

Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

THE
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COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

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 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 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

Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education

South East Region

Inspected January 2001

Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education is a large general further education college offering a significant amount of higher education in partnership with local universities. Since the previous inspection in 1997, the college has produced a yearly self-assessment report. Inspectors used the August 2000 report, (updated November 2000). All sections of the college, including the corporation, were involved in producing the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified, but considered that some weaknesses were underestimated. They also identified additional strengths and a few additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grades as in the self-assessment report for all curriculum areas inspected, except in one, where they awarded a higher grade. They agreed with four of the college's cross-college grades, but awarded a lower grade for one other.

The college provides courses in all 10 FEFC programme areas. Provision in six was inspected, together with basic skills and aspects of cross-college provision. In addition to its work with young people, the college enrolls a large number of adult students. It is at the heart of many local economic and community partnerships to widen participation; its work with asylum seekers is particularly noteworthy. The college has made a

number of improvements since 1997, facilitated by effective, open and consultative management. Management data are now reliable. Teaching and learning have improved. The percentage of lessons judged good or outstanding is now just above the national average, although the scheme of internal lesson observations overestimated the quality of teaching. At all levels, students' achievements have improved considerably: they are now at, or above national averages. The college is now better placed to assure the quality of its provision. Well-structured quality assurance procedures are in place, with effective course review and careful monitoring of franchised courses. There have been many improvements to the college estate, making good use of some inflexible and old buildings. Students are well informed about the college and its courses, receive good support that meets their individual learning needs and enjoy a comprehensive range of student services. Governors provide strategic focus for the college and managers, and maintain effective oversight of the college's financial position. The college should improve: some poorer quality teaching and learning; the rigour of its internal lesson observations; student retention; operational planning; governors' monitoring of the implementation of key policies and objectives; the low take-up of additional learning support services for evening class students; target-setting; the quality of action plans; quality standards for support areas; and some poor access for students with mobility problems.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Craft and motor vehicle engineering	2	Support for students	3
Business studies	2	General resources	2
Public and customer services	2	Quality assurance	3
Travel and tourism	3	Governance	3
Hairdressing and beauty	2	Management	2
Art, design and media	3		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		
Basic skills	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education is a large general further education college. It has three main centres, serving a large conurbation close to the estuaries of the rivers Medway and Thames and the county town of Maidstone. The centres in the Medway towns of Chatham and Rochester are 2 miles apart, and the third is 9 miles away in Maidstone. In September 1999, a personal development centre for military personnel and their dependants was established in Gillingham, at the construction engineer school of the Royal School of Military Engineering.

2 The Medway towns have an unemployment rate of 3.9%, considerably above the figure of 2% for the South East region. Six wards are identified as being among the top 20 deprived wards in the South East. A recent study by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) highlighted a significant number of people in the Medway area who have low levels of basic skills. Maidstone has only 1.6% unemployment and appears more prosperous, but this figure hides pockets of severe socio-economic deprivation.

3 Kent County Council and the recently formed unitary authority of Medway use selection for secondary education. There are grammar schools in most towns for students aged 11 to 18 and almost all other schools have sixth forms. Both the Kent and Medway education authorities are carrying out reviews of sixth form provision. The college is working with the authorities to form local school and college partnerships that will provide viable choices for post-16 students.

4 The college has a wide range of academic and vocational programmes from entry level to degree level. The college offers courses in all programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). During the academic year 1999-2000, the college enrolled approximately 4,000 full-time students and 11,000 students with other modes of

attendance. Programmes in construction, business, and health and social care have most enrolments. The University of Kent validates most of the college's degree programmes. The college also has arrangements for higher education provision with South Bank University and Canterbury Christ Church University College. The college has reduced its franchised provision so that it now has a small amount with local partners, representing less than 5% of its total units.

5 The college's mission is to support employment and individual development by providing education and training of the highest possible quality. The college is committed to widening participation and has been part of an FEFC pilot project to fund programmes that do not lead to a formal qualification in local communities where levels of participation in education are low. The college has also responded to the needs of the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers entering Kent. It is a member of the two chambers of commerce in its local areas, and a member of both the Kent and Medway Learning Partnerships and the Gillingham Education Action Zone.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in January 2001. Inspectors had previously analysed the college's self-assessment report and information provided by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements taken from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. The college submitted its own data, in the same format, on students' achievements for 2000, using FEFC-approved computer software. The data were checked against college registers and awarding body pass lists and found to be accurate. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 56 days. Inspectors observed 95 lessons,

Context

including tutorials and scrutinised students' work and a range of college documentary evidence. Meetings were held with students, governors, managers, teachers and support staff.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the

lessons inspected, 64% were rated good or outstanding and 7% were less than satisfactory, an improvement of 10 percentage points for grades 1 and 2 since the last inspection. These figures are similar to the national averages recorded for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	2	3	0	0	5
GNVQ/AVCE	2	10	8	4	0	24
NVQ	5	12	6	0	0	23
Other vocational	2	14	5	0	0	21
Other	2	11	6	3	0	22
Total (No)	11	49	28	7	0	95
Total (%)	12	52	29	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance ranged from 57% in basic skills to 92% in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education	11.4	74
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Craft and Motor Vehicle Engineering

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 12 lessons, covering a range of programmes for craft and motor vehicle engineering on two of the college's main sites. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses, with effective initial guidance for students
- high standards of teaching in many lessons
- good and improving achievement rates
- productive liaison between course teams, employers and parents
- good attendance rates
- excellent resources for motor vehicle programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient differentiation in teaching to meet all students' needs
- inadequate integration of vocational studies with key and basic skills
- some unsatisfactory retention rates

10 Engineering provision includes a wide range of courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, including craft and technician qualifications. The college has rationalised provision across its main centres with the result that some students travel considerable distances to study their chosen programme. The range of courses and good systems of initial assessment and guidance ensure that students study the most appropriate subjects at the right level. The programme area has good links with the industrial sector. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is a strength. All full-time

students benefit from a work experience programme which often leads to employment opportunities. Students, employers and parents fully contribute their views of courses through surveys and as members of course review teams. Courses are well organised and managed. Good teamwork by teachers impacts positively on the quality of students' learning.

11 The proportion of lessons graded 1 and 2 by inspectors is better than the national average for engineering given in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. However, there were few outstanding lessons. The strengths in teaching and learning are appropriately recognised in the self-assessment report. All courses are planned in detail by course teams. Lessons are supported by plans which take account of the proposed learning outcomes for students. At the time of inspection, most courses were on schedule, according to the schemes of work. Teachers check learning through good use of directed questioning. Well-written and well-designed materials are available in most lessons, helping students to extend their learning without the need to make extensive notes. Practical teaching is often good. For example, in one lesson, students on a motor vehicle body repair course worked on a variety of set tasks. They were supported by two teachers and a technician, working as a team to ensure students were busy. Students were able to demonstrate high levels of craft skills on a range of activities.

12 In a significant number of lessons, teachers do not take sufficient account of their students' different learning needs. Additionally, there is little attempt to reinforce key and basic skills by integrating them with the teaching of vocational studies. Teachers pay too little attention to the key skill of communication in students' written work. The correction of spelling, grammar and punctuation is rare. These weaknesses in teaching and learning were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

13 Examination pass rates on most programmes are above national averages and show an overall improvement of 30 percentage points over the last 3 years. Particularly good results are achieved on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 1 motor vehicle and part 2 engineering craft programmes. Whilst retention rates are often at or above national averages, others are unsatisfactory. Targets for achievement and retention are set at course level and actual performance is closely monitored. Close monitoring and reporting of absences has led to significant improvements in both punctuality and attendance. These strengths and weaknesses are recognised in the self-assessment report. The quality of students' work is good, and work in the practical areas is carried out competently and safely.

