

Thanet College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Thanet College

South East Region

Inspected May 1998

Thanet College is a general further education college situated in north-east Kent. The Isle of Thanet area receives various European social and economic regeneration funds. A very high percentage of the college's students need additional learning support to complete their courses successfully. The college has produced an annual self-assessment report through its quality assurance system in each year since its last inspection. The process has involved all staff and governors. An interim self-assessment report prepared for the inspection indicated the progress made in addressing some of the weaknesses identified in the previous self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements but found that there was an insufficiently rigorous analysis of weaknesses in some instances.

The college offers courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The inspection covered provision in seven of these. The college is strongly managed and well governed. The strategic planning process is informed by widely-based market research. The college's partnership with the local community makes it a

key contributor to the continuing regeneration of the Isle of Thanet. The development of distance learning programmes has been particularly successful. Since the college was last inspected it has made good progress in most aspects of its provision. The quality of teaching and learning has improved, as have the arrangements for assessing quality and the admissions and guidance processes. There has been considerable investment in general resources, of which the open learning resource centre is a significant and valuable example. The college should continue to address: the quality of some teaching; poor examination results and low retention in some areas; take-up of additional learning support; ways of measuring the value added to students' experience at college; inconsistent interviewing and tutorial practice; and under-utilisation of its accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business	2	Quality assurance	2
Hotel and catering and leisure and tourism	2	Governance	1
Hair and beauty	2	Management	1
History, psychology, sociology and law	3		
Basic education	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Thanet College, Broadstairs, serves the north-eastern part of Kent. It offers a wide range of courses in all of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas for students of all abilities. Provision includes higher education programmes offered through franchise arrangements with Christ Church College, Canterbury. Thanet has a number of selective grammar and non-selective high schools, and five special schools for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Ninety per cent of 16 year olds at the college come from the non-selective schools and a high percentage of these and other students need additional learning support to complete their courses successfully. The grammar schools and three of the high schools have sixth forms, several of which offer courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced levels. There are two general further education colleges within a 20 miles radius of Thanet.

2 The local economy provides short-term, casual employment in the summer. Unemployment is very high in the winter. The unemployment rate of 9.3 per cent is double the national average. This pattern has persisted for a long time, and 41 per cent of those unemployed have been without work for more than 12 months. The college has worked closely with the district council in the development of Thanet, which has assisted area status, in securing funds for capital projects and specific training provision through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, objective 2.

3 In 1996-97, the college had 7,242 students, of whom 2,086 were full time. Of the 5,156 part-time students, 1,200 were enrolled on distance learning programmes. The college employs 288 full-time equivalent staff of whom 60 are support staff. It has three teaching

divisions and two divisions responsible for cross-college and central services.

4 The college's mission is to meet the needs of its customers by providing a broad range of relevant, high-quality and cost-effective learning opportunities in a supportive and stimulating environment. It defines its customers as the people of Thanet.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in the week beginning 11 May 1998. Inspectors had previously examined the college's self-assessment report and information on the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the years 1995 to 1997. The data were found to be generally reliable when checked against class registers and examining body pass lists.

6 Thirteen inspectors and an auditor spent 48 days in the college. Meetings were held with governors, managers, employers, heads of schools, community representatives, other college staff and students. Inspectors observed 102 lessons, which included work undertaken as part of a distance learning programme on a cross-channel ferry. They examined students' work and a variety of college documents.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 65 per cent were good or outstanding and 6 per cent less than satisfactory. These figures compare with average figures of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in

1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The profile of inspection grades is substantially better than that achieved by the college in its previous inspection. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 78 per cent, which is just above the sector average for 1996-97 according to the same report. The highest attendance rate (88 per cent) was in business and the lowest (73 per cent) in social sciences, hairdressing and beauty therapy. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	3	4	3	0	10
GCSE	0	5	1	0	0	6
GNVQ	0	6	4	0	0	10
NVQ	8	13	5	1	0	27
Other vocational	4	10	8	2	0	24
Other, including access to higher education	2	6	2	0	0	10
Basic education	2	7	6	0	0	15
Total	16	50	30	6	0	102

Curriculum Areas

Computing

Grade 2

8 Inspectors observed 13 classes covering the range and level of courses in computing. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses, although there were some instances where the emphases given to these varied.

Key strengths

- pass rates generally above the national average
- improved retention rates on most courses
- the high quality of students' assignment presentations, particularly on the access course
- tailor-made courses for local employers
- some good teaching
- good monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- retention on the BTEC national courses
- lack of agreed assessment criteria on the BTEC national courses
- inadequate planning in some lessons

9 The college has expanded its range of full-time and part-time computing courses over the past two to three years, to meet the needs of the local community. The development of distance learning packages has been part of this process. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment, that links with local industry are good. Employers speak highly of the responsiveness of the computing section and its willingness to provide programmes specifically tailored to their needs. Inspectors observed good teaching on a course devised to develop new skills in computing for employees of a local firm who were being made redundant.

10 All the lessons observed were at least satisfactory, and in half, the strengths clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The best teaching was in a lesson on the access to higher education course, where students' skills in using a specific computing package for presenting results, and their rigorous analysis of data were of a high standard. Good lessons were thoroughly planned. Teachers made clear to students the learning objectives of the tasks they were undertaking. Students worked effectively and confidently and teachers gave them appropriate support to enable them to find solutions to problems. Students with hearing impairments were particularly well supported. Assignments were appropriately challenging and assessment criteria were clear. The monitoring of students' progress has been strengthened by the introduction of a 'grade tracking grid', developed in response to a weakness identified through self-assessment. In less good lessons, teachers' plans were often no more than lists of topics; the purpose of tasks was unclear to students and some were making slow progress. Revision tasks were not demanding enough for the more able students, who did nothing for parts of the lessons. Assessment criteria for assignments on BTEC national courses were unclear and this led to some generous marking, a matter not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

11 The work of many of the students was well presented and the standards achieved were high. Retention rates have generally improved over the last three years especially on the intermediate level courses. The low retention on the BTEC national courses in computing was acknowledged in the self-assessment report and the national diploma programme has been replaced by the GNVQ advanced level course. Pass rates on the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 programmes in information technology (IT) were well above the national average in 1997, at 92

Curriculum Areas

per cent and 85 per cent, respectively. Those on other courses are around or just above the national average. In 1995 and 1996, pass rates on GNVQ intermediate IT were substantially lower than the national average. They are now just above average and the retention rate is much better.

