

South Thames College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130420

Name of lead inspector: David Martin HMI

Last day of inspection: 18 May 2012

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. South Thames College is the second largest general further education college in London. Following merger with Merton College in 2009, the college has main sites in Wandsworth, Merton, Tooting and Roehampton. It serves some of the most deprived wards in south-west London. Most of the college's learners live locally and three quarters are from socially disadvantaged areas. Just under half of all learners identify themselves as White British and nearly 60% of learners are of minority ethnic heritage.
2. Provision ranges from pre-entry to degree level courses. Most courses lead to vocational qualifications, although the college also offers general certificate of education (GCE) A-level courses at its new sixth form centre in Merton. Courses for school pupils aged 14 to 16 are also offered. Work-based learning programmes, Train to Gain, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the Workplace, and a relatively small number of apprenticeships, provide work-related opportunities. The college is a significant provider of adult and community learning, on behalf of the London Borough of Wandsworth.
3. Since the previous inspection the college has successfully completed a major capital project, providing new accommodation and resources at the Wandsworth and Merton sites. Further significant building works are in the advanced stages of planning for Merton.
4. The mission of the college is to 'deliver outstanding education and training that is innovative, enriches lives, builds prosperity and leads to successful careers'.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - London Borough of Wandsworth (community learning and family learning)
 - Kingston University (early years, chemical and pharmaceutical sciences, information technology (IT) for e-business)
 - Canterbury Christ Church University (teacher training).
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Welcome Skills Limited (professional cookery, food and drink and customer service)
 - Impact 43 Group (cleaning and support services)
 - London Football Association Limited (coaching awards)
 - The Surrey Cricket Board (coaching awards)
 - Bishopsford Educational Trust (GCE A levels)
 - NCC Skills Limited (adult numeracy).

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to16 Further education (16 to18) Foundation learning	331 part-time learners 3,042 full-time learners 536 part-time learners 938 full-time learners 433 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	1,980 full-time learners 5,281 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	3,470 learners 141 apprentices
Adult and community learning	5,387 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	
Health and social care and early years	2
Science and mathematics	4
Information and communication technology for users	2
Sport, travel and tourism	2
Literacy and numeracy	2
English for speakers of other languages	3

Overall effectiveness

7. This is a good college which has made significant progress since the previous inspection. Through a successful merger it has created an inclusive college with high expectations of its learners and staff. It is tackling well all of the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspections of South Thames College and Merton College. Improvements at Merton are particularly noticeable. The college's capacity to make further improvements is good. Quality improvement arrangements, including the college's self-assessment of its own strengths and weaknesses, are good.
8. Learners achieve satisfactory outcomes overall and enjoy their learning. Overall college outcomes for young and adult learners on further education courses are satisfactory. Many learners achieve well, although success in

examinations varies significantly between subject areas, and success rates are inadequate in science and mathematics. The poor attendance of a significant number of learners damages their opportunities for success. Outcomes for learners following work-based learning courses are good overall, but poor for the small number of apprentices.

9. Learners' skills and standards of work are good. Learners make good progress in their studies and develop well their capacity for successful lives and work. Many continue with their studies to higher levels, often at the college. Learners feel very safe in the college. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are outstanding.
10. Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Well qualified and experienced teachers often plan and execute teaching well and learners experience lively and challenging teaching. In some instances, teachers pay insufficient attention to matching teaching to the needs of more able learners. A wide and expanding range of courses meets learners' needs and those of the local communities. Extensive partnerships with other organisations improve the quality of learners' courses. The care, guidance and support of learners are good, although the setting of targets to help learners improve is insufficiently thorough.
11. The college is well led and managed. Governance is outstanding. Learners are at the centre of the college's work and ambitions. Learners have good opportunities to express their views, which are listened to. Equality of opportunity is good.

Main findings

- Learners' attainment of their qualifications is satisfactory overall. Success rates for a significant majority of learners are good and much progress has been made since the previous inspection and since merger. However, the modest improving trend in overall success rates, for learner responsive provision, places the college marginally below the national average for similar colleges.
- Learners' outcomes for employer responsive provision are good overall, with a high rate of successful completions for Train to Gain and NVQ in the Workplace learners, but with poor outcomes for apprentices.
- Learners' improvement of their economic and social well-being is good. Learners are well motivated, well behaved and enjoy their studies. They often make good progress. Learners' standards of work, and the skills learners develop, are satisfactory or better. Poor attendance by too many learners hampers their progress.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are at least good. The college's judgements from lesson observations are reliable and provide a sound basis

for improvement. The college recognises that the quality of teaching and learning varies, and is not good in all areas.