14 The teachers are well qualified, and their skills closely match the requirements of the curriculum. Some teachers have recent industrial experience. Staff benefit from an effective professional development programme. Accommodation is good and mostly provides a stimulating and well-resourced working environment. Students on the motor vehicle programmes enjoy a particularly good range of modern equipment. The machine tools are old, but are well maintained and are fit for purpose. The learning resource centres have good stocks of engineering books, and multiple copies of significant textbooks, periodicals and videos. Students are making increasing use of information technology (IT) in their studies.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in craft and motor vehicle engineering, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ vehicle valeting	1	Number of starters	29	42	21
		Retention (%)	69	79	100
		Achievement (%)	100	97	95
C&G 6956 motor vehicle progression award	1	Number of starters	29	43	36
		Retention (%)	69	79	67
		Achievement (%)	100	91	100
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	23	19	25
		Retention (%)	100	58	76
		Achievement (%)	48	64	61
C&G 2280 and 2290 part 2 engineering	2	Number of starters	116	41	17
		Retention (%)	74	59	53
		Achievement (%)	27	73	88
NVQ engineering foundation	2	Number of starters	†	15	24
		Retention (%)	†	73	75
		Achievement (%)	†	80	94
NVQ motor vehicle servicing and body repair	3	Number of starters	31	67	46
		Retention (%)	84	63	59
		Achievement (%)	81	77	75

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

15 Twelve lessons at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels were inspected. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report was rigorous in most respects. They considered that the strength associated with the quality of teaching was overstated.

Key strengths

- high levels of achievement on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses
- good retention rates at GNVQ advanced level
- effective use of vocational context in teaching and learning
- positive links with business
- good course management
- strong commitment to students' progress and achievements

Weaknesses

- insufficient recognition of the needs of individual learners
- poorly framed and tested learning objectives
- insufficient enrichment of the business curriculum

16 The college offers a good range of full-time general business courses, from foundation to advanced level, mainly to students aged 16 to 19. Courses lead to the general certificate of education advanced/advanced subsidiary level (GCE A/AS level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) programmes, as well as GNVQ and advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) programmes. The college introduced the AVCE in retail and distribution in September 2000. This was not inspected.

17 Provision is well managed. Staff are strongly committed to students' progression and success, and this ethos permeates vocational studies. As recognised in the self-assessment report, links with local businesses are strong. Course team meetings are held regularly. Group tutorials, delivered within a whole-college framework, are held weekly; the progress of individual students is monitored monthly, using information gained from tutorials, and action plans agreed with students. Course reviews are conducted rigorously with considerable student participation. The introduction of a new system of lateness monitoring this year was brought about by student comment at course reviews. Students' attendance and retention are closely monitored.

18 Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning was a strength. The percentage of lessons which they graded good or outstanding was considerably below the national average. Where teaching is good, lessons are well organised and include a range of planned activities. The structure of lessons is logical and provides planned opportunities for student participation. The checking of learning is both systematic and challenging. Question-and-answer sessions are lively, making use of stimulating vocational materials and teachers' experiences. In a lesson on direct marketing, students learned from a wide range of materials provided. Students were particularly impressed that the case study materials chosen were relevant to all age groups in the class. The planning and delivery of specific learning objectives is sometimes weak. Despite careful planning of lessons, teachers are far less precise about what they expect students to have learned. It is rare that lessons are planned to meet the needs of individual students and to cater for the wide range of abilities within the group. Access to computers in business classrooms is adequate, but IT is not used within lessons either to provide stimulation or as a source of information.

Curriculum Areas

19 Assignments set on the GNVQ and AVCE programmes are appropriate. The tasks permit a full range of assessment grades. Some assignments demand a large number of tasks that result in lengthy student responses which are too descriptive and lacking in analysis. Procedures for internal verification of grading and marking are effective. GNVQ students have usually undertaken two weeks' work experience. AVCE students reported that they had no knowledge of the arrangements planned on their behalf for this year. Systems are in place to ensure that key skills are assessed and developed through assignments or specific lessons. National initiatives to broaden the curriculum have made relatively little impact on the breadth of business studies programmes. There is no separately planned programme of enrichment activities. Students speak positively about the care taken to ensure they are on an appropriate programme of study, and this strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

20 Retention is largely good across the programmes inspected. The most significant exceptions are in the two-year course leading to GCE A level business and the BTEC national certificate, where retention is consistently below national averages. It is significantly above national averages on GNVQ foundation and advanced courses. At GNVQ advanced level, retention rates have improved from 62% to 92% over the last three years. Inspectors agreed with the college that achievement rates are often high, particularly for level 3 vocational courses.

21 Teachers are well qualified. Most have valuable recent industry experience. Classrooms are welcoming with good displays of students' work. In a few rooms, the small space limits the range of teaching styles. Access to computers is good. Libraries have multiple copies of key texts for business courses.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business studies, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	†	17	11
		Retention (%)	†	88	82
		Achievement (%)	†	77	78
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	54	34	33
		Retention (%)	76	82	76
		Achievement (%)	85	79	80
GCSE business studies	2	Number of starters	55	47	49
		Retention (%)	82	72	69
		Achievement (%)	51	91	71
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	74	45	48
		Retention (%)	62	84	92
		Achievement (%)	74	84	95
GCE A level business studies (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	30	47	33
		Retention (%)	87	89	79
		Achievement (%)	73	64	62
GCE A level business studies (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	83	61	52
		Retention (%)	70	66	71
		Achievement (%)	75	84	95
BTEC national certificate in business and finance	3	Number of starters	23	17	20
		Retention (%)	57	35	50
		Achievement (%)	92	100	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Public and Customer Services

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons, covering full-time courses in public and customer services. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- impressive, relevant and up-to-date industrial experience of teachers
- extensive range of external events providing work experience for NVQ students
- good pass rates on most courses
- wide range and number of national awards achieved by the customer service department

Weaknesses

- no differentiated materials for mixed-ability classes
- restricted sports hall and changing facilities at the Horsted centre

23 Provision is made in all three college centres and includes national and first diploma courses in public services and national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses in customer service. A National Council for Further Education entry level course in public services was introduced in September 2000. The customer service department has achieved numerous national awards since 1998, including the Queen's Anniversary Prize for education and the Beacon Award for excellence. Inspectors agreed that this represents a strength. Courses are well managed and teachers work well together in teams. Schemes of work vary in quality; some are comprehensive and detailed while others are just lists of topics. Lesson plans are generally clear and include the

opportunity for students to grade lessons at their conclusion, but this evaluation does not always take place. Mechanisms for ensuring that students receive learning support identified as a result of screening are insufficiently robust.

24 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of much teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of methods and aids to maintain students' interest, check students' understanding regularly, ensure that all students are fully involved in the lesson and help them to form their own conclusions. Effective use is made of relevant video recordings. Role-play exercises are often used to help students experience typical issues of working life. For example, in a lesson on job interviews, the teacher's colleague and some performing arts students took the roles of employer and interviewee, respectively, in role-plays of individual interviews. The exercise demonstrated how not to behave during interviews. This was followed by a video recording of good interview techniques, and students were asked to compare the behaviours they had observed. A lively discussion helped students understand the implications of both kinds of behaviour. Role-play is also used to help students practise how to deal with complaints and other difficult circumstances.

