Carshalton 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

Carshalton College

Greater London Region

Inspected January 2000

Carshalton College is a general further education college in the London Borough of Sutton. The college's self-assessment process is well established. The self-assessment report was thorough, and inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements. However, they found some additional strengths and weaknesses and considered that some of the strengths identified in the report were merely what would be expected as normal practice. The report placed insufficient weight on students' achievements, which remain below national benchmarks. The college has clear plans to address many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, and many actions were under way at the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with four of the seven curriculum grades awarded by the college, awarded higher grades for two curriculum areas and a lower grade for another. Three cross-college inspection grades were one grade lower than proposed in the self-assessment report.

The college offers courses in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in six areas was inspected together with basic skills provision across the college and aspects of cross-college provision. Since the last inspection, the college has improved retention on many courses. It has established productive relationships with a number of external agencies. The expanded access course provision has attracted many students who would not otherwise attend a college course. The college is well managed. The recent reorganisation of the management structure has resulted in a clear management framework which is understood by all staff. Management is open and consultative, features appreciated by staff. There is much good teaching. Students receive a high standard of support from their tutors. Governors are committed to the success of the college and make a significant contribution to strategic planning. The accommodation has been imaginatively redeveloped since the last inspection to provide an attractive working environment for staff and students. The accommodation for engineering is of a very high standard. The college should: improve students' achievements at all levels; address the poor attendance and punctuality of students on some courses; share good practice across the basic skills curriculum; address the poor reliability of IT systems; consider the vulnerability of the corporation's clerking arrangements; and monitor course action plans more closely.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and information technology	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Health and social care	2	Quality assurance	2
Art, design and media	2	Governance	2
Access courses and teacher training	2	Management	2
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1   Carshalton College is a general further education college which was established in 1951 to provide education and training in the London Borough of Sutton and the surrounding area. It is the only further education college in the borough. Sutton has a population of approximately 176,487 and is typical of many outer London boroughs in that there are pockets of quite serious deprivation. The majority of the college's students live in the boroughs of Sutton, Merton, and Croydon. Just over 20% of the students are from other London boroughs.

2   In 1998-99, the college enrolled 3,599 students, of whom 35% were full time and 65% part time. The college provides courses in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. Courses range from entry level to higher education. The proportion of 16 to 18 year old students has increased from 28% in 1998-99 to almost 35% in 1999-2000. In the London Borough of Sutton, 92.7% of the population is white and 7.3% is from black and other ethnic groups. The percentage of students from black and other minority ethnic groups is 22%.

3   The borough has a well-established adult education college, based in Sutton town centre, and 14 secondary schools, six of which are directly maintained by the local education authority (LEA). Secondary provision includes selective grammar schools and all but one of the borough's secondary schools has a sixth form. The college offers a wide range of courses leading to vocational qualifications complementing, rather than competing with, what is offered in local schools. The college has entered into a partnership with Overton Grange School, the only one without a sixth form, to provide students at the school with a range of post-16 opportunities from September 2002.

4   Sutton has one of the lowest unemployment levels of any London borough. The latest figures show that the unemployment rate across the borough as a whole was 2.5%, but this masks higher rates of unemployment in some more depressed parts of the borough. In 1997, 600 new businesses were registered in the borough. Almost 80% of businesses in Sutton are small to medium-sized companies. The college has established a wide range of partnerships and collaborative working arrangements locally.

5   The college's mission is: 'To work with learners and businesses to help them reach their full potential'. Underpinning the mission is the college's aim to create a 'learning village' which serves the communities in south west London. The college plans to achieve its mission through six key strategic challenges:

- 'to expand our activities which are grant-aided by the FEFC by delivering more funded units of activity

- to diversify into new products and services which are financially viable and which enable us to better serve our key clients and markets

- to increase efficiency whilst maintaining the quality of the service we provide

- to ensure that all college activities are of a good quality by achieving continuous improvement across a range of performance standards

- to extend business development initiatives and enhance our key capabilities through partnership with other organisations

- to promote integrated and effective communication both internally and externally by using all available tools to communicate messages swiftly and accurately.'

Context

The Inspection

6   The college was inspected during the week beginning 31 January 2000. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. For 1997 and 1998, information contained in the FEFC individualised student record (ISR) was used to provide data on students' achievements. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999. Data were checked by inspectors against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and found to be mainly accurate. The college was notified in November 1999 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and two auditors working in the college for a total of 57 days. They observed 81 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students. No table of achievements is included for courses for students with learning difficulties and basic skills as there is limited comparison possible with national benchmarks.

7   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 81 lessons inspected, 66% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% less than satisfactory or poor. These figures are in line with the average figures for all colleges in the sector inspected during 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	2	1	0	0	4
GNVQ	1	13	3	0	0	17
NVQ	1	3	6	0	0	10
Access courses	2	5	2	1	0	10
Other vocational	4	13	3	0	0	20
Other	2	7	9	2	0	20
Total (No.)	11	43	24	3	0	81
Total (%)	13	53	30	4	0	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.

Context

8   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Figures for the college are slightly lower than the national figures for 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Carshalton College	10.7	74
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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Information Technology

Grade 2

9   Inspectors observed 12 lessons in mathematics and information technology (IT). They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned, effective teaching
- good course management
- a supportive learning environment, particularly for practical work
- good progression from general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) IT courses
- achievements on all courses at or above national averages and improving

Weaknesses

- some students' unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality
- some equipment failures in practical classes

10   The college offers mathematics and IT courses leading to a variety of qualifications. These include: GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced level; general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics; and Associated Examining Board (AEB) numeracy. Short courses in computer skills are also offered. A key feature of performance on the GNVQ courses is the high rate of progression to other courses. In 1998-99, 88% of students who achieved the foundation award progressed to more advanced courses in the college and 58% of successful GNVQ intermediate students moved to the advanced programme. Over half the students completing the GNVQ advanced in IT in 1999 are now in higher education.

11   Inspectors agreed with the college that courses are well planned. There is regular, systematic monitoring of students' progress and achievements. Students' perceptions of courses are sought through questionnaires and their views contribute to course reviews. Most courses have useful course handbooks which provide an overview of the course and explain the assessment criteria used to grade work. Mathematics and IT teachers are beginning to establish more formal links with other curriculum areas to help in developing key skills across the curriculum.