12 Teachers are well qualified. Those observed as part of the college's classroom observation scheme scored highly on the scale, which rates each teacher's performance. The computing section is well resourced and students are able to gain ready access to the workstations in the new open learning resource centre.

Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	63	66	81
	Pass rate (%)	42	32	66
NVQ level 2 IT	Retention (%)	*	64	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	89	85
GCSE IT	Retention (%)	54	60	75
	Pass rate (%)	100	92	92
Access IT and mathematics	Retention (%)	64	27	56
	Pass rate (%)	57	67	60
BTEC national certificate computing	Retention (%)	*	31	54
	Pass rate (%)	*	78	86
BTEC national diploma computing	Retention (%)	75	46	47
	Pass rate (%)	96	100	87

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

13 Inspectors observed 10 lessons, covering the range of provision in engineering. They agreed with most of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report. They also identified some weaknesses not covered in the report.

Key strengths

- improving pass and retention rates on most courses
- good industrial links
- the creation of realistic work environments
- skilled use of question and answer techniques in lessons
- some high-quality facilities
- effective management of courses

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on intermediate vocational courses
- some inadequate schemes of work
- some poorly-structured lessons

14 The college offers an appropriate range of full-time and part-time courses at intermediate and advanced levels in motor, mechanical and electrical engineering. Full-time students are also able to study additional courses to provide them with better opportunities for progression. Inspectors agreed with the college that NVQ programmes are well structured and that close links with local companies, recently developed through Thanet Employment Training Initiative, improve the quality of work placements available to students. A significant number of students undergo training at the workplace for a variety of engineering-related NVQs, on a distance learning basis. Engineering courses are well managed, a strength not identified in

the self-assessment report. Meetings are scheduled regularly and are well documented. Action plans have deadlines for implementation.

15 Teaching in engineering is generally sound. In the better lessons teachers gave clear explanations of the topic and the learning to be achieved from set tasks. They used question and answer techniques skilfully, drawing all students into discussion, and making effective use of their own and the students' experience. The quality of handouts was good. A strong emphasis is placed on safety. Students studying motor vehicle NVQs not only work on college vehicles, they also work on cars owned by the college's staff, thus operating in a realistic simulated work environment in which they discuss problems with owners, order any necessary parts, complete repairs, and handle the necessary payments. On the Thanet Employment Training Initiative course students clock in and out. Assignment briefs on BTEC programmes clearly state the tasks required and the date by which the work must be completed. Some schemes of work are no more than lists of topics, a weakness overlooked by the college. In a minority of lessons, teachers failed to ensure that all students were engaged in relevant activities. Some lessons were poorly structured and students were not clear what was expected of them.

16 Students on the GNVQ intermediate programme have successfully assembled an electrically powered model car. This has been used as a 'vehicle' for a range of assignments within the course, and the knowledge gained has motivated students to put forward ideas for improvements in its design. Retention rates in 1997 were close to the national average recorded in the FEFC's curriculum survey report on engineering. In the previous two years, however, there were large fluctuations. For example, in 1995 the retention rate on NVQ programmes was 73 per cent, but in 1996 it fell to 54 per cent. Pass rates on advanced vocational programmes showed a notable

Curriculum Areas

improvement, increasing from 20 per cent in 1995 to 71 per cent in 1997. The pass rates for intermediate vocational courses were poor, at 42 per cent in 1995 and 38 per cent in 1996, after which the courses did not run. These low rates and the closure of the courses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. NVQ pass rates have improved from 36 per cent in 1995 to 65 per cent in 1997. All students completing the NVQ programme have subsequently secured employment.

17 Teachers are appropriately qualified for the courses they deliver. Some have been appointed with recent industrial experience. Others, although they have substantial industrial experience, have not updated their expertise. The mechanical workshop has recently been refurbished and equipped with five new milling machines and two new lathes. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that this provides a high-quality and well-organised facility. In contrast, the motor vehicle workshop is cluttered and the electronics laboratory provides a drab environment. The computer suite is a modern bright facility, but would benefit from improved ventilation.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	31	61	70
	Pass rate (%)	20	64	71
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	86	57	*
	Pass rate (%)	42	38	*
NVQ levels 2 and 3	Retention (%)	73	54	72
	Pass rate (%)	36	64	65

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed 24 lessons covering business studies, administration and secretarial studies. They generally agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses, but considered that the strengths attributed to teaching and learning were overstated.

Key strengths

- good, well-planned teaching
- well-designed support systems
- very good links with employers
- the provision of distance learning programmes
- well-managed work experience within business courses
- pass rates in secretarial studies and on National Examination Board for Supervision and Management courses
- good course management and communication

Weaknesses

- some poor classroom management
- poor retention rates on some courses
- the variable quality of schemes of work and lesson plans

19 Courses are effectively managed. Course documentation is thorough and tracking systems effective. Course teams meet regularly to monitor progress, to identify where action is required and to see that actions are followed through. Policies and procedures for checking attendance are well developed. Systems for recruitment, induction and on-course support are clearly understood and valued by students. Students from abroad mix well with other students, and speak highly of their courses and the pastoral care. The business division has

very good working relationships with employers, who describe the college as 'responsible, flexible and innovative in bringing the college to the workplace'. Distance learning programmes have expanded rapidly and inspectors agreed that they are very successful in providing a flexible mode of study for many students.