25 In the less effective lessons, questions were put to the whole class and often the same students replied each time. Students were not always told how long they had to complete tasks, and as a result they often ran out of time. Work set for students is sometimes insufficiently challenging. Teachers do not pay enough attention to poor spelling, punctuation and grammar in students' written work. Students' note-taking skills are underdeveloped and teachers do not ensure that students make appropriate notes of key points during discussions. Most classes contain students who have different abilities, but there are no materials designed to cater for their differing needs. There is insufficient use of IT for

Curriculum Areas

teaching. These weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

26 Pass rates on most courses have been well above national averages in most years since 1998. On the NVQ customer services at level 3, they were particularly good in 1998 and 2000. Data on NVQ achievements for 1999 are not reliable. Achievements on the national diploma in public services course were below average in 2000 despite being well above it in 1999. Retention rates are mainly at or above average. Students on public services courses participate in a wide range of outdoor and other team-building exercises and work experience. Those on customer service courses have the opportunity to work as tour guides,

receptionists, stewards and general 'meeters and greeters' at numerous external events, allowing them to develop their customer care skills. They have a special uniform for the purpose.

27 Teachers are appropriately qualified and have extensive current workplace experience. Inspectors agreed that this is a strength. Teaching rooms at all centres are satisfactory. Learning resources in the libraries are adequate and students have good access to IT facilities. There is a small but well-equipped fitness centre on the Horsted centre housing courses in public services, but facilities in the sports hall and the changing rooms are inadequate, as noted in the self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in public and customer services, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ customer services	2	Number of starters	72	41	116
		Retention (%)	82	76	86
		Achievement (%)	74	90	75
BTEC first diploma in public services	2	Number of starters	10	35	29
		Retention (%)	100	77	64
		Achievement (%)	80	70	89
BTEC national diploma in public services	3	Number of starters	†	18	40
		Retention (%)	†	78	58
		Achievement (%)	†	100	61
NVQ customer services	3	Number of starters	50	*	88
		Retention (%)	94	*	84
		Achievement (%)	97	*	98

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

†course not running

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Travel and Tourism

Grade 3

28 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in leisure, travel and tourism. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and considered one weakness understated.

Key strengths

- extensive use of relevant industrial practice in teaching
- good resources and accommodation
- recent improvements in students' achievements

Weaknesses

- poor retention
- some poor teaching

29 The college offers a wide range of leisure, travel and tourism courses. Full-time courses include GNVQ intermediate, the AVCE, as well as the national diploma and NVQ level 2 in travel services. There are good opportunities for full-time students to study for additional qualifications, such as Lufthansa fares and ticketing, British Airways Galileo first class travel consultant, English Tourist Board 'Welcome Host' certificate, and various languages. Courses are well managed. Appropriate minutes of meetings are taken. Schemes of work are used, but these are no more than lists of topics to be covered and do not identify teaching strategies and classroom activities. Course documentation and assignment briefs are clear and well designed. Course reviews are held regularly and on some courses parents attend the formal meetings. Student satisfaction is monitored in each centre.

30 Teaching is satisfactory or better. Lessons are particularly successful where teachers apply their first-hand experience of the industry and relate this to the study topic. In a travel

services lesson for mature students, the potentially tedious coverage of destinations was enlivened by the practical experiences of the teacher. The teacher drew the best from the students, who themselves were able to contribute from their own experiences. As identified in the college's self-assessment report, a wide range of teaching and learning approaches are used, resulting in some good lessons. In these, teachers promote lively interest and contribution from students and regularly check students' understanding. Poorer lessons result from inadequate planning and ineffective use of time. Students are not fully occupied; insufficient account is taken of their individual needs, their attention wanders and their skills and abilities are not developed.

31 Students are successfully introduced to the disciplines of working in the industry. They work in the college's two travel agencies, as well as undertaking external work experience. Both students and course staff wear the same uniform to help give a sense of identity. Students also benefit from a wide range of relevant visits and activities, including visits to continental Europe and local and national visitor attractions. Students are well supported by effective tutorials. These include personal tutorials, as well as a weekly programme of structured class activities. During one such session, a speaker from the Kent County Constabulary gave an authoritative presentation on drugs and the law, with an emphasis on what the students should be aware of when employed in the travel industry.

32 Despite significant strengths, the quality of provision is undermined by poor retention. The college recognises this weakness in its self-assessment, as well as the contributory cause of inappropriate entry criteria and course choice for some courses and students. Strategies have recently been put in place to help address these weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, there were some improvements in retention for the current year. Student

Curriculum Areas

achievements have improved in the last year, particularly in the professional vocational courses which students follow in addition to their main course. For example, achievements of the British Airways Galileo first class travel consultant qualification increased from 22% in 1999 to 67% in 2000. Results on the NVQ level 2 travel services are consistently good and above the national averages. Assignment briefs for national diploma, GNVQ and AVCE courses are well designed and include opportunities for students to develop key skills. Students' work is well presented and shows frequent use of IT. Errors in grammar and spelling are checked, and teachers use appropriate assignment feedback sheets to confirm progress and achievement to students. Students' work on the NVQ travel services course is consistently good. Portfolios are well presented and appropriately

referenced, displaying a wide range of appropriate evidence. There is systematic assessment and internal verification of students' work.

33 Teachers are appropriately qualified, have relevant industrial experience and many hold relevant assessor and verifier awards. The many part-time teachers contribute their specialist travel experience to the team. Accommodation and resources are of a good standard. Excellent, realistic working environments are provided through two college-based travel agencies, managed by the college in conjunction with a local commercial agency. Each agency has a well-qualified full-time manager. Students have access to an extensive range of good quality leisure and tourism periodicals, books and videos.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in travel and tourism, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Lufthansa air fares and ticketing, level 1	2	Number of starters	†	35	24
		Retention (%)	†	77	75
		Achievement (%)	†	48	83
British Airways Galileo first class travel consultant	2	Number of starters	54	53	35
		Retention (%)	93	70	69
		Achievement (%)	12	22	67
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	17	17	25
		Retention (%)	88	88	88
		Achievement (%)	50	67	95
NVQ travel services	2	Number of starters	56	44	32
		Retention (%)	93	84	69
		Achievement (%)	83	97	82
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	69	39	†
		Retention (%)	71	56	†
		Achievement (%)	76	57	†
BTEC national diploma in travel and tourism	3	Number of starters	†	†	59
		Retention (%)	†	†	61
		Achievement (%)	†	†	97

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty

Grade 2

34 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in hairdressing, beauty and holistic therapies. They agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths.

Key strengths

- high standard of teaching and learning
- good students' achievements
- outstanding specialist accommodation in hairdressing
- thorough mentoring system for new staff

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on a number of courses
- some inadequate facilities in beauty therapy

35 The extensive range of courses in hairdressing and beauty, ranging from entry to advanced level, is complemented by a good range of holistic therapy courses. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the range of provision meets the needs of the local community and industry. All students, both full time and part time, receive effective guidance to ensure they choose the right course. Hairdressing courses are offered at one college centre, and beauty and holistic therapy provision is offered on two. Provision has recently been established at the Oakwood Park centre in response to market research, which identified public demand. There are well-established links with local industry and external providers, including the offer of hairdressing within a local prison. Management of the area is effective. All staff are involved in curriculum planning and development, and there are regular team meetings. Inspectors identified the thorough and helpful mentoring of

all new staff as a particular strength. This had not been included in the self-assessment report.