- Assessment is good and feedback from teachers usually helps learners improve. Target setting for learners' improvement is not sufficiently effective in all subject areas. Targets can be unclear or insufficiently related to improving standards.
- The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of users, including employers, is good. The wide range of provision includes courses in specialist areas particularly relevant to learners' needs and interests and to the local communities. Course progression opportunities are considerable.
- Partnerships are good, contributing well to improving the quality of provision for learners. The emphasis on social inclusion is particularly strong and collaborative work focuses strongly on re-training for the long-term unemployed, vocational training for younger learners and helping young people overcome barriers to employment and training.
- The care, guidance and support of learners are good, with excellent support for the complex and challenging difficulties faced by some learners. The ongoing guidance and support of learners are well planned and executed. Learners with disabilities have access to an extensive range of support.
- Leadership and management are good. The recent merger, together with a substantial building programme, has been completed successfully and the new college is well positioned to meet future challenges. The Principal and senior managers successfully communicate a clear vision and strategic direction to staff and other stakeholders.
- Outstanding governance provides robust challenge and support for managers and staff. Clerking is excellent.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. Learners feel very safe on all college premises and value the way that circumstances in their neighbourhoods do not interfere with their life at college. Security in all college campuses is highly effective, but not intrusive.
- Equality and diversity are well celebrated across the college and the safe and inclusive atmosphere reinforces the promotion of respect and tolerance. In a minority of subject areas, teachers do not always plan effectively for the promotion of equality and diversity in their lessons.
- The college provides good value for money. Financial planning and the college's financial health are good. Resources are good and staff benefit from a wide range of very helpful training.

What does name of South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Maintain the momentum of improvement for learners' success rates, by building on the good practice demonstrated in higher performing areas of provision.

- Ensure more significant improvement of learners' attendance by the comprehensive implementation of rigorous college-wide policies and procedures to address non-attendance.
- Ensure that all learners meet their full potential by making sure that targets, including those set during tutorials, are consistently well focused on improving learners' subject skills.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the calm, safe and friendly environment
- the very good support from teachers and other staff
- the enjoyable lessons
- the very attractive environment and high quality facilities
- the good availability of computers for private study.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the quality of teaching, assessment and feedback on their progress, in a small number of lessons
- the diversity of the range of food in the college's dining areas.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the closeness of the partnership with the college
- the very good development of learners' skills and knowledge
- the college's readiness to meet employers' needs
- good additional support for learners with mathematics and literacy.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the ready availability of up-to-date reports on learners' progress.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

12. Good leadership and management have created a culture of high expectations for staff and learners. At the previous inspections, the overall effectiveness of South Thames College was judged to be good and that of Merton College satisfactory. Since merger, the senior leadership team has been restructured to reflect the new college context and provision, key strategic priorities have been updated and new policies and procedures, drawing on best practice from each college, are in place. Curriculum management and quality assurance arrangements now ensure inclusive staff responsibility and accountability for learners' outcomes. Self-assessment is much improved and the self-assessment report is accurate.
13. Over the past three years, managers have raised the attainment of many learners, improved the proportion of good or better teaching and learning and ensured that staff are well and appropriately qualified. Additionally, the health and social care provision has much improved and is now good. However, whilst success rates for many learners are good, overall success rates have improved only slightly over the past two years. Improving learners' punctuality and attendance and the quality of their targets continue to be work in progress. The college acknowledges that it now needs to improve the capacity of curriculum management across all course teams.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

14. Learners' attainment of their qualifications is satisfactory. Many learners come to the college with lower than average prior attainment. Success rates for a significant majority of learners are good and many are improved since the previous inspection and since the merger. However, the improving trend in the college's overall success rate for learner responsive provision stalled in 2010/11, placing the college just below the national average for similar colleges. This trend is evident for both overall long and short course success rates.
15. Overall, and for each age group, poorer pass rates are the main contributor to lower success rates, rather than issues with retention. In 2010/11, whilst college long course pass rates were two to three percentage points below the national averages for learners aged 16 to 18 and for adults, retention was at the national rates. Current in-year retention shows significant improvement, consistently evident across the college.
16. Overall success rates over the last three years are higher for learners aged 19 and over than for learners aged 16 to 18. Long course success rates vary significantly between levels of course. In 2010/11, for learners aged 16 to 18, they are at, or just below, national rates at foundation and advanced levels, but well below at intermediate level. Poor success rates for GCE AS courses

knocked back the significant trend of improvement at advanced level. For the many adult learners, long course success rates are just above national rates at intermediate and advanced levels, but significantly below at foundation. Success rates are particularly high on many courses in sport, travel and tourism and information and communication technology (ICT).

17. The extent to which learners make progress in relation to their previous attainment is satisfactory overall, although it is good for some advanced level vocational courses. The progress made by GCE AS learners is often below expectations, especially in 2010/11.
18. Overall outcomes for employer responsive provision are good. Train to Gain and NVQ in the Workplace successful completions are high, both overall and within agreed timescales, significantly exceeding national rates. Outcomes for the very small number of apprentices are poor, both overall and within agreed timescales.
19. The significant number of learners aged 14 to 16, attending the college from local schools, achieve well, either on taster or on accredited courses. On the latter, around 80% have been successful over the last three years. Significant proportions progress to college or sixth form; over 80% in the last three years.
20. The college analyses data well to identify any differences in the performance of learners. Analysis of success rates by equality categories shows that the college is narrowing achievement gaps through the improvement of success rates for Black African and Black Caribbean learners. Overall, long course success rates for the largest minority ethnic groups are now close to overall college rates.
21. Learners make good progress in improving their economic and social well-being. They are often well motivated, well behaved and enjoy their studies. Their standards of work, and the skills they develop, are satisfactory or better. They make good progress on their courses. The college places successful emphasis on building the confidence of learners. Learners praise the college for raising their aspirations through participation in such activities as World Skills, the Young Leaders' Award and Pride in your College.
22. For a significant number of learners however, progress towards further studies and employment is significantly hampered by poor attendance. Efforts to improve learners' attendance and punctuality are a major thrust for the college. In the current academic year to date overall average attendance is 83%, representing a small improvement on the previous year. Inspectors noted considerable learner absences in lessons they observed.
23. Learners' progression to further study is often good. Internal progression is substantial, with a three year trend of improvement and around 50% of learners progressing within the college in 2010/11. Progression from

intermediate to advanced level vocational courses is particularly good. Some 50% of learners on advanced level courses, completing in 2010/11, progressed to higher education. The college does not systematically capture information about learners' progression to work.