20 Most of the teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers set the topic or activity to be covered in the context of previous learning, so that students understood the relevance of what they were to do. Students received clear explanations of the topic to be covered and clear instructions for the practical work to be undertaken. Teachers engaged students' interest and attention using a variety of teaching methods: for example, addressing the class, developing class discussion and organising work in small groups. Students responded with enthusiasm, particularly when their own experience and knowledge was used to develop and clarify concepts. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that business studies students benefit from a well-organised work experience programme which supports the teaching and learning taking place in college. Most lessons were appropriately planned and structured although learning objectives were not always identified clearly. In a few lessons, the explanation of the topic was laborious; some students lost interest and concentration and the teacher did not cover all the material. In other lessons, not all students were fully engaged in their work or the teacher allowed a few students to dominate discussion. Some teachers allowed insufficient time for students to reflect before responding to questions.

21 Students' work is of a good standard and portfolios are well organised. Students' assignments are appropriately assessed and the marking of work is supportive. Students' IT skills are well developed. Examination results are generally good apart from results for the NVQ level 2 in administration in 1995 and 1996. Retention is poor in some areas, notably on the

Curriculum Areas

GNVQ advanced course in business, a point acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Pass rates are good in secretarial studies; out of a total of 638 entries in 1997, 49 per cent achieved a distinction and the pass rate was 87 per cent. The NVQ administration by distance learning course achieved a 96 per cent pass rate. In 1997, 15 groups were enrolled for the National Examination Board for Supervision and Management foundation course against a target of five. There was a 100 per cent pass and retention rate on the office skills certificate course introduced in 1997.

22 All classrooms are well equipped with overhead projectors, whiteboards and generous desk space. Students have very good access to IT, commercially-used software, CD-ROMs and the internet through the open learning resource centre. Staff are well qualified in relation to their subjects and all have achieved training and development lead body assessor awards.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced business	Retention (%)	*	64	36
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	80
GNVQ intermediate business	Retention (%)	69	90	75
	Pass rate (%)	88	74	80
BTEC national diploma business	Retention (%)	72	*	71
	Pass rate (%)	94	*	100
NVQ level 2 administration	Retention (%)	75	63	76
	Pass rate (%)	35	31	59
RSA secretarial skills diploma	Retention (%)	88	74	91
	Pass rate (%)	82	96	87
Office skills certificate	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering and Leisure and Tourism

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 15 lessons covering the provision in hospitality and catering and leisure and tourism. These included progress tutorials for employees of a major national employer undertaking distance learning programmes on a cross-channel ferry. Inspectors confirmed the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- an extensive range of courses with well-designed documentation
- sound management
- well-planned teaching providing a broad range of methods of learning
- well-managed internal assessment and verification procedures
- good specialist resources
- extensive distance learning provision
- comprehensive industrial links

Weaknesses

- a small number of poorly-planned lessons
- poor and declining retention rates on some courses
- poor attendance on several courses

24 The college offers a wide range of courses, from NVQs at level 1 to a higher national diploma in catering management, which provides good progression routes for students. Professional and short courses supplement the full-time provision. The section has successfully developed an extensive distance learning programme for a national employer and inspectors agreed that this is a significant strength. The hospitality and business division

comprises three distinct curriculum sections, all of which are well managed. Communication across the division is good and managers meet regularly. Teaching and learning are supported by well-designed course documentation. There are active links with a wide range of employers and businesses. This network enhances the work placement programme undertaken by students, many of whom are offered employment as a direct result of their work placement.

25 Inspectors agreed that teaching and learning is well managed, giving wide opportunities for portfolio assessment. On the more advanced courses, students achieved a good level of competence and worked with little guidance from teachers. In other practical classes, staff frequently gave good skills demonstrations. Help was often provided by learning support staff, who ensured students received individual tuition where appropriate. Students are well tutored on all courses and their progress carefully monitored. In a minority of lessons, the pace of work was laboured and information was delivered in an uninteresting manner so that students lost concentration. In one lesson students were unable to access information on the internet and the time was wasted. Levels of attendance are a cause for concern on the hotel reception course, the national diploma in hotel and catering operations, and GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism. The college acknowledges the problem and is seeking to address it. In contrast, there were good levels of attendance on the practical craft courses.

26 Students receive well-written assignment briefs which highlight the key skills being developed and the criteria for grading. Their work is of a good standard; some of it is excellent. Portfolios of evidence on NVQ courses are thorough and well presented, frequently containing photographic evidence. Of particular note are the excellent standards achieved by distance learning students. Assignments and

Curriculum Areas

coursework are returned promptly with full and detailed comments. Assessment and internal verification are well managed. In practical catering sessions, students showed their well-developed skills and worked with due consideration to hygiene and health and safety. On the advanced level courses, pass rates are at or above the national averages. The pass rate for NVQ level 3 advanced craft kitchen work was 11 per cent above the national average in 1996 but dropped below in 1997. Leisure and tourism courses show an improving pass rate, but retention on the advanced level course is poor. Retention rates on many courses are unacceptably low. These features are set out in the college's self-assessment report and a strategy for improvement has been implemented during the academic year 1997-98.

27 The quality of accommodation is generally good. Extensive kitchens and support areas provide realistic working environments. The college catering service is managed by the

division and enables students to extend their skills in three service areas. A new travel agency has been opened in association with a local travel company. A wide range of appropriate equipment and resources are available to support the teaching and well-qualified teachers are assisted by a full range of support staff. Over 90 per cent of teachers, and the support staff working with them, hold assessor awards.