36 Inspectors agreed with the college that standards of teaching are high and reflect good industrial practice. A variety of teaching activities meets individual students' needs and they participate enthusiastically in their lessons. The positive interaction between students and teachers aids learning. In an NVQ level 3 beauty therapy lesson, students readily and knowledgeably discussed the practical skills required for body faradic, a beauty therapy treatment. Teachers successfully combine younger and older students in practical activities; for example, students in a joint NVQ level 1 and level 3 hairdressing lesson effectively replicated a commercial salon atmosphere where juniors assist senior stylists. Teachers regularly check that students understand their work in both practical and theory lessons. Students' dress code is professional. Clients visiting the hairdressing, beauty and holistic salons comment positively on their experiences. Staff have worked hard to develop a caring learning environment for students. Tutorials are well planned and action plans are rigorously pursued. In an entry level tutorial session for hairdressers, students responded well to the teacher's supportive style, resulting in effective learning.

37 Students' achievements have been consistently good on most courses, and have steadily improved to above national averages. In particular, the NVQ levels 1 and 2 in hairdressing have maintained high levels of achievement, often at 100%. Within beauty and holistic therapies, all courses leading to Vocational Training Charitable Trust qualifications have improved achievement rates over the last three years, and most are now well above national averages. Inspectors agreed that poor retention on some courses is a weakness. Retention is below national averages in several areas. Teachers have worked hard to address this issue. Effective tutorials, for both full-time and part-time students, coupled with attendance

Curriculum Areas

monitoring and effective follow-up action is leading to improvement. In the NVQ level 2 beauty course, retention has improved considerably. The standard of students' written work is high and teachers give helpful and comprehensive feedback. In most cases, spelling, punctuation and grammar are corrected. Hair design students regularly compete in national competitions, performing well.

38 Staff present a professional corporate image, reinforced by their team approach of commitment and enthusiasm. Teachers are well qualified, with relevant commercial experience and recent commercial updating. Practical hairdressing facilities are outstanding. Hairdressing and beauty are well resourced on both sites. Reception facilities in both hairdressing and beauty at the City Way centre resemble high street salons in appearance and demonstrate sound commercial practice. The facilities are warm, clean, bright and inviting. However, some accommodation would be enlivened by additional relevant display material. Toilet facilities are not readily available within practical areas, presenting a less than client-friendly approach. Those at Oakwood Park are unsatisfactory. There are some shortcomings in attention to health and hygiene matters. Clinical waste facilities are not clearly identifiable at either centre. There is minimal access to hand-washing facilities and the specialist make-up salon has none. These weaknesses were not recognised in the college's self-assessment report. At both centres students have good support from libraries.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hairdressing and beauty, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ hairdressing 16 to 18	1	Number of starters	6	10	12
		Retention (%)	100	80	92
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
NVQ hairdressing 16 to 18 (two-year course)	2	Number of starters	81	73	53
		Retention (%)	64	67	66
		Achievement (%)	94	91	100
NVQ beauty 16 to 18 (two-year course)	2	Number of starters	90	25	59
		Retention (%)	16	64	78
		Achievement (%)	55	87	97
NVQ hairdressing (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	8	7	14
		Retention (%)	88	71	64
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
Vocational Training Charitable Trust anatomy, physiology and body massage certificate	3	Number of starters	20	13	20
		Retention (%)	85	31	85
		Achievement (%)	82	100	100
Vocational Training Charitable Trust diploma in aromatherapy	3	Number of starters	32	54	38
		Retention (%)	91	74	71
		Achievement (%)	66	87	100
Vocational Training Charitable Trust diploma in reflexology	3	Number of starters	41	42	35
		Retention (%)	76	86	80
		Achievement (%)	83	86	96

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Media

Grade 3

39 Inspectors observed 10 lessons across a range of courses in art, design and media. Inspectors agreed broadly with the college's self-assessment of its provision. However, they considered that some strengths had been overstated and that the significance of some weaknesses had been underestimated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching and well-managed provision in media
- high pass rates
- effective established progression routes for students

Weaknesses

- low retention rates
- poorly planned projects in art and design
- inconsistencies and shortcomings in resources accommodation

40 There is an appropriate range of courses in art, design and media. These include the GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design, GNVQ intermediate media, national diploma media, AVCE in art and design, and GCE A/AS levels in art, media and photography. The programme area recruits well. Communications between teachers and managers are good, and the enthusiastic and highly committed teachers work well together. Students benefit from this teamwork. Media courses are well managed; course performance is regularly reviewed by media teaching teams and actions are agreed.

41 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is better in media than in art and design. The profile of lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors was not as high as that underpinning the judgements

in the self-assessment report. Media students benefit from teachers' experience as professionals in the industry. For example, they were given a brief to plan and deliver a day-long live radio broadcast. Following a comprehensive technical session and supported by simple handouts, small teams of students took it in turn to take technical control of the studio, and of scripting and producing.

42 In less effective lessons, mainly in art and design, teachers fail to interest students in the work. This is sometimes due to inappropriate choice of activities or teaching approach, where students spend long periods listening to teachers, watching videos or working from limited source material. Students are often unclear about what is expected of them. Some assignments are inadequately planned and some projects poorly introduced. Source material and bare studio environments fail to stimulate the students. They have no individual workspaces to help develop an identity for their work, or to facilitate exchanges of views with fellow students. The separation of teachers across sites makes effective teamwork difficult and limits the sharing of good practice for teachers and students.

43 Teachers encourage students to look critically at the work of well-known artists, designers and media people. In one lesson, students were discussing photographs and campaigns. The teacher listened carefully to students' comments, challenged them to think more deeply and helped them to see the material through the eyes of a professional photographer. At the end of the lesson the teacher asked for feedback. Students readily acknowledged the value of the lesson and their enjoyment of it. Teachers are particularly sensitive in supporting students of a wide range of abilities and ages. Where necessary, additional support in literacy and numeracy is provided, as well as support from carers and signers.

Curriculum Areas

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students' achievements are often high. Most students who complete their course gain their desired qualification and progress to higher education or relevant employment locally. On most courses, pass rates are at or above the national averages, with students in GCE A level art and photography achieving 100% pass rates. Retention is poor across most courses, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, and, with the exception of GCE A level photography, it is at or below national averages. The college has taken some action to address this and monitors the situation carefully. Students on media courses demonstrate a high level of technical and creative ability, working on live projects and producing a college video. Students' practical work in art and design tends to be more varied in quality. Inspectors considered that second-year art and design students' skills in design development and process were underdeveloped. Some students show individual flair and resourcefulness. Second-year GNVQ advanced art and design students produced an innovative range of carrier bags, following a visit to the Tate Modern. In other projects, underdeveloped drawing, process and technical skills led to unsophisticated solutions and poorly realised end products.

