



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Southport College

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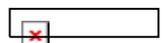
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Basic information about the college

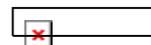


Name of college:	Southport College
Type of college:	General Further Education College
Principal:	Brian C Mitchell
Address of college:	Mornington Road Southport PR9 0TT
Telephone number:	01704 500606
Fax number:	01704 392836
Chair of governors:	Robert Thomson
Unique reference number:	130 491
Name of reporting inspector:	Dave Starling HMI
Dates of inspection:	10-14 February 2003

Part A: Summary



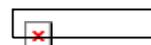
Information about the college



The college was formed in 1983 as a result of the merger of the School of Arts and Southport Technical College. The college's main site is near Southport town centre and there is a secondary site in neighbouring Formby. There are around 30 community learning centres that provide about 15% of college activity. Five of these centres lie outside the boundaries of Sefton. A further 15% of activity is provided through franchise arrangements, the main provider being Sefton Council. There is a sixth form college about three miles from Southport College, four other general further education (FE) or tertiary colleges and one agricultural college in the surrounding towns of Bootle, Skelmersdale, Leyland and Preston. There are twelve 11 to 18 schools in Southport, Ormskirk, Formby and Maghull. Sefton local education authority (LEA) maintains two special schools that have students aged over 16.

The staying-on rate post-16 in Sefton was 87% in 2002; the corresponding rate in Greater Merseyside was 72%. In 2002, 53% of Sefton pupils aged 16, excluding special schools, achieved 5 or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications at grade C or above. The corresponding figure in Southport and Formby was 60%. The college is within the Merseyside objective 1 area, which has areas of significant socio-economic deprivation. In Greater Merseyside, 6% of the economically active population was registered unemployed in September 2002. In Sefton, the rate was 5%. The college offers courses in 12 of the 14 learning areas, including vocational programmes at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) levels 1 to 4 and a range of subjects at GCSE and General Certification of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and Advanced level (A level). Adult education comprises vocational and general education programmes and includes return-to-study programmes and access programmes that lead to higher education (HE). The small HE provision is mostly franchised from local universities in Preston and Liverpool. The college also provides courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's mission is to ensure excellence, by aiming for high standards across all activities, relevance, by ensuring that the curriculum and supporting services address need, and accessibility, by encouraging and widening access to promote lifelong learning, inclusion and participation by the disadvantaged.

How effective is the college?



The provision is good in three of the nine areas of learning inspected: information and communications technology (ICT); leisure, travel and sport; and health and childcare. It is satisfactory in five: science and mathematics; engineering; business; visual and performing arts and media; and humanities. Provision on foundation programmes is unsatisfactory.

Key strengths

- good overall retention rates and improved overall pass rates in most areas

- much good teaching

- well-qualified teachers supported by good professional development

- good monitoring and review of students' progress
- well-used library and resource centres
- significant growth in community provision
- good tutorial support for full-time students and for students with additional learning needs
- good governance
- strong financial management.

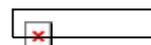
What should be improved

- achievements in, and the integration of, key skills
- pass rates in some GCE AS and A-level subjects
- some inappropriate methods for diagnosing literacy and numeracy
- support for part-time students
- provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- some unsatisfactory provision for literacy and numeracy

- use of management information in a few curriculum areas.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

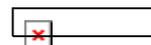


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	Satisfactory. There are good retention rates on some courses and high pass rates on GCE AS mathematics and science courses. The range of provision is narrow. There are good specialist resources but insufficient use is made of information learning technology (ILT) in lessons. Course reviews are rigorous and quality assurance procedures are applied consistently.
Engineering	Satisfactory. There are many high pass rates and improving retention rates on some courses. There is much good teaching and a good level of support for students. A narrow range of courses is offered in mechanical engineering and there is little opportunity for students to take part in work experience.
Business	Satisfactory. Teaching is well planned and most learning is effective. Pass rates for adults on part-time courses are good, particularly for accounting and text processing. The standard of work of Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) accounting students is high. Retention and pass rates for full-time students on business courses vary considerably.
Information and communications technology	Good. There are good retention rates and pass rates on most courses, with the exception of one GCE AS subject. Students on full-time courses are taught effectively using modern learning technology. They are well supported and have good progression opportunities. The college offers a wide range of part-time information technology (IT) courses in the community. The provision is capably managed.
Leisure, travel and sport	Good. Retention and pass rates are good on level 1 and 2 travel and leisure programmes. There is good progression to other FE qualifications and to HE. Teachers have recent industrial experience and knowledge that enhances teaching and the students' learning. Support for students is good. The integration of key skills tasks on level 3 programmes is a weakness.
Health and childcare	Good. There are good retention and pass rates on most courses. All lessons are planned well to meet a wide range of students' needs. The monitoring of students' progress is highly effective. Management is strong and effective. The General National Vocational Qualification

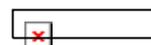
	(GNVQ) advanced and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in health and social care have had low retention rates over the last three years.
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory. Most teaching is good or satisfactory. There are good resources for teaching and learning. Students value the efforts that teachers make to help them. Initiatives have been implemented to improve retention and pass rates but these have not been equally successful on all programmes.
Humanities	Satisfactory. Good curriculum planning has led to well-structured lessons and the use of a range of teaching methods. The appropriate use of target setting has improved students' confidence. In 2002, some GCE A-level students achieved better pass rates than predicted from their GCSE results. Retention and pass rates in some GCSE and GCE AS subjects are poor.
Foundation programmes	Unsatisfactory. There are poor pass rates on some numeracy courses. There is good support for students. Teaching is insufficiently challenging and a narrow range of resources is used in many lessons. The initial assessment and monitoring of the progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inadequate.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior managers and governors promote a shared sense of purpose and mission. Continuous improvement is encouraged through open consultative management. Strategic planning is effective. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive but in some curriculum areas they have little impact on bringing about improvements. Inspectors identified weaknesses in the pass-rates for students aged 16 to 18 in GCE AS and A-level subjects. Achievements in, and the integration of, key skills at levels 2 and 3 are unsatisfactory. While self-assessment leads to the identification of appropriate priorities in some areas, this is not the case in all areas. Management information is not used effectively in some curriculum areas. Arrangements for appraisal and staff development are good. The college's response to the promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. Governors are highly committed to improving the college and students' achievements. Recent substantial improvements to the accommodation have enhanced the provision. Financial management is strong and resources are satisfactorily deployed to achieve value for money.