Examples of students' achievements in hotel and catering and leisure and tourism, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	*	62	39
	Pass rate (%)	*	69	100
NVQ level 3 hotel and catering	Retention (%)	88	80	93
	Pass rate (%)	41	90	69
BTEC national diploma catering	Retention (%)	44	25	48
	Pass rate (%)	91	75	70
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	64	42	81
	Pass rate (%)	63	50	70
NVQ level 2 hotel and catering	Retention (%)	71	67	64
	Pass rate (%)	73	82	90
Hotel reception, hospitality and tourism	Retention (%)	53	57	29
	Pass rate (%)	30	54	67

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hair and Beauty

Grade 2

28 Thirteen classes covering all aspects of hairdressing and beauty therapy were observed. Inspectors generally endorsed the findings of the college's self-assessment report. A few additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- the contribution of work experience to students' learning
- good tutorial support
- efficient and effective management
- the good practical skills which most students develop
- a good client base
- the recording and monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- poor retention and pass rates on some courses
- the lack of attention to professional standards in a few lessons
- lack of variety in teaching and learning methods in some lessons

29 The college offers an appropriate range of full-time courses leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. It has extended its range of beauty therapy provision to include complementary and sports therapy courses. A three-year hair and beauty course is offered on which students gain NVQ level 2 in hairdressing and NVQ level 3 in beauty therapy. The section is well managed. Course teams maintain detailed course files. Recording of students' progress is thorough. The staff are fully involved in decisions affecting the organisation and development of courses and have positive working relationships with

students. Work in tutorials is both supportive and challenging. These strengths are recorded in the self-assessment report.

30 Overall the quality of teaching is good. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that schemes of work are well developed and make clear links between theory and practical work. Students develop good practical skills. The pace at which they develop their competences is increased by the good range of clients in both hairdressing and beauty therapy. Students are encouraged to work on their own initiative and they participate enthusiastically in most practical lessons. In the best lessons, there is an insistence on professional standards. Work experience is well planned and well monitored and it makes a valuable contribution to students' learning. Lesson plans are thorough and lead to well-structured activities which help students to make progress. Theoretical lessons are generally delivered in a style which engages students' interest and emphasises the vocational relevance of the concepts being studied. Visual aids, handouts and the resources available in the salons where students work are used effectively. Good use is made of case studies. In one lesson, students were given individual hair swatches to test and analyse, and then produce a report on the results. They entered into this work with enthusiasm and were enthralled when they came to understand its implications for their practical work in the salon.

31 In some lessons, learning activities lacked variety. In one class an extended talk by the teacher failed to excite students' interest and they eventually stopped listening. Another lesson was badly planned and students wasted time waiting for clients. In a few lessons, students did not observe professional standards and this was not picked up by the teacher.

32 Some of the IT skills demonstrated by students in their assignments and portfolios are outstanding. Files and portfolios are of a good

Curriculum Areas

standard and well organised. The college recognises in its self-assessment that there have been poor retention and pass rates on some courses, particularly hairdressing courses and the three-year hair and beauty course. Pass rates and retention rates on other beauty and complementary therapy courses are generally good. In 1997, the complementary therapies programme achieved a 100 per cent pass rate and there was an excellent retention rate of 94 per cent. The recently-introduced strategy to improve retention rates has had a considerable impact on all courses when this year's figures are compared with the figures for the same time last year. Over the past three years there has been a general improvement in pass rates on all courses, with the exception of the NVQ level 2 in hairdressing.

33 Teachers are well qualified. They have appropriate commercial experience and there are regular opportunities for them to update skills. Specialist accommodation has been refurbished and resources improved to provide

an adequate realistic working environment. However, accommodation for the sports therapy courses is too cramped for the full range of practical work.

Examples of students' achievements in hair and beauty, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 3 beauty therapy	Retention (%)	100	83	82
	Pass rate (%)	73	90	93
NVQ level 2 hairdressing	Retention (%)	83	72	75
	Pass rate (%)	53	92	58
Hair and beauty (three year)	Retention (%)	72	47	54
	Pass rate (%)	63	76	80
Complementary therapies	Retention (%)	*	91	94
	Pass rate (%)	*	79	100
Sports therapy	Retention (%)	*	81	88
	Pass rate (%)	*	77	87

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

History, Psychology, Sociology and Law

Grade 3

34 Inspectors observed 13 classes covering general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCSE and access to higher education courses in history, sociology, psychology and law. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- thorough lesson planning and detailed schemes of work
- organisation and management of teaching and learning
- students' command of academic and technical language

Weaknesses

- poor retention on most courses
- teachers' lack of attention to the range of students' abilities
- lack of variety in learning methods

35 Teaching and learning are well organised and well managed. The range and possible combinations of GCE A level and GCSE subjects has been adjusted to meet new market demands. Systems for pastoral care, discipline and the guidance offered to students are effectively integrated. Course teams meet regularly; messages from management and curriculum leaders are considered, and there is discussion on how to respond to students' concerns. Meetings are not frequent enough to address curriculum development needs adequately.

36 Overall the teaching in social sciences was sound. Lessons are generally well planned and some schemes of work are outstanding in the

level of detail they provide. In the best lessons, there is a pace and momentum to the work which sustains students' interest, carries their studies forward and ensures good coverage of syllabuses. As the self-assessment report indicates, teachers are skilled at preparing students for the requirements of examinations and assessments, and at introducing students to academic and technical language. There are supportive and purposeful relations between teachers and students which encourage many students to contribute to discussions on the rare occasions that these take place. Teachers monitor attendance and punctuality, and students are challenged about absences and lateness.

37 Most lessons lack variety. The learning needs of students are not sufficiently accommodated. In a number of lessons principle activities are listening, responding to questions and copying notes. In no lessons were students encouraged to make their own notes. Opportunities to encourage students to think for themselves were largely ignored. In devising class activities and developing concepts, teachers fail to make use of students' existing knowledge and skills. With the exception of the teaching of examination techniques there was no evidence of teachers helping students to develop study skills. These weaknesses in teaching were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

38 The quality of students' written work, projects and coursework is generally satisfactory. Examination performance is at, or above, the national average for two of the GCSE subjects and three of the GCE A level subjects. The pass rate in sociology in 1996-97 was 100 per cent. However, the aggregate pass rate for GCSE and GCE A level in the four subjects, 1996-97, was at the national average, a 74 per cent pass rate at GCE A level and a 39 per cent pass rate for GCSE. The retention rate is poor: 65 per cent for GCSE courses and 54 per cent for GCE A level courses. Only in GCE A level

Curriculum Areas

history did the retention rate reach within 10 per cent of the national average retention rate for GCE A levels in further education (86 per cent). Retention rates have slightly improved in 1997-98. The college had not analysed the GCE A level and GCSE results by individual subject in a way which would give managers and inspectors a detailed picture of students' achievements in the social sciences being inspected. The process of self-assessment was inadequate in this respect.