45 The provision for art, design and media is located in all three college centres. Although the range of equipment is appropriate for current courses, accommodation and resources for the same course varies between centres. There is limited display space for work in some locations and limited storage space for materials and work at all centres. This disadvantages art and design students, who cannot benefit from the observation of other students' finished work and work in progress.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and media, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	42	34	41
		Retention (%)	79	94	68
		Achievement (%)	45	94	86
GNVQ intermediate media	2	Number of starters	17	13	29
		Retention (%)	71	62	62
		Achievement (%)	58	83	94
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	53	34	33
		Retention (%)	71	62	61
		Achievement (%)	45	90	95
BTEC national diploma media	3	Number of starters	60	43	60
		Retention (%)	75	75	72
		Achievement (%)	82	92	88
GCE A level art	3	Number of starters	9	17	15
		Retention (%)	89	41	67
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level photography	3	Number of starters	†	11	6
		Retention (%)	†	64	83
		Achievement (%)	†	71	100
GCE A level media	3	Number of starters	38	23	30
		Retention (%)	68	70	73
		Achievement (%)	96	86	73

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

46 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered that some weaknesses had not been identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned work experience and vocational 'taster' programmes
- appropriate and well-established progression routes
- good pastoral support
- effective development of key skills through individual learning programmes
- clear and positive management

Weaknesses

- some teaching and activities which do not meet students' needs
- insufficient information and communications technology resources
- lack of rigour in monitoring students' work
- ineffective use of facilitators in lessons

47 Specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is offered at two of the college's centres, at Maidstone and Rochester. The wide range of courses offers opportunities for students to progress to GNVQ foundation or NVQ level 1 programmes. Since the last inspection, there have been positive changes in the provision. There is clear and effective management of the department and good teamwork. The emphasis has moved from accreditation-led programmes to individual

learning programmes. These are accredited where appropriate, but meet individual needs, enabling students to develop greater skills for independent living and employment. Some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities join vocational courses. Appropriate support is provided to meet their needs. The college works closely with local special schools and post-16 units to provide transition programmes for school pupils in their final year. Ensuring that students have opportunities to progress is central to the work of the department. Many students move from school-based link programmes through entry and foundation levels to NVQ and work-based training. There is evidence of positive achievement, but much of it does not lend itself to presentation in tabular form. There is accordingly no table of achievements for this report.

48 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that good pastoral support ensures careful monitoring of students' attendance, behaviour and personal development. Many of the students attending programmes were disaffected in mainstream education and schooling. They have yet to develop the personal skills and levels of self-esteem required to maintain regular attendance. Liaison with parents, carers and associated professionals is continuous and supports the students' needs.

49 A student enterprise company within the department provides them with practical activities which are the focus for the development of key skills. The company has established a materials recycling programme within the college. This is well planned and enables students to meet students on other courses and familiarise themselves with all areas of the college when collecting the materials for recycling. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities use two of the college's industrial workshops to produce sale items for the company, for craft fairs, as well as for personal use. As stated in the self-

Curriculum Areas

assessment report, well-planned work experience programmes are a strength, drawing on positive working relationships with a large number of local employers in retail and service industries and industrial workshops.

50 The standard of teaching varies considerably. Some is good, with clear evidence of planning and the positive involvement of teaching assistants. Students undertake tasks linked to their individual learning goals and they can negotiate their activities. In practical lessons in both woodwork and manufacturing, students were encouraged to collaborate in order to overcome difficulties, and this had a positive effect on self-esteem. In poorer lessons, teaching strategies were inappropriate and teaching assistants were inefficiently deployed. This poor use of their time was a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. In these situations, students had few opportunities for learning and lost interest in activities. On one occasion, a student who had been identified as requiring individual help for reading and writing, was not provided with the support, despite a facilitator being present. Problems with accommodation sometimes adversely affect learning. In one lesson, students working on painting door panels were in an ordinary classroom and had to paint on paper instead. This was not satisfactory. Teachers do not give sufficient emphasis to the needs of non-readers in preparing and presenting activities. Students' work is not always effectively monitored.

51 The department lacks appropriate information and communications technology resources to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. While they have access to well-equipped open learning IT areas, the range of software or hardware is not appropriate for this group of students. Additionally, staff do not have the software or training required to maximise the benefits of information and communications technology for their students.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

52 The inspection covered the range of basic skills courses provided by the college. Inspectors observed 12 lessons and one tutorial. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but found additional weaknesses relating to teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- effective diagnostic and initial assessment
- imaginative teaching which recognises students' preferred learning styles
- clear rationale for the improvement of teaching and learning
- good specialist resources for key skills

Weaknesses

- ineffective lesson planning for key skills provision on vocational courses
- limited range of teaching strategies
- ineffective differentiation of learning resources
- inadequacies in recording students' learning

53 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a clear strategy for the organisation and management of basic and key skills provision. This is based on effective diagnostic assessment and the implementation of the new key skills award. The self-assessment report recognises that the range of basic education courses is limited, compared with the needs identified in the locality. However, a coherent curriculum framework and a clear rationale for development have been produced by the key skills manager. The college has already shown outstanding commitment to addressing the needs of asylum seekers, many of whom have basic skills requirements, and it has sought to

aid the most disadvantaged by establishing effective partnerships with other providers in the community.

54 The quality of teaching on the range of basic and key skills programmes is varied. It is consistently outstanding or good on the 'access to education' course for asylum seekers and on adult basic skills provision. In the best lessons, clearly stated learning objectives are used as the basis for effective teaching and learning. Lessons are well planned and part of a coherent framework consistent with the scheme of work. Teachers have high expectations of their students and set appropriate targets based on an appreciation of students' preferred learning styles. The most effective teaching uses a variety of teaching strategies and searching questions to make students think and to secure their involvement and participation. Teachers take care to analyse responses as part of an effective continuous assessment process.

55 In less effective lessons, planning is poor. Teachers are not imaginative or creative in their choice of teaching methods. They give insufficient attention to students and set them inappropriate tasks, before students have developed the necessary knowledge and skills. Teachers do not always use appropriately differentiated learning resources. Records of learning often describe what students did rather than analyse learning gains. Some teachers use over-generalised statements, failing to identify the shortcomings in students' work and what needs to be done to rectify them. Some of these weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report. Some teaching of key skills on vocational courses is unsatisfactory, a weakness not identified by the college. In a key skills lesson for motor vehicle students, the teacher began an exercise based on a test without adequate introduction, and then abandoned it within the space of 10 minutes. A new exercise was started, with inadequate explanation. The teaching lacked a sense of purpose and failed to interest the students.

Curriculum Areas

56 Most students, particularly those on the access to education and adult basic skills courses, are attentive to their work and keen to succeed. There are close working relationships between teachers and students. Teachers are aware of the complex social, emotional and educational needs of many of the students. They offer appropriate guidance and support, but maintain a focus on the primary issues relating to teaching and learning. Students make progress, developing skills and knowledge. Progression routes are explained to students and they have access to a range of options. In 1999-2000, 42% of students on the asylum seekers course progressed to other college courses. On all the main entry level or level 1 courses that lead to literacy and numeracy qualifications, retention is at or above national averages. There are examples of good students' achievements. In 1999-2000, 100% of the students taking the Associated Examining Board (AEB) literacy achievement test passed. The national average was 71%. In the same year, 89% of those entering for the English for office skills qualification achieved it, compared with a national average of 81%.

57 The composition and profile of the teaching team has altered since the previous inspection. More suitably qualified, full-time appointments have been made to replace part-time staff. Resources, including information and communications technology facilities, have also improved, though they are often not available in classrooms, at the time students with poor basic skills require them. Some excellent resources have been purchased both for staff and students; these are available in key skills centres to support teaching and the promotion of learning.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

58 Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report. The college had addressed some weaknesses before the inspection.