24. Learners feel very safe within the college and employ safe working practices. They have good opportunities through the college's curriculum and supporting activities to help them make informed decisions about their health and well-being. Learners make a very good contribution to both the college and local communities. They organise and participate in many charitable, college and community activities.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

25. Teaching and learning are good. Inspectors agreed with the outcomes of the college's thorough and effective process for observing teaching and learning. Lessons are observed carefully by a small team of observers and judgements are fully moderated. Teaching and learning coaches successfully help teachers rectify any identified weaknesses and improve their practice.
26. The quality of most lessons is at least good, although the proportion of lessons which is better than satisfactory varies between subject areas. In many lessons, the pace of activities is brisk, teachers check learning thoroughly and learners make good progress. Learners build effectively on the topics of previous lessons and make strong links between theory and practice. Lessons are well planned, with clear objectives and appropriate challenge for learners of all abilities.
27. Learners enjoy lessons, especially when they are engaged in stimulating learning activities. They demonstrate good skills in independent learning and research. Lessons take place in a respectful and harmonious environment. Lessons are sometimes disrupted by poor punctuality and attendance. The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons varies significantly between subject areas. Learners use safe working practices.
28. In less effective lessons, learners do not participate actively and they become passive or lose focus when teachers talk too much. The level of challenge is less well matched to learners' abilities and lessons are pedestrian. Teachers check learning poorly in weaker lessons and they sometimes provide insufficiently clear guidance when setting tasks for learners.
29. Assessment of learners' work is usually good. Most work is promptly returned and learners receive clear and detailed feedback which helps them to improve. Occasionally, feedback is insufficiently helpful. Target setting for learners, whilst good in many areas, is not consistently effective. Targets are too often insufficiently clear to promote improving standards. Target setting to improve punctuality and attendance is insufficiently well established and

targets do not reflect any real exploration of the reasons behind poor punctuality or attendance.

30. College facilities, accommodation and most learning resources are of high quality. Practical areas are attractive, very modern and of a good industry standard. Widely distributed information and learning technologies are used well, and sometimes very imaginatively, to enhance learning. The virtual learning environment is increasingly useful, but the extent of resources for learners varies according to the subject.
31. Learners' language, literacy and numeracy skills are assessed effectively during enrolment. Support arrangements are good and put in place at an early stage. Teachers, learning support assistants and learning mentors work together effectively to plan and ensure that individual learners receive the most appropriate support in lessons.
32. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of users is good. The wide range of provision meets learners' needs very well, and includes courses in specialist areas such as games development and making and repairing musical instruments. The majority of subject areas provide courses across levels, although progression routes are not always fully used by learners. Provision for school pupils is well established and successful. The range of provision for vulnerable learners is very good and includes short courses in personal development, employability and literacy and numeracy, planned as a pathway to work or further education. Courses are offered at many community and family learning venues across south London.
33. The curriculum is developed to meet specific local needs. For example, the college is developing higher education courses in order to provide affordable provision for local learners. Provision at Merton is being developed to include hairdressing, plumbing and electrical courses to meet local demand and to meet the needs of employers. The college's centre for employers and enterprise has provided a very successful Train to Gain and successor programme, much valued by local employers.
34. The enrichment programme is particularly extensive and well used, with a range of activities which both support the curriculum and enhance opportunities for employment.
35. Established and successful partnerships are used very well to the benefit of learners. Emphasis on social inclusion is particularly strong. Collaborative work focuses strongly on retraining for the long term unemployed, vocational training for younger learners and helping young people overcome barriers to employment and training. The college is part of a successful information sharing agreement between police, safer neighbourhood teams, the youth offending team and social services.

36. Other partnerships include good working arrangements with schools, local universities, large employers, Jobcentre Plus, the London Football Association and Surrey Cricket Club. The college has strong links with other providers which it uses well to ensure that provision is coordinated across south London to meet the changing needs of learners and employers. Links with employers are strong.
37. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Pre-course information is comprehensive and learners receive very good advice and guidance at the beginning of their courses and at the six-weekly reviews, to check early progress. Inductions are memorable and useful.
38. Support for a range of complex and challenging difficulties faced by learners is excellent. Learners receive continuous support if their learning is interrupted by a change in their circumstances, such as custodial sentences, even if they are unable to attend college. Learners unable to attend their usual day classes due to disciplinary action may attend specially arranged evening lessons.
39. Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is agreed before they arrive at the college. Learners with disabilities are able to gain access to an extensive range of support including signers and a full range of modern assistive technology. Support is provided sensitively and solutions are developed in partnership with learners.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

40. Senior leaders, governors and staff share a common determination to provide high quality education and training for the college's communities. The recent merger, along with changes to the organisation and management of the college, was completed successfully. The new college is well positioned to meet the challenges of the future.
41. The Principal and senior managers communicate to stakeholders a clear vision and strategic direction. The college is inclusive and staff have high expectations of learners and of each other. Governors and senior managers have been very successful in planning and completing a £36m building project, providing learners with attractive, high quality learning environments.
42. Governance is outstanding. Managers and governors collaborate well to review and update the college's mission and strategic plan. Governors are well qualified and bring a wide range of expertise to their roles. The board has a good balance of men and women and members from minority ethnic backgrounds. Governors provide robust challenge to senior managers and demand, and get, detailed management information and reports. Relevant training keeps them up to date. They are completing online safeguarding updating, a duty they take very seriously. Clerking is highly effective.

43. Arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. The safety and protection of all who learn or work in the college are given the highest priority. Policies and procedures are well developed and up to date. The lead safeguarding officer is supported by six managers with specific responsibilities in the college sites. The team has completed thorough safeguarding training. All staff have completed training relevant to their roles and responsibilities, augmented by a programme of updating. Learners report that they feel safe on all college premises and value the way that they are shielded from the tensions and circumstances in their communities and neighbourhoods. Security at all college sites is highly effective, but not intrusive. The college carries out Criminal Records Bureau checks for all staff, governors and for work placement providers and maintains a single central record of these. Safe recruitment is in place and contractors are required to comply with college safeguarding arrangements.
44. Staff conduct risk assessments for all relevant activities and maintain records of incidents, accidents and near misses. Health and safety procedures are highly effective.
45. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Governors and managers review the achievement of learners by age, gender, disability and ethnicity. Actions taken to address any differences have been successful. All staff are trained in equality and diversity. Equality and diversity are well celebrated across the college and the safe and inclusive atmosphere reinforces the promotion of respect and tolerance. Learners understand their responsibilities to each other; they behave well and are well informed about other cultures and traditions. Teachers promote equality and diversity particularly well in health and care, sport and lessons in English for speakers of other languages. However, in other subject areas some teachers do not suitably plan for the promotion of equality and diversity in their lessons.
46. Arrangements for collecting the views of learners, employers and other stakeholders are good and the college acts upon their views well. Surveys of learners' views show high levels of satisfaction. Regular meetings, such as the annual learner conference and the development of a 'Mystery Shopper' project, provide managers with valuable evidence for improvement. The college makes good use of the youth worker team to promote the views of the learners through informal recreational and enrichment activities.
47. Self-assessment and quality assurance are good. Strategies and support enable curriculum teams to review their progress and identify more promptly learners at risk. Self-assessment is thoroughly understood by all staff teams. They meet regularly and all staff contribute to self-assessment and quality improvement. Self-assessment judgements are accurate and evaluative. Actions to improve outcomes for learners are impacting positively. A wide range of relevant staff training has significantly contributed to improving teaching and learning and quality assurance.

48. Management information now accurately reflects learners' progress and outcomes. The college is building the capacity of its middle managers to analyse and interpret data.
49. The college has successfully managed significant change, through a period of merger and with substantial accommodation developments. The financial health of the college is good. Financial planning is good, as is risk management. Value for money is good and resources for teaching and learning are good.

Subject areas

Health, social care and early years

Grade 2

Context

50. Nearly 1,100 learners are enrolled on full-time courses in health and social care and childcare, almost equally split between those aged 16 to 18 and those aged 19 and over. Additionally, just over 400 learners are on workplace learning programmes, mainly for NVQs, and 26 are apprentices. Courses are offered from beginner to advanced levels and include access courses, together with a foundation degree in early childhood studies and a higher national certificate in health and social care. Courses are offered at both the Wandsworth and Merton sites.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. For most learners in both care and early years, success rates are above the national average, with some that are high. A significant minority of learners, however, are on courses where success rates are below national averages. NVQ success, within the planned timescale, for workplace learners is at the national average and for the small number of apprentices overall success is below.
- Progression from care and childcare courses to related employment and to higher level courses is good. It is very good from the access courses to higher education, particularly to social work, nursing and midwifery degree programmes. Good employability skills and good practical vocational skills are developed in practical lessons and through work placements.
- Learners make good progress on their courses. Learners' retention is good, but their attendance and punctuality are too often poor. Learners often achieve good standards in their work, including in their practical and vocational activities. The presentation of their work in lessons and of that displayed in classrooms is of a high standard.
- Learners feel safe in the college and at work. All learners complete health and safety and safeguarding training. Workplacement organisers ensure that work meets the needs of learners and that employers provide a safe environment. Learners develop a good understanding of their responsibilities in creating and maintaining a safe environment in college and in their vocational practice.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers have an excellent grasp of their subjects and use their extensive vocational experience to motivate learners and to link theory to professional practice. They use a wide range of carefully chosen interactive teaching and learning activities well to confirm and extend learners' learning and understanding. Learners' lack of punctuality is not always effectively challenged by teachers.