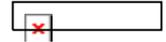
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to education and social inclusion is satisfactory. The college provides effective opportunities in education and training for people with a range of experience and educational backgrounds on both full-time and part-time courses. The college meets its widening participation targets predominantly through franchised and community provision. The college does not make satisfactory provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has successfully established a welcoming and supportive environment that is valued by students. The college's working practices are monitored effectively to ensure that they promote equality of opportunity and are in accordance with the college policy on equal opportunity. The college provides

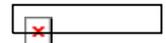
is very good on the main college site. The response to recent legislation regarding the Disability Act is satisfactory. The college is less successful in providing a range of appropriate progression routes for part-time students and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



There is particularly good support for full-time students. For part-time adult students in community and franchised provision, support is not always effective. The procedures for interviewing students are sound. Advice and guidance are impartial and mostly effective. Not all part-time adult students are satisfied with the quality of advice and guidance that they receive. Induction arrangements are effective in preparing students for their course of study and in providing information on college support systems. There is effective tutorial support for full-time students. Tutorial support for part-time students is less well developed. There is a good range of welfare and personal support services. Financial support is available from the student support fund, which exists to help students to complete their course of study. Childcare support enables about 40 students to continue with their studies. Careers guidance is good, particularly for level 3 students who wish to progress to HE. The initial assessment test is inappropriate for some students. There is low take-up of literacy and numeracy support in some curriculum areas where attendance is optional. There are many examples of good support for individual students with additional learning needs. The comprehensive range of services to support students is less effective in community venues. Some students are insufficiently aware of what is available. The quality and availability of information and resources to support students is not uniformly good. There are good procedures for recording lack of punctuality and poor attendance and performance and for taking appropriate action to address these.

Students' views of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- helpful teachers and the good quality of their teaching

- welcoming, safe, adult atmosphere of the college

- resource centre

- college buildings and specialist accommodation

- good access and transport facilities
- good support for individual students, including those with learning difficulties.

What they feel could be improved

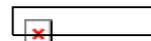
- key skills provision
- parking facilities
- aspects of catering such as queues at peak times and prices
- withdrawal of courses with small enrolments
- support and information for adult part-time students compared with that available to those aged 16 to 18
- enrichment and sporting activities.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole

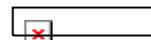


Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	69	25	6
Teaching 19+	69	27	4
Learning 16-18	60	30	10
Learning 19+	60	36	4

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

Achievement and standards



1. The college met most of its retention and achievement targets in 2001/02. Retention rates fell below the college target for adults on level 1 courses, but overall retention rates have been good across most courses over the last three years.
2. Published pass rates were low in 2000/01 but some of the data was unreliable and some pass rates were consequently understated. Pass rates improved significantly in 2001/02 and pass rates for adult students are now above the national average at all levels. The GCE A-level curriculum has been reviewed and some subjects with unsatisfactory pass rates have been discontinued, including history, geography and chemistry. Pass rates remain poor for students aged 16 to 18 on a number of remaining GCE A-level courses and the GCE AS provision. In contrast, those on most vocational programmes are good. Pass rates in key skills are poor at levels 2 and 3 and arrangements for the implementation of the key skills action plan are under-resourced.
3. Many students' destinations are unknown. However, there are examples of good progression to further study and employment in science and mathematics, ICT, leisure, travel and sport, and health and childcare.
4. The college has recently surveyed over 1,300 students in a cross-college survey. Most students felt that they were making good progress. Responses from part-time adult students were particularly positive. Inspectors judged that, in lessons overall, students' attainments were largely at the level to be expected. On average, adult students were doing slightly better than students aged 16 to 18.

16 to 18 year olds

5. The college is successful in retaining students aged 16 to 18 on level 1 and 2 programmes, including most GCSE courses. Retention rates on GCSE mathematics and GCSE art techniques

and practice courses are significantly above the national average. Retention rates are also good on NVQ programmes at levels 1 and 2, for example, NVQ level 1 vehicle maintenance and NVQ level 2 administration. On GCE AS and A-level programmes, retention rates have steadily improved over the last three years but are still below the national average.

6. With exceptions in business and art and design, pass rates for students who complete are high on most GNVQ and AVCE programmes. On GNVQ travel and tourism courses, retention and pass rates are above the national average at both foundation and intermediate levels. Pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses are improving overall but remain poor.

7. The college has introduced a system for students on GCE AS and A-level courses to predict and record their achievements on the basis of their previous attainment. Although overall pass rates are low, results for some students on GCE A-level humanities subjects and on GCE AS ICT are higher than predicted on the basis of the students' GCSE grades. However, on GCE AS art and design, law, media and film studies courses, most results were below those predicted. The system is not yet used to its full potential. A similar system has recently been introduced for over 150 students on vocational programmes. Teachers report that it is a useful way of motivating students, but it is presently too early to evaluate the impact on retention and pass rates.

8. The overall standard of attainment of students in this age range in lessons was a little below the national average. More than half the work seen was good, but there was a significant proportion of unsatisfactory work. For example, the overall standard of assignments produced by AVCE business students is mediocre, with work that is often not presented well. Many students copy text or import Internet materials with little critical evaluation. Students' work on some vocational programmes, such as health and care and leisure and tourism, is good.

9. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 taking key skills have declined and pass rates are poor, especially at levels 2 and 3. Despite some improvement, the pass rates of students aged 16 to 18 are low, with pass rates of 23% at level 2 and 22% at level 3.

10. The college has a small cohort of foundation modern apprentices in work-based learning. Some 20 young people were in training during 2001/02, taking programmes in motor vehicle, catering and hairdressing. Fourteen students achieved their NVQ qualifications and three students achieved all elements of their individual learning plan.

Adult learners

11. Adults form the largest cohort of students in the college. Most are over the age of 25 and undertake short courses. Large numbers of adult learners study in community centres and on courses taught by franchised partners. Retention rates for most substantial provision in outreach and community centres are below that of the main site.

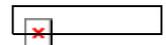
12. There were over 16,000 enrolments to short courses in 2001/2002. Almost half, some 7,800, of these enrolments were on short first aid courses. The high retention and pass rates associated with these programmes have placed the college amongst the top 10% in the sector for short courses and led to a strong headline 'success rate' as defined in *Success for All*.

13. Numbers of adults on GCE A-level courses have declined and numbers on GCE AS courses have increased by almost 50%. Retention and pass rates on GCE AS programmes are good. Over 500 adult enrolments were made on GCSE programmes in 2001/02. Retention rates have been consistently good on most GCSE subjects over the last three years, including GCSE mathematics, where rates are well above the national average.

14. On NVQ programmes, most adults study at levels 2 and 3. Approximately 350 students started these programmes in 2001/02. Retention rates at level 2 have remained consistently high over three years and there was a significant improvement in achievement in 2001/02, with particularly strong results on NVQ level 2 programmes in care. The college has cancelled two contracts with franchise partners as a result of poor performance on NVQs.