39 Teachers are effectively deployed. All are qualified to first degree level and a number possess or are studying for postgraduate qualifications. The curriculum area is well resourced, and there is easy access to a range of equipment and learning materials. Teachers are skilled in developing their own resources.

Examples of students' achievements in history, psychology, sociology and law, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Access to higher education	Retention (%)	72	68	65
	Pass rate (%)	68	81	63
GCE A level	Retention (%)	67	67	54
	Pass rate (%)	61	58	74
GCSE	Retention (%)	78	56	65
	Pass rate (%)	49	49	39

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 2

40 Inspectors observed 14 lessons in the programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- some good or outstanding teaching
- well-planned provision
- good levels of achievement
- a successful café run by the students
- some well-designed visual material

Weaknesses

- some activities and teaching methods which do not meet students' needs
- the structure of the college foundation course
- aspects of part-time provision for adults

41 Provision for students with learning difficulties is well planned. The college offers three parallel routes through which full-time students can acquire the skills for entry to an NVQ level 1 course or employment. This structure has been planned to ensure the success of students who learn at different speeds or who need a different range of skills.

42 Students learn effectively in response to some good or outstanding teaching. The college acknowledges strengths in teaching in its self-assessment report. The best lessons were well planned and practical. A lesson about menstruation was clear and effective. The teacher used sanitary pads, tampons and coloured water to demonstrate how they worked. The students were able to identify what they had learned in the lesson and recalled information from previous sessions. In a

catering lesson, more able students worked independently. They were confident and safe in the kitchen and demonstrated considerable skill in chopping vegetables. They were unobtrusively assessed on aspects of basic food hygiene as part of this session. In some lessons, however, the activities being undertaken, or the teaching methods used, did not fully meet students' needs. The demand which is placed on some students, to produce work on paper for a portfolio for accreditation, detracts from their learning.

43 The college justifiably claims that students with learning difficulties gain in confidence and competence as a result of their courses. Those who enter college on the life skills programmes learn appropriate skills for everyday living and extend these as they develop skills for employability. Students from the two-year prevocational programme progress appropriately into higher level courses or gain employment where opportunities are available. Those students who complete the college foundation course, which is intended for disaffected young people who have not succeeded at school, move on to higher level courses or employment which would previously not have been possible for them. Students on the specially supported NVQ level 1 courses are achieving full awards, or units of the full award, in accordance with their abilities.

44 The café run by students with learning difficulties is a particularly successful resource for the development of prevocational and vocational skills. Students with different levels of ability and skills benefit from the range of roles which they are able to undertake. At peak times the demands on students are similar to those of a fully commercial café. At quieter times, less competent students can develop or rehearse their skills. Staff have produced some well-designed visual material for informing and teaching students. They make good use of photographs, line drawings and computer graphics. Both teachers and the classroom

Curriculum Areas

support staff are well informed and enthusiastic, with a positive attitude to developing the quality of the provision.

45 The college has identified weaknesses in the way in which the current college foundation course meets students' needs. Attendance and retention are unsatisfactory. Key skills are not integrated with the students' vocational programmes and the time allocated to vocational work is too limited. Plans are well under way for a more appropriate college foundation course to be offered from September 1998.

46 Currently nearly 200 adult students attend part-time courses. Many have more severe learning difficulties than the students on full-time courses. Where appropriate, courses are offered on the college site. Other locations include day centres run by the department of social services to suit the convenience of students. The provision has grown up in response to local demand. Although the range of courses is good and students enjoy their classes, aspects of this provision are not fully effective. The work is not co-ordinated and curriculum development has lagged behind growth. The college has recognised these weaknesses.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

47 Inspectors generally confirmed the college's assessment of its support for students, but identified some weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- arrangements for students' recruitment, admissions and guidance
- the high quality of careers and welfare advice and personal counselling
- comprehensive induction into the college's central support services
- effective learning support to meet individual students' needs
- support in class for students with physical disabilities

Weaknesses

- availability of careers and counselling staff
- take-up of additional learning support
- inconsistent practice in interviewing, course induction and tutorials

48 The college in its self-assessment report recognises the strength of its centralised guidance and admissions procedures. Policies and procedures are clear. Admissions, careers and counselling staff are situated in an attractive and accessible building. The centre is well used and valued by staff and students. Publicity materials are clear and informative. Open events and good liaison with local schools, including special schools, ensure that students are generally well informed about the college before applying. Admissions staff deal quickly with all applications and make efficient arrangements for interviews with teachers. Students who are unsure of what they want to do or who apply for inappropriate courses are interviewed by admissions staff. There is no

central monitoring of interview procedures. Practice varies and students reported that some interviews were brief. Students who fail to gain a place on the course for which they are interviewed are referred back to admissions staff, who make an appointment for a further interview. This is inefficient, especially since there is no standard form for recording the outcomes of interviews. This weakness was not identified by the college.

49 Most students receive a comprehensive induction into the college and central support services, which helps them to settle in quickly. A student diary reinforces information about college services and facilities and includes college policy statements, the students' agreement and local information on sources of help. Most students receive a helpful introduction to their course. A small percentage of them either did not receive any induction or did not find it useful.

50 The self-assessment report identifies the high quality of careers and personal counselling, but recognises that the staffing levels limit the service the college offers. Students sometimes experience undesirably long delays in making appointments to see the counsellor. The college has attempted to alleviate the problem by providing a separate counselling service for staff. The careers service currently delivers two days' careers advice each week for students aged 16 to 18 and the college employs a careers adviser for two and a half days a week. The careers centre is well stocked with careers information and useful materials for tutors to use with students applying to higher education or seeking employment.