- Excellent resources are used very effectively by teachers and learners to ensure interesting and varied lessons, meeting learning and vocational needs. Learners use anatomical models very productively and confidently in science lessons. Computer technologies are skilfully used in lessons and to support learners in hospital, or those who for other reasons are unable to attend college.
- Assessment is good. Assignments are clearly set out, understood by learners and closely match the requirements of the awarding bodies and the level of award. Feedback from teachers is encouraging, providing clear guidance for improvement. Learners understand the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve.
- The range of course provision is good. Full-time courses provide a good preparation for entry into the health and early years sectors and for progression to higher education. They meet employers' requirements for working in the care and early years services. The college offers little part-time provision however, and too few short courses to meet the needs of employers in such aspects as skills updating.
- Support for learners is outstanding. Teachers know their learners well and use a very wide range of strategies to meet the needs of learners at risk of leaving or failing their course. Tutorial support is good; teachers set clear targets for learners which they monitor when their progress is reviewed. Learners value highly the commitment and care provided by their teachers.
- Equality and diversity are well promoted. For example, learners discuss fully the needs of disadvantaged groups in society. Learners' work and other displays in classrooms promote positive images of marginalised groups. Teachers extensively draw on a wide range of family and minority groups in case studies and in scenario used as a stimulus for work in lessons. The particularly diverse learner community works very productively and harmoniously together.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers and staff work well together. Ambitious targets for improvement, overall and for learners, are set and very carefully monitored. In year retention has improved and is now high. Managers and teachers take robust action to resolve issues to meet the needs of learners at risk of withdrawing from their courses. However, action to deal with courses with lower success rates has not yet led to sufficient improvement.
- All staff review and assess the quality of provision. They are able to identify and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. However, the self-assessment report takes too little account of the significant variations in success rates between courses. Strategies to harmonise the quality of provision across the two main sites include continued efforts to recognise and widely use good practice.

What does name of South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Building on the best practice in the higher performing courses, implement strategies to improve success rates, so that for all courses success rates are above national averages. In particular, ensure the consistent and rigorous application of college policies to deal with poor attendance and lack of punctuality.
- Widen the range of opportunities for learners and employers by further developing part-time provision, including short courses.

Science and mathematics

Grade 4

Context

51. Nearly 500 learners are enrolled on courses in science and mathematics, an increase of around 80 since 2010/11. This is a comparatively small proportion of the college's overall provision with 150 learners studying the subject area as their main programme. Some 80% of learners are aged 16 to 18. Provision consists of GCE A and AS levels in biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics and psychology with AS level only in pure mathematics. A significant number of learners are enrolled onto the GCSE mathematics course. A small vocational provision of first and national awards in applied science is also offered.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Success and high grade rates for the majority of courses have been significantly below national averages for the last three years and show no improvement. Success rates for AS courses in particular have remained unacceptably low, with some, for example mathematics and physics, more than 30% below national averages. Retention is good but far too many learners do not pass their examinations.
- The high grade rate for the smaller numbers of GCSE mathematics learners is good, and above national averages, although retention is poor on this course. Success rates for the vocational applied science courses are in line with national averages. Attendance is around the college average, but poor punctuality has a detrimental impact on learning.
- The progress of learners on the applied science courses is good, but that of the majority of learners, in relation to their prior attainment, is below that expected. The college is inclusive and learners have a lower than average GCSE attainment at the start of their courses. However, too many learners do not achieve their target grade.
- Learners feel very safe in their lessons and they enjoy coming to college. Health and safety issues within practical science lessons are handled effectively and learners are briefed with appropriate safety instructions at the start of every experiment, for example being reminded to wear goggles or tie back their hair.
- Overall, the standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Learners confidently use technical, mathematical and scientific language. However, they are frequently not able to apply their knowledge and in some cases lack an understanding of even the fundamental scientific or psychological concepts. Topics set for learners in mathematics are not always sufficiently challenging to ensure they are working towards the appropriate grade.
- Teaching and learning are broadly satisfactory with some good practice evident. In more effective lessons, learners work collaboratively towards their learning goals. In group work, teachers ensure that every learner has a task

to perform and each is required to report back to the class. Some very effective questioning between, and within, individual groups takes place.

- In less effective lessons, sessions are too teacher led with not enough focus on individual learners' needs. For example, more able learners often complete tasks ahead of others and are left waiting for further work that would enable them to achieve high grades. The less able are given insufficiently challenging work to ensure that they can meet their own learning objectives.
- Teachers' use of questioning to help assess learners' progress is inconsistently useful. In the majority of lessons, questioning is used effectively with individuals to recall key mathematical and scientific formulae and terminology and to deepen understanding. However, teachers do not involve the whole group and for protracted periods many learners do not participate.
- The initial advice and guidance of learners on enrolment have improved and the majority of learners who complete go on to university, but a significant number are placed on courses with little chance of success. Low achievement rates at AS level result in an unacceptably large number of learners failing to progress to the second year of their courses.
- Learners value highly the one-to-one sessions that they have with their personal tutors and set their own meaningful targets for each of the courses they are studying. These allow them to focus on what they need to do to improve. Learners benefit enormously from the additional workshops that teachers run and have a real sense of belonging to the newly formed sixth form centre.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers recognise that learners' achievements remain poor. They have put in place major innovations in the past year particularly in using data to inform actions for improvement. This has led to improved tracking and monitoring of learners and early intervention to support weak performance. This is beginning to have a positive impact on learners' attitudes and confidence.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory. Managers recognise the inconsistency between their own lesson observation grades and the poor success rates. Self-assessment focuses insufficiently on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Subject course reviews fail to reflect upon, or develop, consistently good classroom practice, and teaching and learning are not a key focus at team meetings.
- Equality and diversity are satisfactory. Learners are rightly very proud of the culture of tolerance and respect across the area, but managers do not focus sufficiently upon the promotion of equality and diversity. Many subject schemes of work lack strategies for incorporating equality and diversity into lessons.