12   There is much good teaching. Teachers are confident and well qualified. Methods of teaching and learning are varied and effective. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives which are explained to the students. In most of the lessons observed, students were highly motivated and the tasks set were suitably demanding and imaginative. In a numeracy lesson covering aspects of algebra, the teacher first established clear learning objectives for each of the students, taking account of their differing abilities. The class then moved to the resource centre where they could use the Internet and commercially produced revision software. The students were enthusiastic about working in a practical IT environment which brought life to their studies. In another lesson, GNVQ advanced IT students gave presentations to the class, prepared using commercial software. Other students offered constructive criticism of the presentations. The work was appropriately challenging and it enabled students to explore a range of presentation methods.

13   Most students work well in practical lessons, in both mathematics and IT. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Students are well supported in their learning, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Some, however, lack confidence in their skills and are too dependent on their teachers. Many of the assignments set

by teachers are demanding. Assignment briefs, however, clearly define the tasks and the criteria used to measure achievement. The quality of much of the students' practical and assignment work in computing is good, with students demonstrating a broad range of IT skills. Work is marked thoroughly and a standardised assignment coversheet ensures that teachers provide detailed written feedback to students on their progress and achievement. As part of each assignment, students are required to evaluate their work. Attendance and punctuality were poor in many of the lessons observed.

14   Over the past three years, retention on full-time and short courses has generally been good. On GNVQ foundation IT and GCSE mathematics courses where retention rates dropped in 1998-99 there was a significant increase in achievement, particularly in the achievement of grades C or above in GCSE mathematics. In nearly all courses, achievement rates in 1998-99 were an improvement on the previous year and were at or above national figures. The strengths in students' achievements were not noted in the self-assessment report.

15   All teachers have a teaching qualification and appropriate specialist qualifications and teaching experience for the classes they teach. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that some full-time teachers need to update their commercial or industrial experience. In computing, many part-time staff have current industrial experience which they use to make their teaching more relevant. The college has recently upgraded its computer network to address weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. This upgrade has resulted in improved facilities for users, but at the expense of network reliability. In spite of considerable efforts to try to rectify the situation, breakdowns occurred which disrupted several of the lessons observed during the inspection.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	**1998**	**1999**
OCR computer literacy and information technology (short course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	795 90 28	593 89 10	712 83 59
OCR computer literacy and information technology (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	40 98 45	178 88 34	41 93 53
GNVQ foundation in IT	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	21 100 29	21 57 67
GNVQ intermediate in IT	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	31 81 40	26 92 63	42 67 75
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	122 80 23	148 92 32	113 58 74
BTEC national certificate in IT applications	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	22 77 88	31 81 52	32 58 94
GNVQ advanced in IT	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	12 83 80	29 90 57	27 89 55

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

16   The inspection covered courses in motor vehicle engineering and engineering IT. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They considered that the college's self-assessment report understated strengths in the areas of retention, achievement, and teaching and learning.

Key strengths
- effective teaching in most lessons
- good, varied methods of teaching and learning
- good retention
- high achievement rates for NVQ motor vehicle engineering courses
- excellent workshops with up-to-date equipment

Weaknesses
- low and declining achievements on level 2 courses in personal computer maintenance
- assessment criteria not always explicit

17   The college offers national vocational qualifications (NVQs) from levels 1 to 3 in mechanical motor vehicle technology, levels 2 and 3 in motor vehicle body fitting and body repair, and the national diploma in motor vehicle engineering. The engineering IT courses, predominantly at level 2, are in computer-aided design and personal computer installation and maintenance.

18   Courses are generally well managed. Schemes of work are detailed and include descriptions of learning objectives and assessment methods. Most lesson plans are comprehensive and set in the context of the overall scheme of work for the course. The handouts and course notes used in lessons observed were well prepared. Teachers monitor attendance and punctuality carefully. Staff and students are careful to observe safe working practices in the workshops at all times. Although students speak highly of their courses and of the college, little use is made of their views in course reviews. Students are not generally represented on course teams.

19   Teaching in the majority of lessons observed was good or outstanding. Inspectors found that the college had underestimated the strength of teaching and learning in its self-assessment report. Teachers use a range of teaching and learning strategies to maintain students' interest. Many make effective use of question and answer to test students' knowledge and experience, and to check that learning is taking place. In several lessons, teachers used examples from their own industrial or commercial experience to illustrate concepts they were explaining to students. Teaching methods included practical workshop exercises, demonstrations, lectures, and 'gapped' handouts. In one very effective lesson, students used a modern fuel injection tester to obtain the fuel injection waveforms for a car. They then compared the waveforms found with those obtained under ideal engine running conditions, in order to identify faults. The students were able to download information from the fuel injection tester to a computer to assist them, subsequently, to produce a technical report on the car being tested. The varied activities, and the associated development of key skills, helped students to learn effectively. They remained focused on the task in hand, and demonstrated a high level of interest throughout the lesson.

20   In practical lessons, students apply themselves to their tasks well and adopt a mature approach to learning. The quality of their work in motor vehicle body fitting and repair is comparable to that achieved in a commercial garage. Students regularly review their progress with their tutors, and produce action plans to help them to improve their performance. All of them take initial diagnostic

tests to identify any need they might have for additional initial learning support in literacy and numeracy. However, not all students take advantage of the support offered. Assignment briefs are generally clear, but the assessment criteria are not always made explicit. Students are sometimes not aware of what they need to do to achieve a high grade. The marking of assignments is sometimes perfunctory. Teachers' written comments are often not detailed enough to help students improve their work.

21 Retention on most courses is above the national average. Students' achievements on level 2 and 3 motor vehicle courses have also been consistently above the national average for the past three years. Achievement rates on level 2 courses in personal computer maintenance, however, are poor, declining from 53% in 1998 to 27% in 1999. Whilst the self-assessment report identifies the areas in which retention and achievement rates are good or poor, it does not address underlying trends in retention and achievement.

22 The standard of teaching accommodation is good. There are excellent workshops containing up-to-date equipment, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. Traditional welding and sheet metal workshops have been converted and refurbished to create two body repair areas which are well equipped with appropriate hand tools. The two principal motor vehicle workshops are clean, bright and modern and reflect good commercial standards. Students have access to equipment such as modern engines and new cars, donated by major manufacturers, together with the latest diagnostic equipment. The college has installed up-to-date facilities for the personal computer maintenance courses. All staff are technically qualified, have assessor and verifier awards, and either have a teaching qualification or are currently working towards one. Many teachers have recently undertaken staff development in areas such as key skills, inclusive learning, teaching styles and equal opportunities.