15. Adult students work well in their lessons. Inspectors observed only a small amount of unsatisfactory work, less than half of the proportion seen nationally. Students' conceptual development is often good, with the majority of students in a group able to make good use of knowledge gained from previous lessons. In areas such as health and childcare, students develop skills to work both collaboratively and without supervision. In leisure, travel and sport, lessons are often progressively demanding, enabling students to demonstrate growing confidence in themselves and their knowledge. Standards in coursework are mostly satisfactory or better. Pass rates for adults taking key skills are poor. Pass rates are significantly lower for adult students, with only an 18% pass rate at level 2 and 12% at level 3. Within ICT, only 4% of students achieved their key skills qualifications at level 3.

Quality of education and training



16. Observations by inspectors on 133 lessons in nine curriculum areas indicate that the quality of teaching and to a lesser extent the learning in the college are better than the national average for the sector. The proportion of unsatisfactory lessons seen was slightly below the national averages for both teaching and learning. Teaching was found to be good or better in nearly 5% more lessons than the national average. Students' attendance was generally good throughout the inspection week, with nearly 80% average attendance at the lessons seen. Attendance by students on ICT and foundation programmes exceeded 85%, whereas the average attendance at the humanities lessons seen was below 73%. The average group size across the provision was 10 students per lesson, ranging from 12 in travel, leisure and sport to 7 on foundation programmes.

17. The use in the pastoral tutorial system of minimum grades as targets for students has been used in GCE AS and A-level subjects to motivate students and give them realistic aspirations. The process has recently been extended in a pilot study to include a proportion of students on vocational programmes who have individual learning plans which are regularly reviewed at tutorials. It is too early to evaluate fully the outcomes of this. In a number of vocational areas, teachers pay careful attention to students' preferred learning styles. They analyse their students' needs and work collaboratively, or through staff development, to meet their needs.

18. The college makes use of a system of lesson observations where teachers are observed in their lessons at least once every three years. This process led to a profile of observations that found about 95% of lessons to be satisfactory or better and this profile was used in the self-assessment of February 2002. Managers sought external moderation of these findings by engaging a team of consultants to observe a sample of 109 lessons in a 'mock inspection' prior to the formulation of the college's self-assessment report of December 2002. The findings of this mock inspection were markedly less good than the outcomes of the college's own lesson observation procedures. As a result of the mock inspection, teachers whose lessons had received satisfactory or unsatisfactory grades were offered development opportunities by the college's teaching and learning advisers. Subsequent observations were made to check that such teachers' lessons were evaluated as at least good. Similar opportunities were offered to all teachers on a voluntary basis. The teaching and learning profiles from the current inspection were significantly better than those of the mock inspection.

19. Key skills provision is inadequate. There are a number of weaknesses in the integration and teaching of key skills, as recognised in the college self-assessment report. Attendance is low in humanities, travel, leisure and sport and in business. In the areas of science and mathematics, health and social care and in engineering, the teaching of key skills is identified in schemes of work and lesson plans, but the development and assessment of key skills are not implemented in lessons. Opportunities to gather evidence for key skills are identified on some courses, but students fail to take advantage of these and teachers do not sufficiently emphasise their importance. Some teachers lack confidence and knowledge to integrate the work effectively, particularly in application of number. A manager for basic and key skills has recently been appointed and a lead tutor

identified for each of the key skills subjects. However, at the time of the inspection, these appointments had had little impact. There are some examples of the good teaching of key skills on leisure travel and sport courses. When the subject specialists teach key skills, the content is related to the students' vocational area. In other areas, where this is not the case, students do not understand the importance of key skills for their programmes of study.

20. The college employs 95 full-time equivalent permanent lecturing staff and 81 full-time equivalent fractional staff. Teaching staff are generally well qualified and have appropriate professional knowledge and experience: 95% of full-time teachers and 76% of part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. The remainder of full-time teachers and a third of the remaining part-time teachers are in the process of working towards a qualification. In some curriculum areas, there has been a high turnover of teachers and the college has experienced difficulty in recruiting suitable teachers. There are well-established and fully implemented staff appraisal, review and development arrangements. Staff have good access to staff development activities, funded by the college and enhanced by the standards fund, which are evaluated and appropriately monitored. The college sets a high priority on the benefits of industrial experience for vocational teachers and sets targets for professional updating for each faculty. Last year the target was exceeded. As an example, professional updating of sport teachers gives them a good understanding of current practices in the sports industry, which has a positive effect on their students' experience.

21. Since the last inspection the college has continued to make significant improvements to its accommodation, which has resulted in a clean and attractive environment for students. Most teaching accommodation is of a high standard. All classrooms are equipped with whiteboards, overhead projectors and screens. Each main corridor has a TV and video. Specialist facilities are good in business, ICT, visual performing arts and media and health and childcare. They are less good in engineering. Many classrooms and corridors have good displays of students work. There is very good access to all classrooms for students with physical disabilities on the main site. There are no dedicated social spaces for students in the college. As the college's self-assessment report acknowledges, the current sports hall is in very poor condition. The college is building a multi-purpose hall next to the main building, which will be completed by September 2003.

22. The college has two very good resource centres on its main site. They are spacious, well used and offer good opportunities for independent study. Students benefit from being able to use the resource centre on a 'drop-in' basis. The library is well stocked with textbooks, has a good range of journals and a large area for students to work quietly. There is no provision for students to use resources other than IT in college owned centres in the community.

23. Students have good access to computers. The college has 928 computers with satisfactory specifications, all of which have Internet access. The ratio of students to computers is good at 4:1. There are, however, few specialist IT resources for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

24. Monitoring and review of full-time students' progress are good. Responsibility for monitoring students' progress lies with pastoral tutors. They meet regularly to set targets and to review students' progress towards achieving these. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own performance and to take an active part in target setting. The rigour of this monitoring has led to improved retention rates and achievement by students. Subject teachers provide regular details of assessment outcomes for use in reviews. Strong emphasis is placed on encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and achievement. Thorough and successful measures are applied to address problems of poor attendance and performance. Parents are involved in this process for students aged 16 to 18 and they receive feedback on progress at parents' evenings and through written reports. Students who take part in the Excellence Challenge have mentors who work with them to raise their level of achievement.

25. Assessment plans and procedures are well documented. All full-time and some part-time courses publish assignment and assessment schedules at the beginning of the course. Good assessment practice is underlined by an appropriate range of types of assessments. In lessons, teachers make sure they acknowledge the progress that students are making. Detailed written feedback on students' assignments includes critical comments on ways of improving the work. Good

internal moderation and verification procedures ensure accurate and fair assessment and marking that meets the needs of the awarding body. Some students are insufficiently aware of how to appeal against assessment decisions. Comprehensive initial assessment of key and basic skills is carried out for all full-time students. The diagnostic process used has not successfully identified some basic skills needs. There are insufficient assessment opportunities for key skills in some lessons.