51 One of the college's objectives is 'to provide extensive academic and pastoral support for all enrolled students'. The self-assessment report makes no overall judgement of the support given by tutors though some curriculum reports recognise a need to improve tutorials. Each division is responsible for organising a tutorial programme. Most students have a personal

Cross-college Provision

tutor and all full-time and many part-time students have a timetabled tutorial. Tutors show strong commitment to their students, who speak highly of the support from, and availability of, their tutors. Tutorials observed by inspectors were generally well planned and effective. Group tutorials are often followed by arrangements to see individual students to monitor progress. Despite the importance attached to tutorial support in the retention strategy, there is little overall monitoring of its quality. Tutors have different perceptions of their role and there is some inconsistent practice in the delivery of tutorials. The training planned for group tutors should help to define roles and responsibilities and encourage the sharing of good practice.

52 The self-assessment report identifies effective learning support as a strength and the strategic plan mentions inclusive learning. Efficient and sensitive methods are used to identify students who need support before they enter the college. The 'integrated support team' includes specialists in dyslexia and hearing impairment. All are experienced and well qualified. In 1996-97 they provided for 386 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, giving individual support and working with groups in and outside the classroom. Students with hearing impairment and other disabilities receive effective support to enable them to participate in lessons. Student support staff also train teachers to work more effectively with these students. The service is carefully monitored by analysing the retention rates and achievements of students receiving support and the perceptions of the staff and students who are involved. Tests are used to identify the need for additional support for all full-time students on courses up to and including level 2. Out of 867 students screened in September 1997, 83 per cent were identified as needing some support. By the time of the inspection, however, only 53 per cent had accepted the support. The monitoring of

students' performance, 1996-97, indicates that those who received support were much more likely to complete their course and achieve the qualification for which they were aiming. Learning support staff are devising strategies to encourage greater use of their services.

General Resources

Grade 2

53 Inspectors generally confirmed the college's judgement about the strengths of its general resources, but considered that the college did not clearly identify its weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the open learning resource centre
- maintenance of accommodation and its adaptation to changing need
- the student guidance and admissions centre
- management of college resources
- students' facilities

Weaknesses

- space utilisation
- some poor teaching accommodation

54 The main college is located on an attractive site close to the centre of Broadstairs, and was developed in the grounds of a nineteenth-century convalescent home. Buildings are of varying ages, styles and quality. A large four-storey building with a decorative stone facade is the college administrative centre. It also houses some workshops and classrooms which are of variable quality, and a student centre. Three smaller buildings of similar age are also used. One, a large detached residence, is being adapted to make it suitable for painting and decorating courses. Another, much poorer flint house, is used to teach English as a foreign language (EFL). The third, the former caretaker's lodge, has been attractively

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converted and extended to become the guidance and admissions centre. The most recent addition to the building stock is a new, curved, glass-fronted open learning resource centre. Access to most parts of the college for students with mobility problems is good, apart from the general education block. The steep slopes of the site, however, make movement difficult for some.

55 In Margate, the college owns old school buildings close to the town centre. These are of poor quality. Only a few courses are now offered there and the college plans to vacate these buildings at the end of the college year. Most of the college's accommodation is good. Most teaching takes place in modern blocks, which are flexibly used and which provide a good learning environment. Rooms are clean, well furnished and equipped with teaching aids. Room utilisation is low, at about 40 per cent, but will slightly improve when the Margate annexe is vacated. The college did not identify the poor quality of some of its accommodation or low space utilisation as weaknesses in its self-assessment report although these issues are clearly addressed in its accommodation strategy. There is a good rolling maintenance programme.

56 Inspectors agreed with the college that the use of students to effect improvements to the college facilities can be beneficial. Carpentry and joinery students build and adapt accommodation for new use when their course or assessment programme permits. For example, carpentry students are currently modifying the interior of one building so that it can be used for painting and decorating courses. Seven students, under the management of a site foreman, built the new children's centre, a wood-built nursery in alpine style. Teachers' staff rooms are generally good although some are too small. The college has good student refectories and communal areas. There are two student centres, one that serves snacks throughout the day, the other equipped as a

games room. Two comfortable student meeting areas have also been arranged in one of the refectories.

57 The new open learning resource centre is an attractive and valuable addition in the centre of the campus. It has become a focal point for students and the use of services previously provided by the library has increased significantly since its opening. During the week of the inspection, groups of students waited each day for the centre to open, and it was full for most of the time. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the learning resource centre is a strength. The 35,000 books, together with an extensive range of other resources including journals, CD-ROM, and video and audio tape recordings, provide a good learning resource. Library staff have assembled over 2,500 specialist information files to support students in their assignments and project work. The annual library budget of almost £44,000 is good. There are 150 silent study spaces, 40 of them equipped with computers providing access to an extensive range of software. Four machines are currently connected to the internet. Links between the library and curriculum areas are generally good. All new course approval proposals are required to show evidence of consultations about the library resources required to support the course. Teachers are encouraged to check the range and quality of the books in their areas each year. The library now also issues course text books which were previously the responsibility of course leaders.

58 The college has 425 computers, 307 of which are available to students. This provides an approximate ratio of one computer to 9.5 students. There are 50 computers available to students on demand, 40 of them in the open learning resource centre. All other computers are located in the teaching divisions. There are sufficient computers to meet most demands although at peak times all machines in the open learning resource centre are in use. Inspectors

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agreed with the college's assessment that the management and use of computing resources is a strength. All computers are on one network and most software is available on each machine. The college management information system is integrated with the college network. All college managers are able to access management information on their networked machines.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- the well-managed quality assurance process
- the annual course reporting and triennial course review system
- the supportive and rigorous system of lesson observation
- service level agreements for support and cross-college services
- the annual appraisal of all staff
- a well-organised staff training programme

Weaknesses

- an inadequate focus on students' achievements
- minimal work on measuring the value added to students' achievements
- limited contributions from employers and parents

60 The college has made considerable progress in improving its arrangements for assuring quality since the last inspection. Its quality assurance system covers curriculum and support areas. The process is well managed.