Key strengths

- high-quality information and guidance
- imaginative use of partnerships to enhance services for students
- comprehensive range of student services
- effective teamwork to support students
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for asylum seekers

Weaknesses

- inconsistent introduction of the new tutorial system
- low student take-up of additional learning support
- limited range of services for evening students
- little participation by students in the life of the college

59 Since the last inspection, the college has created a student support division. This has strengthened the quality of services for students throughout their college life. Figures available for the current year indicate a significant improvement in student retention. Staff in the division work well together, and with other college teams. For example, guidance advisers and support tutors work collaboratively with student records staff to provide an efficient admissions service.

60 As stated in the self-assessment report, most students receive good initial information and guidance. Near each reception desk, a course information and advice centre provides

an efficient service for prospective students. Potential and existing students can consult educational guidance advisers, who provide an impartial and professional service. The autumn survey of students' views shows that 86% of students believe they had good initial guidance. The college is involved in a collaborative project to train guidance workers from local community groups to extend their awareness of educational opportunities.

61 The college makes good use of partnerships to enhance services for students. An extensive school link programme provides vocational courses for over 260 students from 14 local schools. Last year, one-third of these pupils progressed to the college. In liaison with a local housing trust, the college has developed a course that gives intensive support to refugees and asylum seekers. The progression and entry team provides continuing language support throughout their further studies. The college access fund is augmented by donations from local charities. Working with other organisations, the college has secured advantageous fares and travel arrangements for its students.

62 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by an expert, flexible and responsive team. Over 300 students received support last year. Of those completing their course, some three-quarters moved on to further studies. These students report high levels of satisfaction with the service they receive.

63 Staff in key skills centres provide additional learning support. All full-time students complete a computerised test during induction to identify their key skill level. This provides a swift assessment of students' abilities but does not pinpoint specific literacy or numeracy needs. Of those students identified as needing support over the last two years, only 47% have attended workshops to receive help. This year, key skills lessons are timetabled for every full-time student. However, this does not guarantee

Cross-college Provision

additional support for all those who need it. Key skills tutors provide good individual support in workshops, and closely monitor individuals' learning. Subject teachers receive regular reports on students' progress. The college has measured the positive impact of key skills support on student retention rates. It has not yet examined how far it contributes to student achievement of their main qualification.

64 The college introduced a new tutorial system this year. It is well conceived and supported by a comprehensive personal tutoring handbook. However, it is not yet working effectively in all areas. The late appointment of some personal tutors has meant that some students have been poorly served. The autumn students' survey indicates that almost one-third of students did not receive individual tutorials in their first half-term. Documentation devised to support student target-setting and review is inconsistently applied. As yet, there is no means of ensuring that students receive their entitlement to a balanced tutorial programme. The college intends that meetings of personal tutors with tutor co-ordinators for each centre will address these difficulties in the spring term.

65 There is a comprehensive range of student services at each centre. The self-assessment report identifies this strength. Students can easily consult careers, higher education and guidance advisers. Clear financial, welfare and travel information is provided. The access fund is efficiently and fairly allocated. The college provides additional assistance through its own hardship fund and by waiving examination and registration fees for eligible students. The counselling service works to professional standards and contributes significantly to supporting students. Common rooms at each centre are staffed by stewards, who provide effective general support and supervision of students. The college chaplaincy at Horsted provides space for quiet contemplation and worship. The college has no childcare facilities. It has carefully researched the likely demand

and costs, and concluded that childcare requirements can best be met by helping students make other arrangements. Students attending college during the evenings receive less support. The information and advice, student services and key skills centres close at 17.00 hours. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. Evening personal tutors for each centre have recently been appointed. They will work with teachers and students to identify support needs.

66 The students' association has a low profile in the college. Few students are aware of its work, and the recruitment of officers and site committees has been hampered by lack of interest. Students at one centre work well together but this enthusiasm has not yet spread to other centres.

General Resources

Grade 2

67 Inspectors agreed with a number of strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but judged that others had been overlooked.

Key strengths

- considerable improvement since the last inspection
- well-maintained estate
- well-equipped, well-furnished and well-decorated classrooms
- good workrooms for most staff
- useful indoor social areas for students

Weaknesses

- some permanent buildings which are difficult to maintain and heat
- some unsatisfactory temporary accommodation
- difficulties for people with restricted mobility

Cross-college Provision

68 The college has three main centres, totalling 15.9 hectares. These are Horsted in Chatham, City Way in Rochester, and Oakwood Park in Maidstone. Horsted is the largest centre. Each centre has an assortment of buildings of various ages. At Horsted, the original buildings date from the 1940s. Further buildings were added in the 1960s and the 1980s. The City Way centre is dominated by two linked tower blocks constructed in the 1960s. Oakwood Park is part of an educational and leisure campus, set in mature parkland. There is temporary hatted accommodation at all centres. Most of this is used for teaching, though some houses student services. Provision is also made in a small number of outreach centres owned by other agencies, including the personal development learning centres.

69 The college has made many improvements since the last inspection. Careful planning and the removal of some surplus buildings have resulted in more efficient use of accommodation. However, as the Horsted and City Way centres are still underused, further rationalisation is being considered. In the interim, the internal use of buildings has changed to meet emerging needs, and an extensive programme of refurbishment has been undertaken. The college's educational priorities are not specifically addressed in the accommodation strategy, but estate developments are clearly triggered by curriculum initiatives. It has not recorded its progress in implementing its accommodation strategy with sufficient clarity. Imaginative approaches to dealing with the constraints of buildings has resulted in new and improved facilities, and some increased capacity. For example, facilities for animal care, music, dance, holistic therapy, leisure, art and design and key skills have all either been developed from scratch or upgraded, creating good environments for teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed that this was a strength. Some of the college's hatted accommodation is nearing the end of its useful life. The construction of the City Way tower blocks makes

it difficult to regulate their internal temperature and to keep them windproof and waterproof. The college recognised one of these weaknesses in its self-assessment report.

70 Buildings are clean and tidy and grounds well maintained. A premises officer negotiates contracts for maintenance and monitors the quality of work. Minor works are undertaken in-house. Classrooms are decorated and furnished to a good standard, universally applied across all centres. All rooms are equipped with whiteboard, overhead projector and screen. Additional audiovisual equipment is readily available from the educational technology rooms. With the exception of some staff at City Way, most have work areas that are satisfactory or good. The preparation rooms for technicians are well organised and spacious. Student support services and well-equipped reprographic facilities are provided on each site. Inspectors judged this to be a strength not recognised in the self-assessment report.

71 The college has progressed purposefully with its information learning technology strategy over the last two years, extending the facilities to cover all main and outreach centres. The reliability of the system has improved significantly. There are approximately 800 computers for students' use, a significant increase in the number at the last inspection, providing a ratio of computers to students of 1:6. This is almost double the number at the time of the last inspection, a ratio of computers to students of 1:4. Only half of these machines are connected to the college network, and not all are of a high specification, but the college has tried to ensure that students have access to machines appropriate to their need. One hundred and thirty computers are available as an 'open-access' facility for students and staff, located in dedicated rooms and libraries. Information learning technology facilities are underused at times and under pressure at others. Some students are confused about how to access facilities. Others are frustrated by the limitations of the hardware and software.