What does name of South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Through more rigorous self-assessment and systematic discussion of teaching and learning by teachers, develop a clear focus on strategies for stretching and challenging learners of all abilities, so that they are equipped to achieve their target grade, thereby improving success rates.
- In order to allow all learners to have their learning assessed effectively, improve teachers' questioning in lessons to help engage learners and ensure that they participate fully.
- Improve the initial advice and guidance to learners to help ensure that they all take courses for which they are suitably qualified and for which they have reasonable chances of success.

Information and communication technology for Grade 2 users

Context

52. This is a relatively small area of provision and 334 learners take courses either at the Wandsworth or Merton sites. Currently, 184 learners attend full-time. Most learners are aged 16 to 18 and of the 93 aged 19 and over, most attend part-time. Some 50 learners are at foundation level, 74 at intermediate and the remainder study at advanced level. Almost 40 take the national certificate for IT practitioners.

Main findings

- Overall success rates for learners are good. In 2010/11 they were often well above the national averages. For example, they were thirteen percentage points above for the foundation national certificate in ICT and for the advanced level national diploma for IT practitioners the success rate was 100%. Success rates have gradually declined for the foundation and intermediate diplomas for IT users, although they are still relatively high.
- Progression for learners is good. Learners enjoy learning, are well engaged and make good progress from entry to advanced level and then often to employment or further study. The attendance of many learners is good, but a significant number attend poorly and are unpunctual, causing disruption to learning.
- Learners' work is very well presented and learners take ownership of their portfolios and regard them as documents for future reference. Teachers reinforce the development of study skills well and pay careful attention to grammatical and spelling errors. They provide constructive feedback which enables learners to understand their progress and further improve their performance.
- Learners feel very safe in the college, which they view as welcoming and peaceful, and they enjoy being part of a multi-cultural community. Health and safety are rigorously managed and this is valued by learners. Learners take responsibility for their own well-being and the safety of others. Staff have a very good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Teaching and learning are good and highly motivational for learners. Learners enjoy, and benefit greatly from, the teaching of their skilled and respected teachers. In the best lessons, teaching is sharply and accurately focused on meeting individual needs. In a few lessons, teachers do not plan sufficiently for individual learning and more able learners are not suitably challenged.
- Teachers use learning technologies very effectively, developing learners' skills in using the interactive whiteboard, for example, by researching software

packages. Whilst no planned programme of work experience exists, learners use links with industry well to enrich their classroom studies.

- Assessment of learners' work and progress is very well planned and builds well upon the findings from initial assessments. Target setting is accurate and all learners know their targets well. Learners receive expert and thorough feedback on their progress through individual meetings with personal tutors.
- The range of provision is good. Learners have access to a wide range of qualifications and progression to higher levels is good. Learning programmes develop learners' skills and knowledge, are up to date and relevant. Learners are involved with helping to plan their courses.
- The care, guidance and support of learners are good. Pastoral support for learners is very good, with effective support within lessons to meet individual needs. Information, advice and guidance are good, including the use of exit interviews to identify suitable progression opportunities.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff are highly motivated by a rigorous, yet supportive, management style that encourages them to strive for excellence. Teachers are very well supported, trained and mentored. All staff have high expectations of learners. Continuing professional development is highly effective and underpins a robust appraisal system.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Throughout the college, the promotion of mutual respect within a multi-cultural environment is common. Diversity is strongly promoted within lessons, with much emphasis on visual images, but aspects of equality are insufficiently detailed in teaching plans.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements are good. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the report is detailed. The quality improvement plan is very thorough and clearly identifies actions for improvement. Lesson observations and internal verification are both rigorous and are used well to inform staff development.

What does name of South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Improve poorer success rates by building on the good practice in better performing courses and by better management, and challenge to learners, around weak attendance and punctuality.
- Meet the needs of all learners by providing suitable stretch and challenge for more able learners by better planning of activities and tasks to meet their individual needs.

Sport, travel and tourism

Grade 2

Context

53. Courses are offered in sports and travel and tourism, from foundation to advanced level, using both the Wandsworth and Merton sites. Many additional short qualifications in coaching and fitness are also offered. Nearly 900 learners study sport and around 60 study travel and tourism. Of the learners enrolled, 560 are aged 19 and over and 406 are aged 16 to 18. Of the learners, 80% attend the college part-time.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates for learners on travel and tourism courses are outstanding and are well above national averages for the last two years. In 2010/11, success rates for learners on foundation and intermediate level sports courses were satisfactory overall. However, the retention rate on the national award in sport declined and the success rate was well below the national average.
- Learners develop good employability skills and have relevant specialist knowledge for their intended career. They enhance their job prospects through additional qualifications, such as sports coaching and fitness instructor certificates. Learners develop good team and problem solving skills, and teachers successfully promote professional industry standards of customer care. Insufficient opportunities are offered for travel and tourism learners to gain experience in the workplace.
- Learners' overall attendance in lessons is too low. Poor attendance or lack of punctuality leads to disruption of the learning experience for all learners. Rigorous staff monitoring of non attendance and actions to improve it have had little impact so far.
- Learners feel very safe. Safe working practices are a high priority within sports facilities and health and safety are actively promoted and well established. Sports learners develop and apply hazard assessment analysis to a range of sports activities and environments highly effectively. They complete their own risk assessments for coaching activities well.
- Learners make a good contribution to the local community through a range of voluntary and charitable events, for example coaching for young people designed to reduce the level of youth offending and working with schools to organise the Merton borough sports day. Many learners are volunteer Gamesmakers for the 2012 Olympics and one learner will be carrying the Olympic flame.
- Lessons are often inspirational and lively. Learners participate enthusiastically, developing good analytical skills and an understanding of complex concepts, such as the impact of cultural and social factors on sports development. Travel and tourism learners develop a good understanding of tour operators'