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 personal computer maintenance	2	Number of starters	183	106	221
		Retention (%)	92	98	87
		Achievement (%)	67	53	27
NVQ motor vehicle engineering	2	Number of starters	132	114	108
		Retention (%)	67	67	87
		Achievement (%)	76	78	81
NVQ motor vehicle engineering	3	Number of starters	38	88	74
		Retention (%)	84	80	77
		Achievement (%)	59	66	87
Advanced technician courses	3	Number of starters	24	19	16
		Retention (%)	58	89	88
		Achievement (%)	83	80	75

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

23   Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering health, social care and early childhood studies. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The weaknesses identified in the report are being addressed and progress has been made in a number of areas.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- effective course management and planning
- a flexible curriculum offering different patterns of attendance
- well-managed work experience
- good levels of achievements on many courses

Weaknesses

- a few courses on which achievement and retention rates are below the national average
- IT not a sufficiently integral element of early years courses

24   The college offers GNVQ courses in health and social care at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) certificate in childcare and education, the CACHE diploma in nursery nursing, and the national certificate for dental nurses. Students can study in a number of different ways for the CACHE diploma. There is the standard two-year full-time course, a 'fast-track' one-year course, or a shortened day course over two years. Additional innovative features of the early years courses include the replacement of the first year of the CACHE diploma with the CACHE certificate. This offers students who might drop out of the two-year course a short-term achievement goal. The college has recently introduced the CACHE advanced diploma in childcare and education which provides progression from level 1 to 4 in childcare qualifications.

25   There is much good teaching. In many lessons, students were engaged in a range of activities which were suitably demanding and relevant to the vocational area being studied. Teachers frequently use their professional and vocational experience to illustrate the topic being taught. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that teachers are knowledgeable and set teaching very clearly in a realistic vocational context. In one lesson in which students were evaluating children's behaviour, the teacher used a video recording of a group of young children engaged in structured free play in a nursery class to explain the problems encountered when observing the physical development of young children. This gave students an interesting and memorable example of the relationship between everyday practice and the theory being discussed. In another effective lesson which focused on the weaning process for babies, the teacher used her vocational experience to illustrate the possible consequences for a baby of introducing solid food too early. This brought to life what might otherwise have been a theoretical consideration of the risks. The teacher subsequently set up a baby-food tasting session for students to reinforce the importance of not adding salt to food served to infants. IT lessons, in contrast, were not always relevant to care, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

26   All students undertake work placements as a part of their course. Work experience is well managed. Tutors visit work placements to assess students' skills development, and they make good use of students' own experiences in the workplace to enhance classroom-based activities. In one class, for example, students

were asked to illustrate the influences and controls which may affect the daily lives of young children by drawing on examples from their work placements. The college has forged effective links with a wide range of employers in childcare and social care. Employers and workplace supervisors contribute to course planning. In 1998 and 1999, two groups of students undertook work experience in nursery schools and crèches in Finland.

27   With the exception of the full-time CACHE diploma in childcare and education, courses have good retention rates. Figures for the current cohort of students on the diploma, however, indicate that changes to the course structure and the implementation of a strict attendance policy have started to address the retention problem. With the exception of the national certificate for dental nurses, students' achievements on most courses exceed the national average. Assignment briefs are generally well designed and students' written work is of good quality. Teachers' comments on marked work enable students to identify ways in which they can improve their performance.

28   Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that courses are well managed. Course handbooks are comprehensive. Lesson objectives and the objectives of work placements are detailed and clear, and there are good records of students' progress. Minutes of team meetings and course reviews clearly identify issues raised and the actions subsequently taken. Where the self-assessment report identified the need for some staff to update their vocational experience, action has now been taken to rectify the situation through a programme of staff development. Teaching rooms and specialist resources are adequate for the courses taught, but there is insufficient space to display students' work adequately.

Curriculum Areas

**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
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	12 58 43	13 77 50	11 91 90
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	23 70 81	12 58 71	16 88 79
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	54 81 80
National certificate for dental nurses	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	37 95 34	44 95 39	36 97 37
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	17 76 82	16 94 92	13 85 100
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing (one-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	18 83 93	16 69 82	12 83 80
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	59 85 71	54 67 95	48 71 88

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*course did not run

Art, Design and Media

Grade 2

29   Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report and noted that progress had already been made in addressing some of the issues raised.

Key strengths
- a good range of provision
- effective course management and monitoring
- good professional and industrial links
- good, effective teaching
- good achievements on level 3 courses
- good retention rates
- well-planned schemes of work and course handbooks
- beneficial links between the art, design and media sections

Weaknesses
- poor levels of achievement on level 2 courses
- activities restricted by the size of some workshops
- poor punctuality on the part of some students

30   The college provides a good range of courses, which include options in fine art, graphic design, media, multimedia, photography, television and video. Qualifications available include GCSE, GNVQ intermediate and advanced, general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), the national diploma in media studies, and a new programme for adults validated by the Southern Open College Federation which provides progression from level 1 to level 3. The college has used the introduction of the higher national certificate in multimedia and the new fast-track national diploma for adult students to update and extend the specialist equipment and resources.

31   Courses are well managed. Teachers from the subject areas of art, design and media have established fruitful co-operative working relationships, enabling them to develop integrated projects, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students benefit from this close co-operation. Course teams meet regularly, and keep accurate records of meetings. Minutes of meetings indicate that quality issues are carefully considered, targets for improvement are set and action plans developed. Records of students' progress are detailed. Work experience for art and design students was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Some progress in improving the monitoring of work experience had been made by the time of the inspection.

32   The majority of the teaching in art, design and media is good and sometimes outstanding. The grade profile of lessons inspected was slightly better than the profile in the self-assessment report. Students' attendance in the lessons observed was high, but poor punctuality was commonplace, and in some cases, caused disruption to the work being done by the students already present. In many of the lessons observed, students undertook a wide variety of activities requiring sustained effort and concentration. Lesson planning is thorough and schemes of work take account of students' individual needs and abilities.

33   Teachers often use their professional experience and links with commercial organisations to enhance students' understanding of topics being covered, as noted in the self-assessment report. For example, in one lesson, media students were applying basic drawing skills to the illustration of a small product. They then selected the most effective technique for presenting the product. The

teacher's knowledge and experience of professional practice enabled him to offer the students a wide range of possible techniques from which to choose their own style of presentation. In some lessons, teachers use question and answer to check students' learning, and the questions posed are often searching. Students are encouraged to use a variety of resources and research techniques to produce their work. For example, in a GNVQ intermediate lesson, students were developing ideas for repeat patterns based on their research into stained glass designs. The project had been launched in response to the marketing department of a national organisation which was seeking designs for hand-painted silk cushion covers. Students had made good use of visual reference material in the study centre and were selecting and creating their own designs in the studio. The students' concentration levels and the quality of their designs were impressive.