Cross-college Provision

72 Inspectors considered the college's libraries to be satisfactory. There is a library at each main centre, providing a total of 232 workspaces; 35 for quiet study. The concept of the multimedia learning environment is underdeveloped. The college's investment in library resources has declined since the last inspection, but is still good at £21 per full-time equivalent student. Most of the budget is allocated to divisions, but administered centrally. The bookstock for the various curriculum areas ranges from adequate to very good. Until very recently, there has been no forum which would enable formal, structured liaison between library and teachers.

73 Many steps have been taken to improve access for people with mobility difficulties. However, internal and external doors are still difficult to negotiate and there are long distances between facilities. Able-bodied students are often insensitive to their fellow students' needs, using facilities, such as lifts, which have been designated specifically for their use. Inspectors judged the obstacles faced by students with restricted mobility to be a weakness. The college tries to avoid some problems of access by changing timetables. There are good indoor social areas for students. These include well-maintained, supervised common rooms, a fast food court operated by hospitality and catering students at Oakwood Park, a health and fitness suite at City Way, and a tea-room for adult students at Horsted. However, there are no college-based facilities for outdoor sports.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

74 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that one strength had been overstated and identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- well-structured framework for quality assurance
- effective course review
- thorough self-assessment
- rigorous monitoring and assessment of franchised provision
- reliable data, supporting quality improvement

Weaknesses

- inconsistency in the quality and implementation of action plans
- incomplete development of quality standards for support areas
- insufficient benchmarking and moderation of lesson observations
- variability in the precision of target-setting

75 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that well-structured quality assurance procedures have been developed since the last inspection. Staff at all levels recognise the importance of continuous improvement and are committed to raising standards. The college's intentions are set out in a quality policy. Procedures for improving quality were reviewed, clarified and documented during the last academic year. They are clearly expressed in a quality manual, and managers' responsibilities for them have been defined. Modified procedures are used to assess and monitor franchised courses. All staff have copies of the manual, which is also readily available on the college intranet. Quality improvement is led by a quality manager and a team of seven co-ordinators. Appointed last year, they support the manager in the implementation of quality assurance procedures and monitoring compliance. The function of the academic board and its role in quality assurance is not clearly defined. The college intends to address this. It has created a number of committees

Cross-college Provision

concerned with assuring quality, including the academic standards committee, and these have clear terms of reference. They report to the academic board, but its activities are neither central to their role nor in assuring quality.

76 The college produced its third self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. It is underpinned by departmental and divisional reports, aggregated from detailed course reviews. The report was comprehensive, and evidence to substantiate strengths and weaknesses is clearly identified and carefully evaluated. Self-assessment, including that of governance, does not include external moderation or evaluation. Data on students' retention and achievements, used to support judgements, are accessible and reliable. Information obtained from two college-wide student surveys does not contribute directly to course self-assessment, and feedback to students is limited. Course teams use different approaches to ascertain their students' and employers' views. In some areas, parents and employers attend meetings to contribute to course reviews. Action plans to address weaknesses identified through self-assessment are of varying quality. The best are detailed, identify actions to improve teaching and learning, and are continuously used by course teams in monitoring progress and outcomes. Weaker examples do not identify appropriate actions for improvements in teaching and learning and monitoring lacks rigour. The college identified these weaknesses through its internal validation procedures. The quality co-ordinators support staff in achieving improvements.

77 Quality standards have been identified by all support services but are at different stages of development. They are not formally reviewed to ensure congruence with strategic and operational objectives. The college recognises that they are not consistently applied and monitored. Users of the services are not consulted in all cases. The college charter sets

out the college's commitments to students. Achievement of these commitments is monitored indirectly through student surveys, but there is no formal process for reviewing the college's performance against its charter commitments, or for reviewing the charter itself.

78 Students' achievements for all age groups at levels 1 and 2 have improved over a three-year period and are above national averages. For short and level 3 courses, adult achievement is above national averages. Achievement by 16 to 19 year old students has improved, and is at the national average. With the exception of retention rates for adult students on level 1 and short courses, retention overall has not improved over the last three years. It is at or below the national average. Target-setting is developing. Targets for improving students' retention and achievements are set at course and college level. Most of the aggregated, college level targets are met. Teams are inconsistent in the range of targets they use and the precision of the targets set varies considerably. There are different approaches to monitoring. Course targets are reviewed and re-stated during the academic year, depending on the performance of students. Predicted grades, based on students' results in GCSE examinations, are used as indicators of the general performance of GCE A level subjects. The use of predicted grades to raise standards and the performance of individual students is underdeveloped. The college recognises that target-setting is insufficiently used in the self-assessment process.

79 A formal internal lesson observation scheme has existed for two years. Teachers are supported where improvement is required. A central team of managers and teachers grades lessons, but the grades are not moderated or compared with national averages. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The percentage of lessons considered to be outstanding is significantly higher than these observed by inspectors.

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However, since the last inspection, the percentage of good and outstanding lessons has improved and it is now at the national average. A formal teacher appraisal scheme has been developed, although it is not informed by lesson observations. Training and development needs are identified and met. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1999.

Governance

Grade 3

80 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-qualified and experienced governors from a range of backgrounds
- good oversight of the college's financial position
- high level of informed debate and appropriate challenge
- effective induction and mentoring for new governors

Weaknesses

- insufficiently focused monitoring of progress towards strategic objectives
- inadequate monitoring of some aspects of college policies
- lack of a governors' training plan

81 The working relationship between governors and senior managers is good. The principal and chair of the corporation are in regular contact. The work of the corporation and general strategic issues are openly and informally discussed. Governors regularly receive well-written reports from college managers, but they do not require reports on key aspects of performance to be presented as part of a defined reporting cycle.

82 Arrangements for the induction of governors are good. New governors receive a detailed information pack and are assigned an experienced governor as mentor. There is no formal training needs analysis or training plan for governors. However, there is a skills audit and governors are encouraged to attend training. Some governors attend college events but links with the staff and students remain underdeveloped, a weakness identified in the last inspection. A plan to attach individual governors to curriculum divisions has recently been agreed.

83 The corporation has a determined membership of 19, comprising seven business governors, two staff governors, one student, two local authority nominees, three community nominees, three co-opted governors and the principal. At the time of inspection the corporation had no vacancies. Through a number of governor resignations, retirements and appointments, the corporation has completed its move to the new composition agreed in 1999. Governors have a wide range of experience and expertise. Inspectors agreed that governors are enthusiastic and committed and that the college benefits from their skills and experience.

84 The corporation has three established committees: audit, remuneration and search. Although this is a small number for the size of the college, the corporation believes that the model enables all governors to be fully involved in the corporation's business. Partly due to recent changes in composition of the corporation, only nine out of 19 governors serve on these committees. There are six corporation meetings a year. Governors' attendance at these and committee meetings is good, a significant improvement since the last inspection, when attendance was cited as a weakness.

85 Governors are generally well informed about the work of the college. All members of the senior management team attend corporation meetings. At each meeting, the principal

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provides a detailed written report, often the main agenda item. Periodically, other managers present detailed reports on finance, the curriculum, and quality and standards issues. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that governors pay careful attention to monitoring finances and that strategic issues are carefully considered. However, although there is generally good debate and challenge on issues raised, governors are sometimes overloaded with information. For example, heads of division all make lengthy presentations supported by detailed documentation at the same meeting. The corporation relies on full board meetings to monitor the college's quality and standards. College targets and course achievement statistics are reviewed in detail. The complexity of this information does not allow governors to consider all issues in sufficient detail in this forum. The college's self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

86 Progress towards the achievement of the strategic plan is monitored through reports to the corporation. However, the corporation does not require the college to produce a set of annual performance indicators for all aspects of its work and governors lack clear targets against which they can monitor progress. This leads to an over-reliance on management to ensure that developments are matched against strategic goals. The corporation does not receive reports on the implementation of key college policies, in such areas as student complaints and health and safety, except by exception in the principal's update. Governors considered their own section of the self-assessment report in detail and reviewed the overall college report at three corporation meetings.