26. Overall, the college has a range of programmes that meets many local needs. The curriculum covers all of the 14 areas of learning, but three areas have less than 1% of students in them. There are very few students undertaking land-based, construction and retail/customer service courses. Most curriculum areas offer an adequate range and levels of courses. However, in some areas, such as health and childcare, business and engineering, there are gaps at entry level and level 1. In visual and performing arts and media and ICT there are good ranges of courses.

27. Of all college students, 53% are on provision in the community, 25% on franchised provision and 21% on the main site.

28. The college has expanded and developed its work with the 14 to 16 age group, through its work with a number of schools. In the last three years, numbers have grown from 50 in 2000 to 134 in 2002. There has also been a significant growth in student enrolments on community provision. In the last year, there was a 22% growth in the college's provision as a whole, of which 87% was in community provision, 9% in franchised provision and 4% on the main site. The college has 33 locations in the community. There is good community provision in ICT at 24 sites. Health and social care also has effective partnerships with a local health service trust and early year's partnerships to develop health-related work. A significant amount of the college's basic skills work is also located within community settings.

29. The college has mechanisms for identifying student and community needs. A marketing officer, with a team made up of a schools links officer, employment officer and guidance worker, is responsible for market research as well as promotions. The marketing manager meets with curriculum leaders to discuss market trends and this has led to some new initiatives in curriculum planning. Links with employers are less well established than links with schools and community groups. Some areas of learning do not offer students suitable work placements or work experience. In ICT, engineering and visual and performing arts, work placements and work experience are not fully effective.

30. There are good progression routes in some areas of learning. Health and social care students have good opportunities through the strong partnerships established with local HE institutions. In leisure, travel and sport, 80% of students on level 1 and 2 programmes progress to other FE provision. There is also good progression in ICT, engineering and visual and performing arts and media. However, there is a lack of progression routes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

31. The college offers enrichment activities for all full-time students. All students spend their first six weeks undertaking a compulsory study skills activity followed by curriculum related enrichment activities, which are compulsory. In the health and childcare area, for instance, a range of additional qualifications can be gained and a good programme of visits, residential courses and speakers is organised to broaden the curriculum.

32. There is particularly good support for full-time students. For part-time adult students in community and franchised provision, support is not always effective. The college has an energetic approach to the recruitment of students through open evenings, presentations at school and careers events. The procedures for interviewing students are sound. Advice and guidance are impartial and mostly effective. Advice and guidance workers brief students on the range of student services available. Not all part-time adult students are satisfied with the quality of advice and guidance that they receive. Induction arrangements are effective in preparing students for their course of study and in providing information on college support systems. Important issues, such as equality of opportunity, are introduced and explained. Students who start their courses late are supported by a 'buddy' system involving student mentors.

33. Group tutorials for full-time students are mostly effective in helping students prepare for progression to work or HE. Relevant contemporary issues, such as meningitis, are discussed and awareness raised. The quality of tutorials is assessed through observation. A strong team of pastoral tutors monitors attendance and students' progress. There is good communication with subject teachers. Tutorial support for part-time students is less well established. In tutorials, students receive guidance on careers and HE by working to complete the wider key skills unit on improving their own learning and performance.

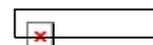
34. There is a good range of welfare and personal support services. The college provides guidance and counselling on a range of pastoral issues, and many students highlight the good support that they receive. Financial support is available from the student support fund, which exists to help students to complete their course of study. Financial help is available for students who have to buy expensive specialist kits for their courses in areas such as catering and beauty care. Childcare support enables about 40 students to continue with their studies. Careers guidance is good, particularly for level 3 students who wish to progress to HE. There are effective systems and procedures seek to ensure that students receive accurate information on future courses or work opportunities outside the college.

35. The initial assessment test is inappropriate for some students. There is low uptake of literacy and numeracy support in some curriculum areas. In the faculty of information and computing technology, only 11% of students identified as needing it take up the provision. The take-up rate is less than 45% in three of the other four faculties. Only in the faculty of design, technology and art is the figure good, at 75%. Fewer than half of the total of 532 students identified as needing basic skills support are receiving it. Attendance is optional. Teachers may refer students for learning support or they may refer themselves. The learning support team has taken action to encourage more students to receive learning support, but its effectiveness has not yet been monitored.

36. There are many examples of good support for individual students with additional learning needs through support workers who accompany them to lessons or by the purchase of specially adapted equipment. The college plans a rapid response to identified needs so that students can start at the beginning of a course. However, there are examples of less effective support for students in community provision. The comprehensive range of services to support students is less effective in community venues away from the main college site. Some students are insufficiently aware of what is available. The quality and availability of information leaflets for students and prospective students is not uniformly good. Some students in community venues wrongly believe that younger students mostly use the main site and this acts as a barrier to their using the services available there.

37. There are good procedures for recording lack of punctuality and poor attendance and performance and for taking appropriate action to address these. The college addresses poor attendance through prompt action by teachers to follow up unauthorised absences.

Leadership and management



38. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has responded well to issues raised in the last inspection. The management team has been effectively restructured and five faculties have been created. Senior managers and governors promote a shared sense of purpose and mission. There is strong leadership, very good governance and effective teamwork between teachers at all levels. Governors demonstrate high levels of commitment to the success of the college and to its effective contribution to education and training in the locality and further afield. They set clear and appropriate strategic objectives and communicate well with managers and teachers. The strategic planning process is consultative and pays careful regard to local and national priorities.

39. The college sets, regularly reviews and monitors demanding but realistic targets that concentrate

on retention and pass rates. Heads of faculty and teachers negotiate targets at course reviews and senior managers then reconsider their appropriateness. A recently introduced system of standard improvement targets aims to drive up standards throughout the college. Targets are set for progression within the college and to HE, but do not include targets for employment.

40. There have been improvements in many achievements. For example, the curriculum area of engineering has significantly improved since the last inspection. Retention rates have been above the national average for the last three years but pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 on GCE AS and A-level courses are below national averages. Achievements in key skills at levels 2 and 3 are low and the outcomes for adult students are significantly lower than for those aged 16 to 18. Provision for literacy and numeracy and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is unsatisfactory.