The procedures are clearly described and well understood by staff. Annual course reports, which include action points, are completed by course teams. Reports vary in the detail and analysis provided but they are generally good. Results of questionnaires completed by the students at the beginning, middle and end of their courses are collated and actions taken as appropriate. The mid-course questionnaire includes ratings for individual lecturers. Courses are also subject to a detailed review on a triennial basis. Both course reports and course reviews include an overall grade using inspectorate criteria. Action plans are carefully monitored to see that they are being implemented. The college acknowledges the limited contributions of parents and employers to the quality assurance process.

61 Targets for recruitment, retention and achievement are set for the college as a whole and for individual courses. Retention rates in the current year are showing an improvement on 1996-97. Course action plans sometimes include specific measures intended to improve students' achievements, but whole-college strategies are undeveloped. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The college currently undertakes a value-added analysis of GCE A level examination results in which the total value-added scores in one year are compared with those of the previous year or years. The analysis is of limited use as it does not measure the value added in individual GCE A level subjects, nor provide a comparison with value-added results from other institutions. The college's self-assessment report identifies its intention to extend its system for measuring value added to other courses.

62 Students are generally unaware of the existence of the college charter. A summary is on display in the guidance and admission centre, where copies may be obtained. No reference is made to the charter in pre-course information, in the diaries issued to all students, or during induction. Students are made aware

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of the college's complaints procedure during induction, and details are also provided in the diaries. A committee of students, with representatives from across the college, spends much of its time discussing quality issues. Its recommendations have led to improvements in pre-course information and the design of student questionnaires.

63 The college has produced a self-assessment report annually since its first inspection in 1994, and has linked this activity to the quality assurance system. The process involves all members of staff, and the governors assess governance through their committees. As it was some time since the last self-assessment report was written, the college prepared a summary of progress on action plans in the current year, and an interim self-assessment report covering those areas being inspected. In an extensive and thorough process, section heads produced curriculum area self-assessment reports based largely on their course reports, while cross-college self-assessment reports were produced by the appropriate managers. The main report is informed only in a general way by evidence from lesson observations. In some instances it lacks a clear and rigorous analysis of weaknesses.

64 Nearly all cross-college and support sections have developed service level agreements setting out services to be provided, timescales and monitoring arrangements. Significant quality improvements have already occurred as a result. The college's commitment to continuous quality improvement is demonstrated by its achievement of the Investor in People award in 1997, the Basic Skills Agency quality mark in 1998, and the Positive about Disabled People award, also in 1998. There is a well-established and effective system of annual staff review and development interviews through which all staff are appraised and training needs identified. An extensive annual training programme is organised. It is closely monitored, and reviewed and revised at

frequent intervals.

65 Inspectors agreed that the system of classroom observation which has been in operation over the past 18 months is rigorous and supportive. Detailed and constructive feedback is provided to individual teachers and their line managers. Teachers are generally positive about the value of the observations and the feedback they receive. Various activities such as best practice lunches and best practice training sessions have been organised. Observations have not so far included tutorials. A mentoring system is being developed to support newly-appointed or failing staff.

Governance

Grade 1

66 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths of governance.

Key strengths

- the experience and expertise of governors
- the well-planned consultation exercise on the future strategic direction of the college
- the efficient conduct of corporation business
- the commitment of governors to continuous improvement
- effective monitoring of the college's finances by governors
- an effective audit committee

Weaknesses

- poor attendance by a few governors

67 The corporation has a membership of 15. Inspectors agreed with the claim in the self-assessment report that the college benefits from the considerable experience and expertise of governors: this includes finance, property, law, higher and secondary education, human

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resource management, public administration and service. There is no student governor. Students, at their own request, meet governors from time to time through the college student liaison group which is also attended by senior managers.

68 Governors are knowledgeable about the challenges which the college faces. They are clear about the mission of the college and ensure through their activities that this vision is translated into a continuously improving response to the education and training needs of the community. Governors are committed to the college, they understand their role of stewardship and observe the boundary between governance and management. While governors give generous support to the executive, they do not do so uncritically and require action to be undertaken if they are concerned about a particular matter. For example, in 1997, the corporation requested that a working group be established to develop strategies to improve student retention and that it should provide progress reports at subsequent meetings. Governors are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the college's academic performance through annual reports presented with commentary at their meetings. They made good use of these reports in their review of the self-assessment report. Their consideration of students' achievements is not always adequately recorded in the corporation minutes.

69 The production of the self-assessment report for 1996-97 was the first time that governors had assessed their performance formally. Each committee went through the exercise separately with the aid of guidelines provided by the clerk. Their findings were discussed at a meeting of the full board, aggregated and agreed. At the same meeting, governors considered and approved the college's overall self-assessment report with a few amendments.

70 Governors are actively reviewing the college's strategic direction through a well-

planned consultation exercise, both within the college and involving existing and potential partners. A governors' strategic committee, which oversees the planning process, has been in existence for some years. Inspectors agreed that this is a strength. There has been training for governors, especially through presentations from curriculum managers, to enable them to understand more fully the issues of strategic planning and the needs of teaching divisions. From time to time, there are also briefing papers for governors on current issues and on FEFC or government policy.

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

72 Inspectors agreed that the corporation has established an appropriate committee structure. There are strategic, finance, personnel, audit and remuneration committees. Committee meetings are well attended. Financial monitoring by the finance committee is effective; it involves the careful consideration of the college's financial performance. The audit committee is operating effectively in monitoring audit matters and advising the corporation on the effectiveness of the college's system of internal control. Governors need to tidy up a few procedural matters, such as the terms of reference of the finance committee.