products and services. Learners with a wide range of abilities make good and better progress and are appropriately challenged.

- In a small minority of lessons, questioning techniques insufficiently stretch more able learners to develop further and deepen their understanding of the theoretical aspects of the subject. Learners are not always encouraged to find out information for themselves.
- Accommodation and resources are good. Sports accommodation reflects high industry standards, enabling learners to develop skills required by employers. Access to information and learning technologies is good and well used in lessons. The college's virtual learning environment is well used by learners to study outside of lessons and to catch up on work that they have missed
- Assessment of learners' work is thorough. Teachers give learners constructive and timely feedback. Most return marked work within two days. Oral and written feedback is constructive and set learners clear targets. Marking standards are particularly rigorous and internal verification is thorough and prompt. The monitoring of learners' progress is accurate, detailed and up to date.
- The guidance and support of learners are good. Initial assessment ensures that learners' additional support needs are promptly identified. A wide range of high quality services, including counselling, mentoring, additional learning support, and financial support, help learners. Sports teachers use a 'wake up text' service to improve learners' punctuality and this is starting to work.
- Leadership and management are good. High quality specialist resources and staffing are managed well. Teachers at Wandsworth understand improvement targets and make good use of tracking systems to monitor learners' progress, but these are yet to be fully established at Merton. Effective strategies to retain learners have resulted in a significant increase in retention on courses previously underperforming.
- Self-assessment effectively identifies strengths and areas for improvement, leading to clear actions for improvement, with realistic targets, although improvement trends are uneven. Staff have high levels of relevant industry expertise, are well qualified and regularly update their skills through highly effective continuous professional development.
- The area acts upon the views of learners well to improve the quality of resources and teaching and learning. For example, functional skills lessons are now timetabled for the middle of the day, learners are given a greater range of opportunities to develop practical skills and the quality of printed learning materials has improved.

What does name of South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Raise the attainment of learners on full-time sports courses by ensuring that monitoring and tracking of their progress and attendance are consistently translated into useful actions which improve punctuality and attendance.

- Develop and extend the range of travel and tourism partnerships so that learners can benefit from a greater understanding of the industry, gain more work placement opportunities and enhance their employment prospects.

Literacy and numeracy

Grade 2

Context

54. The college offers literacy and numeracy courses from entry to intermediate levels across nine locations. The majority of learners study literacy and numeracy for functional skills qualifications as part of their main course of study. Currently, 3,169 learners attend part time and 91 attend full time. Around 50% of learners are aged 16 to 18. Adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities account for 13% of total learners. For 2011/12, 55% of learners are female and 85% are of minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Many learners return to learning after difficult earlier experiences with education. They significantly develop their confidence, skills and employability and raise their own, and their family's, aspirations. They progress well, with significant numbers joining access courses and a few moving on to higher education. Learners enrich their social and working lives as a result of the skills they gain.
- Success rates are satisfactory overall. Functional skills success rates declined in 2010/11, but remained close to national averages. To date, in 2011/12, they are good. GCSE English and mathematics pass rates in 2011/12 at grades A* to C are above national averages, at 78% and 67% respectively. Pass rates in national tests at entry level, accounting for 75% of learners, were good for literacy and numeracy, at 86% and 83% respectively.
- Learners develop good literacy and numeracy skills. Confident use of numeracy skills increases their independence, financial understanding and capacity to help their children at school. English learners speak of their improved reading, unlocking a wealth of knowledge and ability to write formal letters, so helping secure personal and societal rights. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities improve their speaking and listening skills.
- Learners feel safe and appreciate the positive environment provided by the college. Learners develop their knowledge in nutrition and health and are better equipped to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Learners take part in community activities and plan charity events together, providing useful opportunities to further develop their communication, team working and problem solving skills.
- Teaching and learning are good. Good initial and diagnostic assessment is often used well by teachers to identify skills needs and frame teaching. Learners are appropriately challenged through lively and well planned activities and they receive frequent and useful feedback from teachers. Most teachers use questioning effectively to check learners' understanding.
- Individual learning plans are used well by learners and teachers on stand-alone literacy and numeracy courses. Learners understand what skills they need to develop, monitor their progress and identify next steps. They are not

used consistently well for functional skills and too many learners do not understand the relevance and usefulness of numeracy to their future employment.