41. Quality assurance processes are well managed and comprehensive. Most course teams adopt practices consistent with these procedures but they are not implemented effectively to improve the curriculum in all areas. Course teams, with student representatives, meet termly and effectively review progress. Some course reviews, such as those for general education and business, were identified as not thorough enough. An annual 'stakeholders' meeting and student focus groups provide opportunities for the college to gather views about its provision. Results of surveys of students' views are compared to national averages and demonstrate high levels of satisfaction.

42. A satisfactory system of lesson observations is used to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning advisers are effectively used to support teaching staff and assist with the dissemination of best practice. A comprehensive report on the quality of teaching and learning is presented annually to the governors. A systems audit and a course audit are used for all franchised and off-site provision. However, these procedures are not consistently applied, and their outcomes used, as effectively as they are on the main site. For example, the literacy and numeracy self-assessment reports for different sites are not related.

43. While self-assessment leads to the effective identification of appropriate priorities in some areas, this is not the case in all areas. Evidence from a range of sources, including a recent external consultancy exercise, is used to validate college judgements. Inspectors judged that overall provision in three of the nine curriculum areas was good, satisfactory in five and unsatisfactory in one. While quality assurance procedures have led to an overall improvement in teaching and learning, they have not led to a corresponding improvement in all curriculum areas.

44. Management information systems have been improved. Student tracking systems, for use by tutors, are at an early stage of development. A satisfactory range of timely reports is available for retention and attendance rates for termly course reviews, but systems to identify and monitor students' achievement in relation to their attainments at entry are not well established. In some curriculum areas, teachers do not make sufficient use of the data available to evaluate their work. A training programme is increasing teachers' confidence in the use of management information systems.

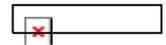
45. Staff development and appraisal processes are good. New teachers benefit from a structured, comprehensive induction and mentor support that effectively introduces them to the college and its systems and values. All staff are appraised annually and development needs identified. Teachers are observed regularly and additional observations take place for those teachers who are new or judged to be in need of additional support. Appraisal takes into account teaching performance, where relevant. Centralised recording of all staff training facilitates the sharing of good practice.

46. The promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. There are comprehensive policies for equal opportunities and race relations. The ethnic profile of the local population is reflected in the staff profile for ethnicity. The promotion of equal opportunities is reinforced through regular training and monitoring in most areas. Some department reviews do not indicate monitoring of equal opportunities and they are insufficiently detailed. Procedures to monitor complaints are rigorous, clearly documented, publicised and effectively referenced to the college charter.

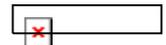
47. Governors make a good contribution to the development of the college. They are clear about their strategic role and have used their expertise well to give good support to the college, for example, in the areas of personnel, finance and estates management. Governors demonstrate outstanding commitment and thorough knowledge of key issues facing the college. There is a waiting list to become a governor. Governors have a good awareness of areas that are under-performing and effectively monitor progress made against targets for improvement. The governors participate in an effective training programme and they have a self-evaluative approach, both as individuals and as a corporate body.

48. There is strong financial management and resources are satisfactorily deployed to achieve value for money. Managers have made significant efforts to monitor and promote procedures to secure effectiveness and efficiency. Each of the five faculties has a detailed and comprehensive business plan. An annual operating surplus has been effectively used for college developments. Over the past 10 years, £10 million has been spent on college refurbishment and accommodation developments.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good retention rates on GCSE mathematics and science courses

- high pass rates on GCE AS mathematics and science courses

- good specialist resources

- good progression

- rigorous and effective course review.

Weaknesses

- little use of data on students' achievements as related to previous attainments

- insufficient use of IT in lessons

- restricted range of provision in science

- many early student withdrawals from part-time courses.

Scope of provision

49. The majority of the programmes in science and mathematics are courses at levels 2 and 3. Biology and mathematics are offered to full-time GCE AS and A-level students and to part-time, day and evening GCSE students. GCE AS statistics are provided for full-time students. GCE AS physics and GCSE chemistry are offered as part-time evening provision. The majority of students on GCE AS and A-level courses are aged 16 to 18. There is an access to HE course and modules are offered in mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. There are currently seven students studying these modules. On GCE A-level biology and GCSE mathematics courses there are flexible arrangements to allow students to study at home. A review of science provision has resulted in a reduced range of science courses. There are no vocational courses. Large numbers of students are recruited to the GCSE mathematics course each year. 'Taster' courses are run for schools and the general public.

Achievement and standards

50. Retention rates on GCSE mathematics and science courses are good and pass rates on GCE AS mathematics and science courses are high. In 2001/02, the majority of GCE A-level and GCSE mathematics and science courses had retention and pass rates above the national average. Students performed well in relation to their previous achievements. For example, the retention rate on GCSE biology was 87%, while the pass rate on GCE AS mathematics was 91%, with 70% of students gaining A to C grades. One student passed GCE AS chemistry.

51. The proportions of students achieving high grades in 2001/02 on GCSE mathematics and science courses were above the national average. In lessons, mathematics students develop a range of mathematical skills and techniques. Students find problem solving and applying mathematics difficult. Science students demonstrated good practical skills in experimental work. They use their time effectively in lessons and respond well to teachers. Access course students were confident and made good progress in mathematics and science modules. Students' attainment was satisfactory or better in most lessons. Progression routes are good and large numbers of GCE A-level students progress to HE or further study with a small number gaining employment. There are some opportunities for work experience and enrichment.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	276	269	259
		% retention	75	89	82
		% pass rate	21	32	45
GCSE science	2	No. of starts	25	**	20

		% retention	88	**	60
		% pass rate	9	**	75
GCSE biology	2	No. of starts	37	**	31
		% retention	89	**	87
		% pass rate	12	**	52
GCE AS mathematics	3	No. of starts	18	11	27
		% retention	83	82	85
		% pass rate	13	33	91
GCE AS biology	3	No. of starts	9	**	28
		% retention	100	**	79
		% pass rate	22	**	77
GCE A-level human biology	3	No. of starts	12	12	*
		% retention	38	75	*
		% pass rate	83	63	*

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** unreliable data

Quality of education and training

51. Most teaching and learning are satisfactory or better. Teachers have formed good relationships with students, which help to motivate them to work hard in lessons. In the best lessons, teachers had planned thoroughly to take account of the needs of the students. In one GCE AS mathematics lesson on finding gradients of straight lines, the teaching was carefully planned to take account of the full ability range within the class. Students participated enthusiastically, made very good progress and were responsive to the teacher's suggestions. Worksheets are of a high quality and provide for extension work. In some lessons, students had difficulty maintaining their concentration because the teacher failed to vary the activities sufficiently. Ineffective use of questions resulted in some students not being involved in the work.