34   Much of the practical work produced by students is of a high standard. However, some students fail to maintain adequate notes in their course files. In the majority of lessons, students worked hard and demonstrated a mature understanding of the subject. Retention on most courses in art, design and media is consistently good. The pass rates for advanced level courses is generally above the national average. At level 2, pass rates are below the national average and show no sign of improving or declining.

35   Teachers are well qualified. Although the self-assessment report identified the need for industrial experience, inspectors found that most teachers have current professional and industrial experience. Students also benefit from the use of part-time specialist tutors who bring them into direct contact with current industrial practice. The accommodation used for art, design and media has been designed to meet current course needs. However, some workshops are too small for the number of students using them. Students can book time in an additional studio to work on their assignments. The workshops and studios are generally well furnished and well maintained.

Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement
rates in art, design and media, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE art	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	8 80 50	13 93 62	7 78 43
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	12 86 67	16 84 100	14 93 57
GCE A level art and photography	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 100 60	15 79 73	15 79 100
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	9 55 56	10 80 80	13 78 92
National diploma in media fast-track (one-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	7 88 100	13 87 77
National diploma in media studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	15 84 93	9 81 100	13 72 85

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Access Courses and Teacher Training

Grade 2

36   Inspectors observed 10 lessons on access and teacher training courses. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths
- good teaching
- comprehensive access programme at levels 1, 2 and 3
- flexible course structures
- effective guidance and support for students
- improving rates of progression to higher education

Weaknesses
- some unkempt teaching accommodation
- an over-reliance on photocopied handouts in some classes

37   The self-assessment report identified the increasing recruitment of students to access to higher education and teacher training programmes. Since the last inspection, all the access programmes have been modularised to enable them to be offered with a common core and specialist modules in the three pathways of humanities and social sciences, applied science and nursing. During their induction, students can attend lessons in a range of pathways, and some choose to transfer from one pathway to another during the first term of study. Students can take individual units when it suits them and so progress at their own pace. The access provision ranges from level 1 to level 3 with good opportunities for progression for students who have little previous formal education. Access courses are also offered on a fast-track basis in the evening for students who work or who have childcare commitments. Courses

leading to the certificate in further education teaching and the certificate in learning support tend to attract adult students who wish to develop their careers.

38   Inspectors agreed that the high level of guidance and support students receive is effective in supporting learning and developing confidence. During induction, students' literacy and numeracy support needs are assessed, and workshops are available for those students who need such support. Tutorials play a key role in preparing students for higher education. In one tutorial, students were using role-play to practise the skills needed for a university interview. They were clearly appreciative of this opportunity. The college provides many adult students with financial assistance for travel, childcare and registration costs. Students spoke highly of all aspects of the support they receive at the college.

39   Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the teaching is generally good. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies to maintain students' interest. They are skilful in trying to involve even the most reluctant of students in discussion. Teachers sometimes make use of their own experiences or introduce touches of humour to enliven the activities being undertaken. In an effective access to humanities lesson, students worked in groups using case studies to explore methods of sociological interaction. The teacher illustrated important points using role-play. In another good lesson, students on the teacher training course were studying modern methods of assessing children's work. The lesson began with the teacher giving a clear, detailed exposition of the subject and this was followed by a lively class discussion. Good use was made of informative handouts and overhead projector transparencies. In some lessons, teachers depend too much on photocopied handouts to provide the stimulus for learning.

Curriculum Areas

40	The quality of students' work is good. Teachers' comments on marked work are constructive and help students to improve their performance. Students make effective contributions to most classes and draw upon their own experiences to enhance their learning. They develop useful IT skills and use those skills to present their work effectively. Progression rates to higher education have increased over the past three years. In 1999, 73% of access students and students on teacher training courses progressed to a relevant degree or higher diploma course. Retention is in line with national averages. Pass rates on the full-time access programme are consistently good, and the pass rate on the part-time access course in 1999 was outstanding. The pass rate on the certificate in further education course is low and

declining. Over 80% of students completing the certificate in learner support have gained the qualification in the last three years.

41	Course management is good. Schemes of work are detailed and teachers explain them to students early in the course to enable them to plan their workload carefully. Teachers are well qualified. Many have recently updated their teaching skills. Team meetings are well documented. Teachers gather the views of students through questionnaires and use these to review the quality of courses. Most teaching accommodation is good. As identified in the self-assessment report, however, a few rooms are in need of redecoration.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in access courses and teacher training, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Fresh start (full time)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	21 81 59	42 57 100	21 62 100
Return to learn (part time)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	30 100 50	26 100 23	24 100 43
C&G 7321 certificate in learning support	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	40 100 90	35 85 91	40 95 84
C&G 7307 certificate in further education	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	97 79 29	93 80 28	86 72 19
Access intensive (part time)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	29 97 68	28 77 73	19 58 100
Access modular (full time)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	35 74 54	64 75 69	62 81 68

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

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

42   The inspection concentrated on the discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but found that the report overstated some strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a good range of provision
- a clear curriculum framework and management of provision
- the high level of staff commitment to students
- well-equipped practical classrooms providing realistic living and work environments

Weaknesses

- an overemphasis on external accreditation, with some schemes unsuitable for the range of learners
- underdeveloped individual learning plans
- a lack of differentiation in lesson planning, organisation and teaching
- a lack of rigour in assessing students' learning and achievement

43   The range of provision was identified as a strength in the previous inspection report. The college now provides a more flexible framework for meeting the needs of learners with a variety of abilities. There are more opportunities for students to gain practical vocational experience and better opportunities for progression. Course teams meet regularly to consider individual students' progress, and to plan changes to the programme in the light of experience. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that effective links with local community organisations and special schools have had a beneficial impact on the planning and organisation of provision.

44   Teachers are strongly committed to their students. In the best lessons there are practical activities with focused tasks which engage and challenge students. In one portfolio preparation session, students looked at previous students' portfolios, identifying and investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the work. This helped them to plan the development of their own portfolio. In another effective lesson, students explored the language for describing facial expressions. They illustrated their findings by producing masks which they were to use subsequently in a drama lesson. The quality of teaching and learning is often marred by a lack of planning for the needs of individual students. There is an overemphasis on whole-class teaching. Whilst some students respond well to this technique, others are easily distracted or lack the confidence to contribute freely to activities. Individual and group work is primarily based on worksheets which focus on reading and writing, despite the fact that many students cannot read. Lesson plans rarely specify the learning objectives for individual students, which results in some students pursuing activities that are not demanding enough and others tackling work which they do not understand. The college did not identify this weakness in its self-assessment report.