87 Corporation business follows clear standing orders. Governors are required to signify their acceptance of the code of conduct in writing, and also to update the register of interests annually. Corporation minutes are available to the public and copies, without supporting

papers, are in the college libraries. The audit committee monitors the work of the internal and external auditors effectively. It has not prepared an annual report for the corporation for the last two years. Governors receive advice through its minutes. The work of the search committee in proposing new governors is good. The corporation recently appointed a part-time external clerk, a chartered secretary, to replace the current clerk, a member of senior management. The chair of governors formally appraised the principal for the first time last summer.

88 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

89 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but considered that one key weakness was omitted.

Key strengths

- effective, open and consultative management
- good financial management
- reliable management information systems
- productive and innovative range of external partnerships

Weaknesses

- lack of a clear operating plan, linked to strategic targets
- some protracted decision-making

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90 The college has made significant progress over the last two years. Management systems are good, communication is effective and students' achievements are steadily improving. The organisational structure is clear and well understood by staff. The senior management team has five members: the principal, three directors and the personnel manager. The director of curriculum manages both teaching divisions and the support services. Five curriculum and service area divisional heads lead teams of managers and co-ordinators. Accountability at all levels is clear. Staff speak positively about open and consultative management. The structure is kept under constant review. There are regular senior and middle management meetings at which strategic and operational matters are discussed. Working relationships are good. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that communication is effective. Ideas for improvement are positively encouraged by managers. The college's intranet is an increasingly useful medium for the exchange of views. A well-written and informative college newsletter is produced twice a term. Effective development days enable staff with different specialisms to meet and share ideas. A large number of part-time teachers attend.

91 Financial systems are good and appropriate attention is paid to financial management. The self-assessment report identified the effectiveness of annual budgeting and financial forecasting. Both are fully integrated with the strategic planning cycle. Projected costs attached to proposed course activities, staffing and capital requirements are carefully analysed. Within a yearly cycle, all managers are required to produce detailed business plans. The senior management team considers these, together with issues arising from self-assessment, and works with governors to produce an update of the strategic plan. Final budgets are allocated in October, after enrolments are known. The business planning

model is well developed and understood by staff. Although non-management staff are clear about the college's main strategic priorities, they are less aware of how they contribute to them. The college does not produce an annual operational plan or identify in sufficient detail clear targets referenced to the strategic plan. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

92 The senior management team meets every two weeks to review and discuss financial, operational and strategic matters. In relation to some aspects of capital expenditure and staffing, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that decision-making is sometimes protracted. The directors of curriculum and business development work together to consider new course proposals. New courses and funding streams are being introduced to replace around £9 million of income previously generated from distance learning. Owing to very poor students' achievements, the college discontinued this provision in August 2000.

93 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Despite the college's level of funding remaining below the sector average, the college has maintained the highest category of financial health recognised by the FEFC. Financial regulations have been updated and approved by the corporation. The internal auditors have not identified any significant concerns with the college's internal control systems. Although expenditure on staffing is carefully controlled, it is increasing and now represents over 70% of budget. Budgets for costs other than permanent staffing are delegated. Clear management accounts are produced monthly.

94 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that data on students' achievements are mainly accurate and reliable. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection. Staff have confidence in the data and managers regularly access student

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information in an electronic format. The college's intranet is developing as a major method to access data. Staff training in some areas of IT use has been slow. Course teams generally understand the importance of regularly monitoring student attendance, retention and achievement data.

95 Inspectors agreed that the college has extensive and productive links with external organisations. The college's commitment to widening student participation and developing a strong community focus is a key strategic objective. The college works in partnership with many other organisations. These include the Kent and Medway Widening Participation Steering Group; lifelong learning partnerships; the Royal School of Military Engineering; employer associations and other community groups. It has initiated a large number of projects. For example, it has established learning centres for personal development in locations such as a military barracks, a foyer and a local chamber of commerce. The latter is a University for Industry (Ufi) learndirect centre. The college is also part of a partnership, led by Medway Council, to provide centres of excellence for IT training.

96 There is an appropriate range of policies. Most are reviewed annually and monitoring is generally good. For example, the actions linked to the newest policy on tutoring are being systematically evaluated and deficiencies rectified. An equal opportunities committee meets regularly and the annual action plan is regularly monitored. The health and safety policy is clear and supported by a committee that conducts internal inspections and monitors accident reports.

Conclusions

97 The inspection team found that the college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. A detailed update to the report and

action plans was provided before the inspection to facilitate the work of inspectors. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, although they judged that some strengths, particularly in relation to teaching and learning, had been overstated. They also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. In one curriculum area inspected, inspectors awarded a higher grade than the college's self-assessment. In all of the other curriculum areas inspection findings were in accord with the self-assessment grades. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the cross-college grades in the self-assessment report. In this area, inspectors awarded a lower grade.

98 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 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	2
16-18 years	37
19-24 years	20
25+ years	41
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	7
Level 2 (intermediate)	27
Level 3 (advanced)	41
Level 4/5 (higher)	13
Level not specified	11
Non-schedule 2	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 2000)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	608	919	16
Agriculture	139	38	2
Construction	247	736	10
Engineering	161	657	8
Business	578	940	16
Hotel and catering	227	82	3
Health and community care	641	756	14
Art and design	459	83	6
Humanities	707	1,371	21
Basic education	183	211	4
Total	3,950	5,793	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 23% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	303	59	0	362
Supporting direct learning contact	95	0	0	95
Other support	190	0	0	190
Total	588	59	0	647

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£29,480,000	£29,679,000	£28,861,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£14.97*	£16.20*	£16.60
Payroll as a proportion of income	46%	44%	46%
Achievement of funding target	99%	91%	**
Diversity of income	54%	51%	48%
Operating surplus	-£844,000	-£212,000	-£188,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1998-99 (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

*provisional data

**not yet agreed with the FEFC

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	608	682	756	450	366	492
	Retention (%)	84	87	83	85	87	85
	Achievement (%)	58	79	85	58	67	76
2	Number of starters	2,330	2,498	2,178	1,174	1,222	1,436
	Retention (%)	79	77	77	76	72	75
	Achievement (%)	69	77	83	69	80	83
3	Number of starters	1,977	2,000	1,877	1,114	1,371	1,564
	Retention (%)	71	74	72	73	78	75
	Achievement (%)	63	65	75	73	75	79
4 or 5	Number of starters	64	23	34	602	414	474
	Retention (%)	75	91	82	69	85	80
	Achievement (%)	84	75	65	61	76	70
Short courses	Number of starters	350	471	781	1,417	1,740	5,084
	Retention (%)	89	88	84	75	92	95
	Achievement (%)	79	73	75	72	80	86
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	695	207	300	824	682	797
	Retention (%)	86	75	83	94	88	92
	Achievement (%)	21	45	68	85	79	93

Source: college

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