 3

89   Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but judged that the significance of the identified weaknesses had been underestimated.

Key strengths

- good financial management
- strong leadership
- active well-organised cross-college groups

Weaknesses

- insufficient improvement of rates in retention and achievement
- underused management information for monitoring and planning
- underdeveloped market research

90   Management has been restructured to meet the needs of the newly merged college, the requirements of the strategic plan and current trends in post-16 education. The college had been divided into three largely independent departments, supported by numerous college services such as finance, student services and marketing. These have been replaced by a more integrated structure and more flexible arrangements in which the heads of the 10 new schools have responsibility for: quality assurance; curriculum innovation and development; inclusive learning and additional support; and resources for teaching the curriculum. It is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the new structure but there are early signs of improvements, such as the college's increased ability to meet the requirements of curriculum 2000.

91   The principal took up post in August 1999 and the new senior management team was completed in November 1999. The senior management team comprises the principal, two assistant principals, the director of finance, the personnel manager, the business development manager and the head of student support. Governors have agreed that a new assistant principal post will hold responsibility for quality assurance and student services. Strong leadership from the senior management team

drives all developments. Its members have a clear vision for the college's future. They have recognised in the self-assessment report that, after a long period of stability, the college needs to change and develop. They are managing change with the prime intention of improving the rates of students' retention and achievements. There have been some improvements in students' achievements, as noted in the self-assessment report. The senior management team is also working to change and update the perceptions of the local community about the college. The self-assessment report acknowledges that this aim has yet to be fully achieved. As identified in the self-assessment report, the management of estates and personnel is effective.

92   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Since the last inspection in 1996, the audited accounts have recorded operational surpluses each year. The college enjoys a comfortable cash position. Good quality management accounts are produced for the senior management team, and the governors. Financial delegation to managers has led to a strong emphasis on achieving targets. Each area is responsible for meeting unit target and other funding targets as well as performance targets. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. In 1999-2000, the college completed a £1.2 million capital scheme involving the remodelling of its London Road site on time and within budget. The college has recently updated its financial regulations and procedures, both of which are appropriate and reflect good practice.

93   The middle management of the college is in transition. Middle managers will complete the academic year still operating in their current roles, but they have already been appointed to new roles and are planning for September 2000. The college management team comprises the senior management team and the middle managers, including the service managers, of

the college. Their regular meetings are already resulting in improved communications across the college. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the new management structure allows for effective participation from middle managers and staff. Some curriculum areas, for example business and health and social care, are well managed. Others, for example engineering, are experiencing difficulties. During the current transitional period, lines of management at the Morden Park site are clear and are understood by staff. Staff at the new Central Road site are less clear about lines of management.

94   Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment on managers' lack of involvement in the curriculum and their insufficient impact on teaching and learning. They judged, however, that these weaknesses had been given insufficient emphasis and that inadequate action is being taken to address issues emerging from quality assurance activities. Market research to assist curriculum planning, and to identify new markets is not sufficiently detailed and thorough. This weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

95   There are more than 20 cross-college groups. Membership is drawn from staff at all levels. Some staff find it difficult to attend meetings because of teaching commitments. Each group is clearly identified as having a decision-making, advisory or developmental role and lines of reporting are also clear. All staff contribute to strategic planning. Representatives of the local community, staff and students from the college participated in a successful strategic planning conference. The college recognised the strengths in these arrangements in the self-assessment report.

96   The accuracy and availability of management information have improved. The new system is capable of producing a range of user-friendly data in various appropriate

formats. Staff training and support are needed to develop application skills for effective planning. This weakness was acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

97   Staff at the Morden Park site value the improved communications and feel well informed. Managers are accessible and communicate well. Whole-staff meetings take place regularly. 'Update', published twice each term, informs all staff of developments in the college and is supplemented by 'Snippets', which contains informal news and views. 'Merger Countdown' has been produced every two weeks, with a separate student version for display on noticeboards. Staff at the Central Road site expressed dissatisfaction with the level and timing of communication with them.

98   The college has a firm commitment to equality of opportunity. The equal opportunities group meets regularly to set and review targets. The college employs an increasing number of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college is also committed to widening participation and has extended its provision for disaffected students both in college and through partnership arrangements. Good contact and effective relationships are maintained with the London Borough of Merton and a range of external agencies representing areas such as higher education, employment, community groups and other educational providers.

Conclusions

99   The comprehensive self-assessment report covered all aspects of the college's provision and provided a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses recognised in the report. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. The college gave insufficient emphasis to weaknesses in rates of students' retention and achievements on some courses. Some curriculum areas in the self-assessment report gave insufficient prominence to weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college in three of the curriculum areas. In four curriculum areas the grades awarded by inspectors were one grade lower than those proposed by the college. In cross-college areas, inspectors agreed with one of the grades but awarded grades one lower than those proposed by the college in four other areas.

100 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 (July 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	20
19-24 years	16
25+ years	63
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	40
Level 2 (intermediate)	21
Level 3 (advanced)	29
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	8
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	499	837	26
Agriculture	74	81	3
Construction	64	65	3
Engineering	140	196	7
Business	236	883	22
Hotel and catering	130	264	8
Health and community care	163	217	8
Art and design	119	159	5
Humanities	154	367	10
Basic education	101	292	8
Total	1,680	3,361	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 39% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	Permanent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	112	2	0	114
Supporting direct learning contact	40	2	1	43
Other support	36	0	2	38
Total	188	4	3	195

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£7,300,000	£7,185,000	£7,477,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.37	£16.88	£16.44
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	67%	65%
Achievement of funding target	102%	102%	101%
Diversity of income	11%	12%	12%
Operating surplus	£51,000	£39,000	£216,000

Sources: Income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)
ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1998 and 1999)
Payroll - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)
Achievement of funding target - Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
Diversity of income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)
Operating surplus - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	608	807	605	891	862	789
	Retention (%)	85	82	80	80	79	76
	Achievement (%)	33	42	58	45	48	64
2	Number of starters	992	1,145	625	838	610	748
	Retention (%)	79	79	71	77	82	80
	Achievement (%)	48	39	62	51	54	83
3	Number of starters	522	793	814	546	1,170	902
	Retention (%)	93	63	66	82	67	69
	Achievement (%)	60	58	62	55	52	61
4 or 5	Number of starters	3	1	5	95	95	143
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	83	82	87
	Achievement (%)	33	100	80	34	52	67
Short courses	Number of starters	176	111	147	2,845	2,707	2,545
	Retention (%)	89	86	90	90	91	90
	Achievement (%)	51	52	77	56	57	66
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	234	272	282	936	572	652
	Retention (%)	92	89	87	85	76	84
	Achievement (%)	25	93	76	72	87	90

Source: ISR

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