52. In science, practical work is used to consolidate and develop students' theoretical knowledge and is carried out safely. Extensive use is made of handouts and, in GCE AS biology lessons, students are referred to web sites for further reference sources. Science students are motivated and willing to ask questions. On full-time courses, written work is set and marked regularly while, on part-time courses, not enough use was made of assessment to check the students' understanding.

53. Schemes of work are detailed, identify key skills and make reference to additional work using other resources. All teachers carry out an analysis of students' preferred learning styles but they do not make effective use of the results in the planning of teaching and learning. In general, insufficient use is made of IT in lessons. Staff development is extensive.

54. Laboratories are spacious and well resourced. There are two computers in each laboratory. GCE A-level classes make good use of textbooks. Technical support is good. Rooms have a subject identity but there are few wall displays. Laboratories are accessible to wheelchair users but lack specialist facilities for the disabled student. Resources for learning are good and there is a suite of computers, an on-line mathematics support package and a range of dedicated course materials. The range of texts in the library is adequate for students' needs and access to computers is good.

55. Assessment of students' work on full-time courses is carried out on a regular basis using a

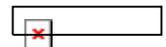
variety of procedures. Assessment on some part-time courses is infrequent. In some subjects, students' progress is measured using examination questions and marking takes place according to awarding body standards. Students' achievement is recorded and teachers give oral feedback to students and written comments on assignments. On the access course, internal and external verification procedures follow regulatory body requirements. Students on full-time courses have progress checks twice each term. Progress of students on part-time courses is less regularly monitored.

56. Support for students is good. There is a comprehensive induction programme for all students that helps them to settle quickly on their courses. Students are helped by teachers who give freely of their time outside lessons. A basic skills assessment is used to assess the entitlement of full-time students to additional learning support, but uptake is low and the impact on teaching and learning is not analysed. Effective procedures are in place to follow up poor attendance and there are good links between subject and pastoral staff. Few part-time students receive specialist subject advice and guidance. There are many early student withdrawals from part-time courses.

Leadership and management

57. Course review and self-assessment evaluation are rigorous and involve all teachers. Effective action plans are produced. Target setting is well developed and used effectively in course management. Data on students' achievement and on retention rates are unreliable. Course teams meet informally and equality of opportunity is actively addressed and promoted. There are high levels of student satisfaction with course organisation and teaching.

Engineering



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses

- much good teaching

- good level of individual support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses

- a narrow choice of courses in mechanical engineering

- o lack of work experience opportunities for many students.

Scope of provision

58. Engineering courses are offered in mechanical engineering, gas installation, electrical/electronic and motor vehicle. There are currently 164 full-time and 240 part-time students taking engineering courses. Many courses are offered on a full-time and part-time basis and at levels from entry level to level 3. Full-time courses in engineering and motor vehicle cater mainly for students aged 16 to 18. Some other part-time courses, including the evening computer-aided design and fabrication and welding courses, cater mainly for adult students. The full-time gas installation course is made up of students who are over 19. Additionally, the motor vehicle section supports a successful and expanding school links programme with 67 students from six schools taking part. There are currently five students on a small modern apprenticeship programme for motor vehicle students.

Achievement and standards

59. There are high pass rates on the City and Guilds computer-aided draughting and design, first diploma in engineering, national diploma in engineering and NVQ level 2 gas installation courses. There are also high pass and retention rates on the NVQ motor vehicle maintenance level 1 course. The pass and retention rates on the entry level certificate in engineering course are close to national averages. There are low retention rates on the first diploma in engineering and the national diploma in engineering courses, but high retention rates, at 80%, and high pass rates, at 100%, for NVQ gas installation level 2 courses. There is good progression for many students following their courses. For example, 55% of national diploma students progressed to HE and 47% of first diploma students progressed to another FE course. All students who successfully gained the award gained full-time employment. Some courses have a wide ability range and students fail to produce work of a consistently high standard. On other courses, especially some of the adult part-time provision, students produce work of good quality. Some level 3 engineering students are completing complex project work. The national diploma students, for example, are currently fabricating and assembling a small hovercraft. Students have carried out detailed research into the theory and practice of hovercraft design.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Certificate in engineering	entry	No. of starts	9	73	77
		% retention	56	100	90
		% pass rate	60	97	97
NVQ in vehicle maintenance - service replacement	1	No. of starts	25	28	15
		% retention	83	74	80
		% pass rate	85	10	90
City and Guilds 4351-01 computer-aided draughting and design	2	No. of starts	16	28	12
		% retention	94	82	83
		% pass rate	93	78	90
First diploma in engineering	2	No. of starts	11	11	18
		% retention	55	82	61
		% pass rate	83	89	82
National diploma in	3	No. of starts	27	29	28

engineering	% retention	68	86	56
	% pass rate	85	83	90

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

60. There is much good teaching. Tutors are well prepared and all lessons are well planned, with detailed lesson plans and schemes of work that clearly state objectives and expected outcomes. Tutors make students aware of the objectives at the start of lessons. Learning materials, including assignments, are well presented and reproduced. Teachers make good use of practice examples to improve understanding. There is good practical teaching in workshops and students are able to use a range of machines, hand tools and testing equipment. Students have good access to ICT. For example, in some electronic engineering sessions, complex programs are used to simulate electronic circuitry. The pace of lessons is appropriate to the abilities of the group and tutors give students a high level of individual support throughout all lessons. There are learning support assistants in some lessons. Clear explanations of topics are given and tutors question students effectively to test and consolidate students' understanding. There is some poor key skills teaching, with learning materials that fail to gain the interest of students. Students are not made aware of the relevance and importance of key skills within the engineering industry. The standard of work produced by most students is good. In a few lessons, the standard of students' work was allowed to be less than satisfactory and students had little pride in what they had produced.

61. Teachers are suitably qualified and have a wide range of industrial experience. Assessors and verifiers are also suitably qualified. The practical workshops are satisfactory for the current provision and contain a suitable range of machinery and hand tools. There is a fully equipped gas testing centre adjacent to the other workshops. Some new equipment for the motor vehicle workshop has been purchased recently. Currently, there are no vehicles that comply with the requirement that assessments are carried out on vehicles no older than five years. General classrooms are well decorated and well equipped. Students regularly have ICT lessons in the resource centre and speak well of the facilities there.

62. Students' progress is routinely monitored and reviewed. Assessments and internal verification processes are rigorous and well documented. Workplace assessments are thorough, with comprehensive questioning and appropriate feedback. Work experience is not an integral part of engineering courses and there is a lack of work experience opportunities for many engineering students. However, students in motor vehicle do take part in work experience and have assessment carried out in the workplace. There is little promotion of work-based learning in engineering and few effective links with employers.