- Teachers are highly qualified. They use a range of excellent resources to engage learners' interest and promote discussion and use interactive whiteboards particularly well. Most facilities provide an excellent learning environment, although not all learners have ready access to computers to support their learning outside of lessons.
- Partnership activity is satisfactory. Links with Jobcentre Plus ensure that employment advisers can refer unemployed adults to improve their employment prospects. Links with local schools enable parents to receive literacy and numeracy support.
- Teachers are sensitive to learners' needs and provide good support for learners including those with complex personal issues. Some teachers provide additional sessions and individual support. Additional learning support is well planned and specialist staff provide support for dyslexia. Teachers regularly give advice on progression opportunities and learners are encouraged to continue with their studies.
- Leadership and management are good. The effective management of change has resulted in an ethos of high expectations. Curriculum managers and teachers are very positive about the improvements following the college merger. Managers closely monitor performance. Appraisals provide clear improvement targets. Teaching and learning coaches provide good support and staff development.
- Equality of opportunity is satisfactorily promoted. In a few lessons, the promotion of equality and diversity is good, but in the majority, opportunities to explore issues to reflect the diversity of the group are insufficiently exploited.
- Staff are fully involved in self-assessment. The quality improvement plan is robust. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but teaching and learning are over graded. Learner representatives contribute well to the evidence for the report.

What does South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- Help learners better understand the relevance of English and mathematics within their vocational studies, by extending to all provision the existing good practice in individual learning plans used for stand-alone courses.
- Actively plan the promotion of equality and diversity within teaching and learning to celebrate the inclusive ethos of the college and encourage learners to explore, value and appreciate diversity and to foster tolerance.

English for speakers of other languages

Grade 3

Context

55. Currently, 1,876 learners are enrolled on full and part-time courses at foundation and intermediate levels. Of these, 204 learners are aged 16 to 18 and most attend full time. The majority of adult learners attend part time. Around half of all learners are from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds and the majority are female. All courses lead to external qualifications including unit accreditation. Courses take place during the day, in the evening and at weekends across four main college sites and in community venues.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners and achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates for speaking and listening units at foundation level are high, but are low at intermediate level. Success rates for full certificates at foundation and intermediate levels fell substantially in 2010/11 from high to low rates across all full qualifications. The college has acted promptly to identify reasons for this and to take action to improve.
- Learners develop well their comprehension, narrative and speaking and listening skills. They develop the language skills they need for work and to engage successfully in the community. The standard of learners' work is good. Learners progress well in lessons and between courses and build well on their skills. Learners enjoy their learning in the inclusive and safe college environment.
- The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good overall, although the proportion of outstanding lessons is too small. In the best lessons, learners actively extend their knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and language and teachers place good emphasis on correct pronunciation. Teachers make good use of question and answer to clarify learning points and challenge learners' understanding.
- All teachers integrate equality and diversity well into lessons and learners become more aware of other cultures and the local communities in which they live and work. In a few lessons, teachers insufficiently place learning into the context of everyday life. Teachers place too much reliance on worksheets and not enough use is made of everyday items, such as newspapers, to give relevance to reading tasks.
- Learning technologies are used effectively in lessons. Classrooms are well resourced and most teachers use interactive whiteboards well to promote the interest of learners and illustrate key learning points. A minority of teachers use them only to display learners' worksheets. Learners, including those at beginner level, gain confidence in using the internet and using computers to compose both formal and informal writing.

- Overall, the assessment and monitoring of learners' progress are good and learners fully understand their progress in developing their language skills. Individual learning plan targets are clear, measurable and fully understood by learners. Teachers monitor learners' progress well and learners know the progress they are making in lessons and towards qualifications.
- The provision meets the needs and interests of learners well. A good range of courses is available across four main sites and in the community, although the number of intermediate classes is small. A good focus is given to the development of vocationally related courses. Learners participate well in additional activities to enrich their learning.
- Partnership working is good. Good links with schools and community groups develop opportunities for language learning in the community. Good internal links with the business development team lead to new courses with employers. Well-established links with external support services provide specialist assistance to learners.
- The support of learners is good. Teachers give good support in lessons, both to the whole group and separately to individual learners, and engender a supportive learning environment. Learners report that they are well supported by teachers and by specialist support staff, such as college career advisers. Arrangements for the safeguarding of learners are very good, but their awareness of the dangers of cyber bullying is insufficiently specific.
- Curriculum management is satisfactory. Although the curriculum falls within the remit of three schools, strong efforts are being made to align programmes and working practices. Management reorganisation has led to a rigorous focus on the content and quality of provision across all sites. Communications between teams are good. Staff training promotes improvement. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.
- Managers focus well on learners' progression and improving attainment. The self-assessment process is inclusive and results in clear actions to improve. Teams are taking strong action to improve lower success rates. The evidence from the college's scheme of lesson observations is useful, although too many lessons are over graded.

What does South Thames College need to do to improve further?

- By building on the good practice for better performing courses, ensure that strategies are in place to improve low success rates at foundation level and that success rates rise to their former high levels.
- Develop and use learning resources in lessons to include materials from everyday life, to promote learners' understanding of the communities in which the learners live.
- Further improve the programme offer and make provision more widely available by increasing the number of intermediate courses.

Information about the inspection

56. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Deputy Principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
57. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

South Thames College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	4,106	12	2,450	1,644	0
Part-time learners	8,051	243	742	4,869	2,197
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				

Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
▪ How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
▪ How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	2	2	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	1				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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