45   Although students complete an individual learning plan during their induction, teachers do not always check on the progress individual students have made. For instance, one student wanted to improve her spelling but there was no specific action or strategy to address this. Many students want to get jobs, but spend time on activities irrelevant to the work skills they will need. Some students participate in work

experience in the community. However, teachers do not always use the skills students gain on work placements to make lessons more relevant. Teachers' assessments of students' work sometimes fail to make clear to students what they have learned or how they could improve their work.

46   All courses are externally accredited. However, inspectors do not agree that this is a strength in itself as, in many cases, the accreditation offered is inappropriate for individual students. In some lessons, the emphasis on students completing worksheets which are required to gain the award prevents them undertaking activities which would be more relevant to their needs. There is recognition for what students achieve outside the accreditation framework. These achievements are celebrated at an annual award ceremony. Progression from discrete courses to level 1 courses was low in 1999, but a significant improvement on 1998.

47   The college did not acknowledge in its self-assessment report the significance of some teachers' lack of specialist qualifications in working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This affects their ability to assess individual students' needs and to devise suitable learning programmes. Learning support workers are appropriately qualified. Some teaching and learning support staff use signing to support students. Inspectors agreed with a weakness identified through the college's own classroom observations that learning support workers were not always used effectively in lessons. Some classrooms provide a rather uninspiring learning environment, but the well-designed and well-equipped domestic kitchen and garden shed provide opportunities for students to gain experience in realistic living and work environments.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

48   Ten basic skills lessons were observed by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- good resources relevant to students' experiences
- responsive discrete basic skills provision
- good progression from discrete basic skills courses to employment and to other college courses
- basic skills support available to all college students

Weaknesses

- lack of co-ordination in managing the diverse elements of basic skills
- insufficiently varied basic skills qualifications
- poor development of individual learning plans, following basic skills screening
- poor attendance and punctuality in basic skills sessions
- inadequate centralised tracking of students receiving literacy or numeracy support

49   The college's basic skills provision consists of: discrete full-time and part-time courses in basic skills, partly delivered to mature students through the fresh start programme; outreach courses; basic skills as an additional qualification to vocational programmes; and support in basic skills for students on other courses in the college. Basic skills support is delivered either in the study centre, or through the tutorial system, where course tutors may work with groups or individuals. The outreach programme is responding successfully to the needs of students from very deprived areas. Review and evaluation of the provision following basic skills summer schools in 1999 have resulted in improvements to discrete courses.

50   As the self-assessment report records, each of the three elements of basic skills has its own team leader, but there is no effective overall management of the provision. This has inhibited the sharing of expertise and good practice. For example, the documentation used in outreach provision to help students to manage their own learning is not used with students on college-based basic skills programmes. The types of accreditation used by the college for basic skills are too limited and, in many cases, the level of work is insufficiently challenging for students, particularly on advanced courses. Attendance and punctuality at many of the teaching sessions were poor.

51   Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment, that there is much good teaching of basic skills. Of the 10 lessons observed, five were good or outstanding. Most lessons are well planned, and staff use a wide range of teaching methods and resources. Teachers usually recap on work completed in previous lessons, and explain how tasks fit into the course. Wherever possible, teachers develop students' practical skills and experience as a stimulus to learning. In a numeracy support session, students spent time measuring their classroom before tackling some area calculations. All the students benefited from the activity. In another effective discrete basic skills lesson, students were discussing the changing role of women in society. All of them took part in the lively discussion, encouraged by a skilled, enthusiastic teacher. The teacher's use of handouts, flip-charts and video-clips ensured that students' interest was maintained throughout the lesson. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that progression from discrete basic skills courses to employment or college courses is good.

52   All full-time college students are screened during their induction to identify their need for basic skills support. Students who need support are offered a follow-up interview with a member of the additional learning support team to discuss their specific needs and the support available. However, students do not set personal goals for themselves, and staff fail to monitor or review the progress of individual students with sufficient care. There is little formal liaison between basic skills teachers and teachers on vocational courses to ensure that students receive the basic skills support relevant to their needs. Although the college has sufficient staff and resources to meet the needs of all students identified as needing support, some students fail to attend the sessions offered to them. Students who attend basic skills support in the study centre are very positive about the support they receive, and value the increase in confidence afforded by developing their literacy and numeracy.

53   The area of the study centre set aside for additional basic skills support does not provide a good learning environment. Students are distracted by noise from elsewhere in the study centre, and people who pass through the area cause further disruption. The study centre houses the college's main resource collection for basic skills. Resources are clearly displayed and accessible. However, the range of resources is narrow, particularly for numeracy support. Computers are used effectively in outreach centres to deliver basic skills support. Teachers for all strands of this provision are knowledgeable and committed to helping their students succeed.

Support for Students

Grade 2

54 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- an effective admissions process
- comprehensive student induction procedures
- a well-managed guidance and advice service
- good careers guidance
- effective support for students from tutors

Weaknesses

- lack of formal systems for managing additional learning support
- few recreational opportunities for students

55 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college has a systematic approach to recruiting students. Staff working in all areas of the college have a strong focus on the needs of the students. There are effective arrangements to inform prospective students about college courses. Staff in the customer services centre, located near the college's reception area, give useful information to enquirers in a welcoming, friendly environment. The college's prospectus is well designed and provides a good overview of available courses. Detailed factsheets for each course list entry requirements and other essential information. Enrolment procedures are efficient and include well-managed interview arrangements for most applicants. Students receive an effective induction to the college's services and to their courses. Induction activities are tailored to the needs of each course. For example, a group of students on a childcare course appreciated an early visit,

during induction, to their future work placement. The visit emphasised the vocational nature of the course, and helped students to make a smooth transition from school to further education. Imaginative induction assignments enable students to get to know one another and their teachers. The college diary reinforces information provided during induction and it is used by many students to organise their studies. Students are aware of the college's charter and the complaints procedure.

56 All full-time and some part-time students undertake initial screening tests to identify those individuals who need additional support in basic literacy and numeracy. Students are informed of the results quickly. Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that there are strong links between learning support tutors and teachers on vocational courses. Vocational course teachers and learning support tutors liaise informally, but there is little sharing of information about schemes of work or the content and demands of assignments. Formal systems have only just been put in place for reporting attendance at learning support sessions. Although records are kept of the work carried out during additional support sessions, tutors and students do not agree individual learning plans for these sessions.