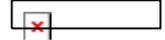
63. There is good individual support for students. There are currently 21 students who have an identified learning support need. Many of these students attend the skills workshops either on a regular or 'drop-in' basis. Additionally, learning support assistants support tutors in some lessons. Good use is also made of engineering technicians who enthusiastically assist tutors during many practical lessons. There is a good tutorial system within which students receive advice and support. Some students have recently returned from a residential trip to Euro Disney where they attended seminars concerned with the engineering aspects of the theme park. There is good informed pastoral support by tutors and students are positive about this aspect of their college experience. Individual support given to students within learning sessions is also good.

Leadership and management

64. There is a strong course team in engineering. Teachers meet frequently both formally and informally. Curriculum leaders are set targets in terms of attendance, enrolment, achievement and retention. Young people leaving school have few engineering options and many consequently join the motor vehicle course with little understanding of the level of basic skills required. This absence of choice, and the lack of real engagement with the course by some students, has contributed to the

lower than expected attainments of this group. Equal opportunities are not routinely and systematically discussed during work-based assessments or reviews.

Business



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- consistently good pass rates on accounting and text and word processing courses

- high standard of work by AAT course students

- well-planned lessons promoting high attainment

- effective management in administration and accounting.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business in 2002

- lack of vocational relevance in the teaching and assessment of key skills

- insufficient written feedback to level 3 business students on how to improve performance

- full-time business curriculum insufficiently matched to students' needs.

Scope of provision

65. Business comprises three main curriculum areas, namely, business studies, accounting and administration. The management provision is small and includes certificates in marketing. Students attending full-time courses are mainly aged 16 to 18, and numbers have declined significantly over

the last 2 years. In 2002, 39 students enrolled on full-time business courses and 13 on administration courses, less than half those in 2000. The full-time business provision comprises GNVQ foundation and AVCE. Administration courses are at level 2 and include medical and legal options. GCE AS and A-level business are offered to full-time students during the day and part-time students in the evening, although student numbers are small and declining. The GNVQ intermediate business and the entry award in business failed to recruit sufficient students in 2002. Most students are adults who attend part-time day and evening courses particularly in accounting, word processing and text processing. IT courses also include, for example, document presentation, audio, mail merge and legal text processing. Flexible entry patterns on these courses allow students to enrol at different times in the year and spread their study over short or longer periods. A small range of part-time courses in text processing is offered at community centres.

Achievement and standards

66. Students perform well in text and word processing examinations at all levels. Results have been above national averages for the past three years. Most full-time administration students achieve several qualifications, including oral skills in business and medical or legal options. They have a period of work experience in local companies relating to their interests. They also provide a useful service for teachers, students and private clients through running a college office services bureau. A good quality assurance system ensures that work is of a high standard before it is despatched to customers. Most of these students progress to employment after one year's study. Pass rates on the AAT course are consistently above the national average and qualifications are achieved in good timescales. Students on foundation, intermediate and advanced levels attend well and produce high standards of practical accounts work. Advanced level students are adept at analysing information and they use technical accounting terms with ease. Their written and oral work is fluent and shows effective synthesis of information.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Text and word processing	1	No. of starts	1,120	1,830	1,369
		% retention	79	93	88
		% pass rate	77	86	83
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	19	17	16
		% retention	84	76	81
		% pass rate	81	77	38
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	28	23	43
		% retention	86	83	72
		% pass rate	88	89	74
NVQ administration	2	No. of starts	33	41	28
		% retention	79	83	64
		% pass rate	85	74	78
NVQ accounting	3	No. of starts	64	33	37
		% retention	78	82	81
		% pass rate	52	59	67
AVCE business (single award)	3	No. of starts	34	21	31
		% retention	53	67	58
		% pass rate	83	100	6
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	37	58	*

		% retention	68	62	*
		% pass rate	64	59	*

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

69. Teaching is good overall. All lessons are well planned and have a clear purpose. Some, with exemplary lesson plans, enabled students at different levels of attainment to make good progress. In one administration lesson, students were required to bring information to the lesson and were also able to draw on their experience in the offices services bureau to make stock calculations and discuss strategies and solutions for a variety of situations. Based on what they had learned, they worked in small groups to design stock safety notices. All students were encouraged to think for themselves and to make the best use of their different levels of experience.

70. Most teaching is conducted at a brisk pace and teachers have high expectations of their students. There are opportunities for practical work, time for individual reflection and group discussions. Teachers make regular checks on what students have learned. In the best lessons, they challenge any simplistic responses made by students to encourage them to think more deeply. Adults in IT skills and accounting lessons were particularly well motivated when some of the more difficult topics were introduced using the teacher's and their own work experiences. Younger students on level 3 courses were passive and inattentive in key skills and GCE A-level lessons; students were not punctual, attendance was poor and students were reluctant to contribute during lessons. Key skills are not effectively integrated with the business and administration curriculum. Teachers missed opportunities to teach and assess key skills in vocational contexts.

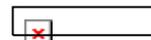
71. The marking of students' work on GCE AS and A-level and AVCE courses is often constructive but insufficiently detailed, with the result that students do not receive sufficient help to improve their work. On several assignments and class exercises, grammatical and spelling errors remained uncorrected and inappropriate communication styles or poor business layouts were accepted without comment.

72. Teachers have wide experience and most have teaching qualifications. Several part-time teachers contribute recent business experience and specialist knowledge. Managers effectively help part-time teachers with their roles. Lessons take place in good accommodation. Classrooms are spacious and many have excellent projection facilities. Notice boards have relevant and interesting materials. Computer rooms are well equipped. During the week of the inspection, average attendance in lessons was high, though the average group size was small.

Leadership and management

73. Faculty managers set clear targets for course enrolment, retention rates and achievement and these are carefully monitored. Action is speedily taken when performance falls short of targets. Some teachers are insufficiently conversant with the targets set for the courses on which they teach. In the area of accounting, administration and IT skills, there is much good teamwork and teachers' collective vocational skills are used effectively. They have clear management direction and share a common sense of purpose to develop the curriculum. This helps to ensure that the quality of work in the lessons is uniformly good. The business curriculum has not been effectively developed to encourage different groups of students to attend. There is insufficient sharing of good practice amongst teachers working in different faculties across the curriculum area.

Information and communications technology



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on most courses

- good progression rates on full-time courses

- effective use of ILT in lessons

- good range of part-time IT courses across the community

- good tutorial system for full-time students

- effective management and team working on full-time courses.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on GCE AS courses

- no appropriate full-time course at level 1.