73 The clerk to the corporation is also the head of finance and corporate services. The corporation has put in place arrangements to ensure that he is able to properly fulfil both roles by providing appropriate administrative support. There is a separate clerk for the audit committee. Comprehensive papers are provided to the corporation and its committees, which provide a good basis for decision-making. Standing orders to guide the conduct of business

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for the corporation and its committees are not comprehensive. The corporation has established a code of conduct for governors, including the introduction of a register of interests. In a few instances this does not provide sufficient detail of individual interests. Three governors have a poor record of attendance at corporation meetings. The corporation had not reviewed the position of these governors after they had not attended corporation meetings for six months. This point was not picked up in the self-assessment process.

74 Governors appraise the principal annually. The college's annual strategic objectives become personal to the principal and performance is assessed against his degree of success in meeting these. There are similar arrangements for the appraisal of the two other senior postholders.

Management

Grade 1

75 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective and open management
- financial management
- strategic planning
- the effective management structure and good communication
- a reliable management information system
- good links with the local community

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

76 The college is well managed. Inspectors concluded that it has accurately assessed its own strengths. The principal leads a strong

senior management team of six which includes the deputy principal responsible for the educational support services division, the head of finance and corporate services division and the heads of three teaching divisions. The team focuses on strategic matters and on monitoring the implementation of college policy. The principal also meets informally each head of division, primarily to assess progress towards agreed annual operating targets.

Communication across the five divisions is facilitated by monthly management updating sessions. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that communication is good at all levels of the organisation. The principal and other senior managers are visible and accessible. Staff and students value this open management style. The principal attends some of the divisional and section meetings to provide opportunities for staff to discuss operational matters directly with him, and holds twice-yearly briefing sessions for all staff.

77 The divisional structure is well established and effective. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that curriculum management overall has improved since the last inspection. Managers have a clear understanding of their role and of their individual accountability for the efficient use of resources and for the performance of their section. The college has an appropriate range of committees. All committees have the primary purpose of providing opportunities for staff at different levels to inform the development of policy and management decisions. The minutes of all committees are published.

78 The college's strategic planning process is informed by widely-based market research. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that strategic planning is a strength. Section and division plans are produced to a common format and brought together by senior managers. Drafts are considered by the corporation's strategic committee before the plan is submitted to the corporation for

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approval. Operational targets are set at section, division and college level and these form the basis of regular monitoring throughout the year by managers and the corporation. A reliable information system supports management at all levels, and managers have ready access to essential up-to-date information. The college has achieved its growth targets over the past four years. The college's average level of funding for the current year 1997-98 is £16.63 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £16.72 per unit.

79 The college's mission presents a vision of a college that is a community facility and resource. This vision is realised through the college's close links with schools, other colleges and external agencies which include the local district council and chamber of commerce, employers, social services and voluntary organisations. The college is perceived by these agencies and the wider community as a key contributor to the continuing regeneration of the Isle of Thanet. Marketing and business development staff have established close working relations with local industry and public service, notably with a major cross-channel ferry company and the Kent Ambulance Service. The college has recently secured a New Deal contract in collaboration with another further education college. The college's involvement in an initiative to train young people for the engineering industry has enhanced the employability of many students. Collaboration with a local secondary school has increased the number of pupils progressing to further education by over 30 per cent.

80 The college has well-established personnel policies and procedures. Equal opportunities considerations in the appointment and employment of staff are monitored systematically, and outcomes are reported annually to the corporation's personnel committee. Nearly all staff are employed on the college's own contract. The monitoring of equal opportunities for students is effected through a

students' forum which is attended by both managers and governors. The college's health and safety policy is updated as necessary, and its implementation is monitored by a committee chaired by the deputy principal.

81 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has developed a planning model for determining the provisional allocation of budgets for staffing and non-staffing areas to the divisions. Senior managers revise these provisional budget allocations in the autumn, in the light of actual student enrolments. The system provides an analysis of unit costs and a strategy for improving efficiency in the deployment of staff. Budget holders receive accurate, timely financial reports and appropriate advice when they need it from the finance function. There is detailed and effective monitoring of the college's financial performance by managers. The college's financial regulations and financial controls manual are comprehensive but have not yet been updated to reflect the budget planning and modelling systems.

Conclusions

82 Inspectors found the self-assessment report useful in planning and carrying out the inspection. They considered its findings to be largely accurate. All but one of the grades were judged by the inspection team to be well founded. However, using the expression 'areas for improvement' rather than 'weaknesses' in the self-assessment report led, in some instances, to a lack of rigorous analysis and a failure to identify the specific actions required to address weaknesses.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	23
19-24 years	15
25+ years	58
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	16
Intermediate	40
Advanced	37
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	6
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	227	875	15
Agriculture	18	26	1
Construction	67	57	2
Engineering	124	200	4
Business	266	1,156	20
Hotel and catering	395	626	14
Health and community care	400	783	16
Art and design	190	59	3
Humanities	354	1,158	21
Basic education	45	216	4
Total	2,086	5,156	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	114	1	7	122
Supporting direct learning contact	100	6	0	106
Other support	59	1	0	60
Total	273	8	7	288

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£8,971,000	£8,943,000	£9,204,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£16.71	£17.17	£17.40
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	66%	71%
Achievement of funding target	105%	100%	100%
Diversity of income	28%	21%	*
Operating surplus	£246,000	-£287,000	*

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

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

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

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	169	142	115
	Average point score per entry	3.7	2.7	4.0
	Position in tables	middle third	bottom third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	132	127	98
	Percentage achieving qualification	74%	77%	70%
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	112	113
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	57%	65%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *continued*

Students' achievements

		<i>1994-95</i>	<i>1995-96</i>	<i>1996-97</i>
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	96	55	85
	Retention (%)	75	34	32
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	24	40	61
	Retention (%)	100	100	100
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	89	81	85
	Retention (%)	91	89	84
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	0	32	66
	Retention (%)	0	100	88

Source: college data

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