57 There is innovative use of short wave-band radios. Students with physical disabilities or epilepsy are given freedom of movement whilst still being able to call for assistance from tutors if required. The college responds to the needs of students with a range of physical disabilities by providing specialist equipment when it is needed.

58 The study centre provides good facilities for students to study privately or in groups and students appreciate the help given by study centre staff. A careers guidance section contains relevant information on higher education institutions and careers opportunities. The college provides good support to students

applying to higher education. Twenty-four computers in the study centre and a further 18 computers in the IT open learning centre are available for use by students without prior booking. However, spaces are sometimes limited as they can also be booked for class teaching. A recent upgrading of the computing network has disrupted computing facilities in the centre and prevented some students gaining access to a computer when they need to. The college acknowledges this issue and additional IT sessions have been made available to students to make up for lost time.

59   Inspectors agreed with the college that tutorial support for students is effective. All full-time and many part-time students have a minimum of one hour a week timetabled for tutorials. Most students have useful individual interviews with tutors once a term to monitor their progress. Support for part-time students attending only a few hours a week is less well developed, as noted in the self-assessment report. The college has a strong partnership with a local careers service. Careers guidance is integrated with tutorials, and students can also request personal interviews with specialist careers advisers. During one tutorial, a group of secretarial students considered the personal qualities sought by employers when hiring staff. Students compiled a list of these qualities, in order of priority. Students then watched a videotape showing an employer selecting candidates for a job on the basis of personal qualities. Finally, the tutor summarised the overlap between the choices made by the employer and the students. Curriculum teams collect data on students' destinations, but there is no comprehensive analysis of this information.

60   Welfare guidance to students is comprehensive and well managed. Friendly and knowledgeable staff deal with a range of issues, such as benefit entitlement, job vacancies, and childcare support. A short-term counselling service is available. The college access and

hardship fund is administered efficiently by guidance staff. Records are kept of the extent to which student services are used, but there is no systematic evaluation of their possible impact on students' retention and achievements. The college employs a student support worker who focuses support on students who are at risk of leaving courses early. Recreational and sporting activities are few, despite efforts by the student support worker and the student union executive to extend the range available. The student common room is small and used by only a small proportion of students.

General Resources

Grade 2

61   Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report but found that some of the identified strengths were no more than would be expected as normal practice. The key weakness in general resources was insufficiently emphasised.

Key strengths
- imaginative, effective redevelopment of college accommodation
- much good-quality teaching accommodation
- the high standard of catering accommodation and facilities
- good access to accommodation and good amenities for people with restricted mobility

Weaknesses
- unreliable IT systems

62   Carshalton College is situated on a single site in the borough of Sutton. Further community bases are being developed in conjunction with local organisations. For

example, the college has recently opened a new IT facility within Sutton library. The majority of students study at the college site. In 1994, the college prepared a comprehensive accommodation strategy which contained a five-year plan for refurbishment and upgrading. Since the last inspection, the final phase of the original strategy has been completed. A revised strategy focusing on a planned maintenance programme has also been produced. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the redevelopment of the college has been carried out imaginatively and creatively and has transformed the physical image of the college. The main entrance area is light and welcoming. The signage is clear. A central mall accommodates a range of services including a customer services centre, guidance shop, food outlets, hairdressing salon and a shop. It also houses a fully operational branch of a national travel agency. This area is seen as a 'vocational high street' and is being developed as part of the college's strategic commitment to become a 'Learning Village'.

63   The majority of classroom accommodation is good. The college has defined a standard for classroom decoration, essential equipment and furniture. A checklist is on display in each classroom and staff and students can note any aspects which are unsatisfactory. The checklists are themselves checked regularly and remedial action is taken where necessary. However, as recognised in the self-assessment report, expectations have risen since the beginning of the accommodation upgrade and some classrooms are falling below the current high standards. Arrangements for cleaning and maintenance are appropriate and have been altered in response to feedback from staff and students. There is a comprehensive strategy for the maintenance of the college's accommodation. This includes the development of energy conservation and a commitment to use 'green' resources wherever possible. Staff value the helpline which provides a fault report centre and an information service to keep them up to date.

64   Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the high standard of catering accommodation and facilities. Students' views were taken into account when planning the scope of catering services in the college. The final refurbishment was completed in November 1999 with the opening of a self-service restaurant. There are also two further food outlets which cater for different client groups, a café-bar aimed at over 18s and 'Nightingales', a silver-service restaurant which also serves as a training restaurant. Catering services are also provided to the newly created business centre. The centre contains a suite of high-quality conference and meeting rooms which can be booked by local organisations and businesses.

65   The study centre is centrally located. It is well furnished and provides an attractive learning environment. Students comment positively on the facilities and the help they receive from study centre staff. The centre provides a range of services, including a quiet study area, group work area, careers section and space for the delivery of additional support. The centre is open five days a week and on three evenings until 20.30 hours. The quality of the bookstock was noted as a weakness at the last inspection. Additional funding has been made available over the past two years and steps have been taken to improve the quantity and quality of these resources. A 'Euro' area within the resource centre contains 24 open access computers, a range of resources to support the study of European issues and an ESOL and foreign language collection. All computers have Internet and CD-ROM facilities. The range of audiovisual resources is being continually updated and increased. A regular new materials bulletin for staff provides a termly update on newly acquired resources in the study centre.

66   People with restricted mobility are able to reach all parts of the college easily. There are many examples of the adaptation or installation of aids for those with mobility problems. For example, push-button opening mechanisms on doors within the mall area, waist level control panels and audio announcements in lifts. There are sound arrangements for evacuating people who use wheelchairs, in the event of a fire.

67   There is no central college strategy to inform the development and maintenance of IT across the college. An upgrading of the computer facilities in autumn 1999 has led to significant problems, and IT systems are unreliable. The effects of this weakness were understated in the self-assessment report. Although the college has started to tackle the problem, computer breakdowns and network crashes disrupted many lessons during the inspection. Computers used by managers and staff have also been affected. Although CD-ROMs are available on computers in the study centre, they are not networked and are used infrequently.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

68   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that the college gave insufficient emphasis to some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a clear commitment to continuous quality improvement
- a comprehensive self-assessment process
- an effective staff development programme linked to strategic goals
- well-established staff appraisal
- a well-developed internal verification system
- the use of students' views to inform planning

Weaknesses

- the limited impact of quality assurance systems on students' achievements
- the lack of documented remedial actions in some curriculum reviews

69   The college makes a clear commitment to establishing comprehensive continuous quality improvement systems as one of its six strategic goals. Since the last inspection it has continued to develop its well-established quality assurance system which includes annual course review and evaluation. The system is overseen by the quality assurance group which includes middle managers from curriculum and college service areas. The college has recently reconstituted the quality assurance forum, a subgroup of the academic board, to oversee and report on academic quality issues. Several new initiatives have been introduced over the past two years, such as the 'tutoring for achievement' programme which provides tutors with a range of activities designed to improve students' retention and achievements. However, the self-assessment report is overgenerous in the impact it believes this initiative has had on students' achievements. Retention is comparable with sector averages, but students' achievements are still below national benchmarks, despite an improvement in 1998-99. Although service standards for cross-college support areas are at an early stage of development, staff and students report that service standards are good.

70   Course teams review the quality of courses annually. Targets for recruitment, retention and achievement are set, using previous performance and national benchmarks as guidelines. The college has developed a lesson observation system. Lessons are graded realistically. The grading profile is broadly in line with the grade profile awarded to lessons during the inspection. The judgements made as a result of internal observation of lessons

contribute to curriculum reviews. Inspectors agreed that the quality of most course reviews is good. Strengths and weaknesses are rigorously evaluated, and action plans are often thorough. However, as the college acknowledges in its self-assessment report, there are some course reviews which are less good; for example, some fail to include measurable outcomes in their action plans. Robust internal verification systems have been developed to ensure consistency in the assessment of students' work. Improved management information systems provide reports on attendance to course managers to help them to identify students who are at risk of leaving their course early.

71   The college has a robust self-assessment process which is overseen by the quality review group whose members include a governor, an external consultant, a quality manager from another college, and the college's quality manager. The self-assessment report produced for the inspection was the fourth produced by the college. Clear guidelines have been produced which enable all staff to contribute to the report. The self-assessment process includes a consideration of targets, statistical data, customer reviews, performance observation of lessons and tasks, team reviews, and reports by internal auditors and moderators. It also takes account of any complaints made about the college's services. Self-assessment is acknowledged by staff to be a valuable process.

72   Students' views are gathered in a number of ways. There are regular questionnaires which are used to gauge students' views on the quality of courses and the quality of the college's learning environment. Students' views have led to significant changes. For instance, the college identified through questionnaires that they needed to review the effectiveness of the catering facilities. This has resulted in an imaginative development of the restaurant facilities in the college which now cater for a range of tastes. Students are invited to

participate in the annual course review cycle. The student interest forum, which is a subgroup of the academic board, has clear terms of reference, meets once each term, and is charged with reporting to the academic board on issues of interest to students which fall outside academic concerns. In recent meetings, the student interest forum has discussed the catering facilities, the election of a student member to the corporation, and the problems the college is encountering with its IT facilities. The college charter is set out clearly in the college diary. Students understand the charter commitments, and are aware of the complaints and academic appeals procedures. Inspectors did not agree with the college that the charter was weak.

73   There is an effective system of line management reviews, as noted in the self-assessment report. Staff understand and support the process. It is linked closely to the college's strategic plan and it focuses on developing the skills of staff. New staff to the college participate in a well-organised induction programme. They can shadow a more experienced colleague to help them to understand their role more clearly. The college pays particular attention to meeting the needs of new staff with physical or learning disabilities. Teaching and support staff have access to a range of in-house and external training programmes. The college budget for staff development in 1998-99 was £78,000 representing 1.8% of the college's total budget. The college has recently received the Investor in People award.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 2

74   Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they found that some strengths had been overemphasised, and they identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a clear distinction between governance and management
- a strong working relationship between board and management team
- the broad range of skills and experience of governors
- the effective conduct of board and committee business
- governors' involvement in strategic planning
- governors' monitoring of the quality of provision

Weaknesses

- a potential conflict of interest in clerking arrangements
- few links between governors and college staff and students
- no mechanism for reviewing the performance of the board and its members

75   The governors bring a broad range of business, public sector and academic experience to the college. This expertise is used to support the work of the college. Members understand the distinction between governance and management and respect the limits this imposes on their involvement in the day-to-day running of the college. The relationship between governors and senior staff of the college is good. After considering the requirements of the

modified instrument of government, the corporation now comprises 16 members. The appointment of members in two new categories will not be made until transitional appointees come to the end of their term of office. The nominations committee has not completed an audit of governors' skills and has not yet identified gaps in skills. Members support the college at a range of events, including the public annual general meeting and presentation events. The board has identified in its self-assessment report that members of the board have few formal links with students and staff below senior management level. This concern was echoed in discussions with staff across the college.

76   The corporation has established effective committees with appropriate terms of reference. Attendance at board meetings is good. The board meets at least once each term. Committee meetings are timetabled to precede corporation meetings so that matters arising from their deliberations can be put before the board. Agendas, minutes and supporting papers are comprehensive and reflect a structured ordering of business. Board members are appropriately involved in the development of the strategic plan. They debate the college's mission statement and supporting objectives. Well-informed reports are presented by the college's managers which enable the board to monitor progress on key issues, such as the financial health of the college and the quality of its provision.

77   Much of the work of the board is conducted through its committees whose work is overseen, but not duplicated by the board. The committees include: the planning and development committee, the corporate services committee, the audit committee, the nominations committee and the remuneration committee. The annual budget is approved in good time by the board, on the advice of the corporate services committee. Monthly management accounts are circulated to all members of the board and discussed at board

meetings. The planning and development committee considers curriculum quality, strategic planning and self-assessment issues. The audit committee monitors the plans and reports of the internal and external auditors and reports on these to the board. The audit committee has decided that value for money studies on aspects of the college's work would be helpful. Three such studies have been produced; on customer services, catering and IT systems.

78 The clerk to the board is a member of the senior management team, with direct line management responsibility for the accounting and finance, IT, marketing and personnel functions of the college. Currently no member of the college's senior management team holds a professional qualification in financial management. The corporation has approved a separate job description for the clerk, in addition to his executive job description. The combination of responsibilities compromises the clerk's position, in terms of providing advice to the board with managerial responsibilities. The standard of clerking is sound and the clerk is well regarded by members. However, this arrangement represents a possible conflict of interest. The clerk does not service the audit committee, as the corporation considers that it would be inappropriate for him to do so given the nature of his other management and financial responsibilities.

79 A two-year training programme for the board was the result of a training needs analysis carried out in November 1997. The training programme is now complete. It involved 10 sessions, six of which were externally facilitated. The board's self-assessment report rightly identifies the need for a further training review. Members have not yet established a system to review the performance of the board or the contribution made by individual members.

80 The governing body has a code of conduct. On an annual basis, governors are required to sign to confirm their agreement to abide by the provisions of the code. However, the college's code of conduct predates the issue of the Nolan committee's report on the seven principles of public life and it is not in step with current sector practice. The corporation maintains a register of members' interests but the process of annual updating needs strengthening.

81 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.

Management

Grade 2

82 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made in the college's self-assessment report. However, they found that some strengths were no more than would be expected as normal practice, and that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths
- a well-managed college with a clear management structure
- a clear vision and mission understood by staff
- good formal and informal communications
- effective strategic planning
- strong support for staff from senior managers
- productive links with a wide range of local organisations
- effective monitoring and implementation of the equal opportunities policy

Cross-college Provision

83   The college is well managed. The management structure has recently been reorganised to reflect more closely the key college objectives. The management team, which meets weekly, comprises the principal and the four senior postholders. Staff, generally, understand the new structure and are clear about their own responsibilities. Managers work well together and are well regarded by staff who appreciate their support and accessibility.

84   The vision and mission of the college are well articulated by the college's managers and the supporting strategies and targets are clearly illustrated in the strategic plan. Staff at all levels in the college contribute to the development of the strategic plan. The current three-year plan has 18 months to run, and preparations for the new plan have already begun. The operational plan is comprehensive and links strategic goals to team plans. Improvements in students' achievements are a central aim of the plan. Although some improvement can be seen this year, the self-assessment report acknowledges that achievement rates remain below sector benchmarks.

85   Formal and informal communications across the college are good. There are regular meetings for all the college staff. College managers communicate effectively with staff through a regular staff newsletter, an annual staff survey and a programme of events, such as the annual student and staff awards ceremony. Most staff have access to internal electronic mail. The management style of the college is acknowledged by staff to be open and consultative. The college's café-bar provides a convenient place for informal meetings and is well used for this purpose. A strong line management review scheme ensures regular, formal meetings between managers and staff at all levels.

86   The support for staff is exemplary. New staff are carefully initiated through a range of cross-college training activities and all staff undergo close monitoring during a probationary period. Permanent staff enjoy an attractive package of benefits which include free private medical and dental insurance, with subsidised rates for partners and families. Subsidised nursery places are available. Front-line staff are issued with attractive clothing with a discreet college logo. This was introduced after extensive consultation, and is a popular innovation with many staff. Staff morale generally is good, and the college is seen to value its employees.

87   Central to the college vision is its commitment to the economic regeneration of the local community. The revised management structure includes a senior management post with a specific responsibility for forming partnerships and external relations. A wide range of initiatives has resulted in strong local links which, in turn, have led to additional funding opportunities. Notable links include work with the Sutton Regeneration Partnership, the South Wandle Regeneration Partnership and a successful collaborative bid to become a University for Industry learning hub. There are strong links with the Orchard Hill Further Education College for adults with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

88   Inspectors agreed with the judgement made in the self-assessment report that room utilisation is significantly below sector norms at 25%. Some rooms are let to outside agencies after teaching hours and at weekends, which brings additional income to the college.

Cross-college Provision

89   The IT facilities in the college have not kept up to date with the strategic aim of the college to introduce IT as an important tool for all students and staff. Although most management information needs are now catered for with consistency, and reports on student data are reliable, the college lacks a cohesive strategy and plan for the development of IT to support new curriculum developments and the information needs of managers and staff.

90   The college has a clear equal opportunities policy. The aims of the policy are effectively monitored. Governors and college managers have undertaken training in implementing equal opportunities strategies. The college emphasises in its premises planning the need to ensure that people with physical disabilities have easy access to all parts of the college. The college is an accredited user of the disability symbol for its good practice in recruiting and retaining staff with disabilities.

91   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has a healthy cash balance and expects to continue to make small surpluses, though this is dependent on the performance of its subsidiary company. Budgets are set following a college-wide consultation process, and informed by budget preparation instructions. Governors and the college's management team receive monthly management accounts on a timely basis, and these are considered termly by the corporate services committee and the corporation. The college has a set of financial regulations in place. The procedures to be followed in the event of suspected fraud or irregularity need to be strengthened.

Conclusions

92   The self-assessment report used for the inspection was the fourth produced by the college. The college updated each section of the report a month before the inspection. Inspectors found the self-assessment report useful when they were planning the inspection. All college staff were involved in the self-assessment process and inspectors found that the staff are, generally, self-critical. The self-assessment report was clear and concise, and included strengths and weaknesses and planned action under the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The report was supported by detailed evidence drawn from course reviews and other internal quality assurance processes. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college, but found some strengths to be no more than would be expected as a matter of routine practice. They also identified some additional weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded for four of the seven curriculum areas inspected. In relation to the cross-college areas inspected, inspectors agreed with two grades but lowered the other three grades by one grade.

93   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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	35
19-24 years	19
25+ years	41
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	27
Level 2 (intermediate)	34
Level 3 (advanced)	34
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	193	173	11
Construction	72	279	11
Engineering	120	130	8
Business	136	774	28
Hotel and catering	175	123	9
Health and community care	161	72	7
Art and design	108	9	3
Humanities	224	356	18
Basic education	78	80	5
Total	1,267	1,996	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 26% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 2000)

	Per-manent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	62	0	19	81
Supporting direct learning contact	19	0	7	26
Other support	74	1	3	78
Total	155	1	29	185

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	*1998*	*1999*
Income	£7,129,000	£7,597,000	£7,538,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£20.58	£18.49	£17.38
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	50%	56%
Achievement of funding target	113%	108%	106%
Diversity of income	23%	28%	29%
Operating surplus	£349,000	£155,000	£45,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)
Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
Achievement of funding target - Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 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	279	358	949	214	382	759
	Retention (%)	86	84	82	90	87	76
	Achievement (%)	37	39	87	52	44	77
2	Number of starters	630	800	651	842	770	633
	Retention (%)	77	87	77	84	88	79
	Achievement (%)	45	44	62	47	51	58
3	Number of starters	350	274	365	569	455	639
	Retention (%)	81	80	79	85	82	76
	Achievement (%)	54	73	67	53	60	62
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	65	57	54	189
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	74	91	94	85
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	81	37	55	43
Short courses	Number of starters	322	298	612	327	332	2,792
	Retention (%)	77	88	85	85	94	91
	Achievement (%)	42	59	77	41	57	67
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	452	700	256	2,994	3,962	107
	Retention (%)	88	92	80	95	96	82
	Achievement (%)	35	41	69	50	43	83

Source: ISR
n/a not applicable

FEFC Inspection Report 56/00