Scope of provision

74. The breadth of provision gives good progression opportunities to a wide range of students. There are full-time courses leading to the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma and the national diploma for IT practitioners, the higher national diploma in computing and an access to IT course for adult learners. Part-time courses include introductory courses in IT, computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and CLAIT Plus, the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), office applications, Cisco networking and a higher national certificate in computing. These courses are available at many locations as part of the college's community learning provision. In addition, courses are available through a flexi-study route for those students unable to attend lessons on a regular basis. There is good community provision, with 24 sites offering IT courses both during the day and the evening.

Achievement and standards

75. In the last three years, pass rates on most courses have been consistently at or above the national average. Especially notable are the ECDL and the national diploma computer studies courses, with pass rates sometimes over 10 percentage points above the national average. Retention rates are also commendable, with few courses failing to meet the national average and many courses doing significantly better. Among the latter are the one-year CLAIT course, the ECDL courses, the Integrated Business Technology level 2 (IBT II) short course, the GNVQ intermediate ICT course and the national diploma course in computer studies.

76. Computing students demonstrate good practical skills and show a good understanding of the basic concepts. They can work both independently and in groups and the quality of work in their portfolios is generally good. Full-time students are well motivated, carry out their work with enthusiasm and have the opportunity to visit IT-related work places to gain experience. During the inspection, students were punctual and attendance was good, at 85%. Last year, 65% of students completing their course progressed to a higher course either at the college or at university and 19% of students went straight into employment.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
CLAIT (short)	1	No. of starts	748	756	656
		% retention	94	93	90
		% pass rate	79	72	72
ECDL (short)	2	No. of starts	16	74	145
		% retention	100	90	97
		% pass rate	13	61	82
IBT II (short)	2	No. of starts	78	180	146
		% retention	87	96	94
		% pass rate	35	56	61
GNVQ intermediate in IT	2	No. of starts	29	49	37
		% retention	90	83	92
		% pass rate	81	58	68
National diploma in computer studies	3	No. of starts	27	27	30
		% retention	78	74	83
		% pass rate	100	100	92
National diploma in IT	3	No. of starts	17	21	28
		% retention	71	95	71
		% pass rate	92	88	90

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

77. On full-time courses, there are detailed schemes of work, lessons are well planned and students are aware of the assessment arrangements. Some part-time courses, however, have less detailed schemes of work, although the standards of teaching and learning are generally good. Teachers use questions effectively in lessons to check that students understand the work. The more able students are given the opportunity to undertake extension activities designed to help them fulfil their potential, while those in need of extra help are given individual support. Teachers display sound vocational

knowledge and make good use of the data projectors that are installed in most computer rooms. All full-time students are found an annual work experience placement and over 30 students are sponsored by their employers to take part-time courses.

78. The main college site has well-equipped computer rooms with well-spaced, good-quality networked workstations, ceiling mounted data-projectors, overhead projectors, blinds, good-sized whiteboards and a good display of computer-related posters. Where rooms do not have ceiling mounted data projectors, these are available on mobile trolleys. Only one room has inadequate equipment, and that is the hardware/computer maintenance room, where machines are at least 10 years old. Internet access is available on all networked machines. All students are given their own account on the college network where they may store and retrieve their own files. They may also access, from within the college, a shared drive where teachers place course notes and assessment. A college intranet, which can be accessed on the Internet, is in its development stage. Some teachers' rooms have only one workstation between three staff to prepare course material and mark students' work. The quality of resources at community sites is also less satisfactory. Some of the deficiencies include poor, non-adjustable seating, rooms that are too hot, few ILT resources, no evening technical support and workstations with a lower specification than those in college.

79. Internal verification procedures are in place and adhered to by teachers. Course leaders verify assignment briefs and a representative sample of students' work is cross-marked by appropriate teachers. The students are given a schedule of well-spaced assignments early in the course. Marked work is quickly returned with a front cover sheet containing constructive feedback indicating how students can improve their performance. There are regular assessor meetings for those who teach at the community sites, to evaluate the assessment practice and to standardise marking. Students' progress is carefully monitored on the main site and personal tutors are well informed about students. This practice is less rigorous for part-time students at the community sites, although it is by no means unsatisfactory.

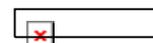
80. Full-time students have weekly group tutorials with tutors who have been specially trained in pastoral care. These teachers have created a comprehensive scheme of work, which is frequently reviewed. Students' opinions are treated seriously and improvements have been made at their suggestion. The students have commented that they find these group tutorials and the periodic individual reviews relevant, useful and interesting. Part-time students do not have tutorials, although they may still make use of the counselling and advice facilities that exist at the main college site.

81. The implementation of the arrangements for key skills is unsatisfactory. They are not taught as an integral part of courses, neither do teachers show students how they can develop key skills through aspects of their work. There is a lack of preparation for key skills assessment and the pass rates are accordingly poor.

Leadership and management

82. Curriculum teams meet frequently and minutes are taken and circulated. Action points are agreed at meetings and plans reviewed. Most issues raised are dealt with promptly and effectively. The college intranet is used by teachers to share knowledge and expertise with each other. Minutes of team meetings indicate that the computing teachers are well motivated and working enthusiastically as a team to improve the quality of their courses. Improvements to the physical and human resources and the general quality of the provision are the result of a progressive attitude and sustained effort at faculty management level.

Leisure, travel and sport



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on most programmes
- good progression
- effective teaching meeting the learning needs of all students
- good tutorial support for students.

Weaknesses

- key skills tasks not matched to curriculum needs on level 3 programmes
- insufficient opportunities to gain additional qualifications in sport.

Scope of provision

83. The college offers a range of travel, leisure and sport programmes, including AVCE, GNVQ foundation and intermediate programmes in travel and leisure, intermediate certificate in retail operations, BTEC national award in sport development and fitness, BTEC national diploma in applied science, BTEC first award in sport and short courses in first aid, NVQ in coaching and national pool life-guarding qualifications. Travel and leisure students can also take a range of additional courses. There are few additional qualifications available in sport.

84. The college has been actively concerned to meet local needs in sport and now offers two additional units from another sports route.

Achievement and standards

85. There are good retention and pass rates on most programmes, with 80% of students on level 1 and 2 programmes progressing to other FE qualifications and 64% of level 3 students progressing to HE. Assessment and marking are handled well, and teachers give detailed positive feedback and points for improvement. Students' conceptual development is good, with the majority of students able to make effective use of knowledge gained from previous sessions. Lessons are progressively demanding and most students demonstrate growing confidence in themselves and their knowledge. The standard of students' work is good. All units are assessed accurately and consistently in line with the standards of the industry.

A sample of retention and pass rates in leisure, travel and sport, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
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GNVQ foundation leisure and travel	1	No. of starts	10	14	10
		% retention	100	83	100
		% pass rate	100	70	90
GNVQ intermediate leisure and travel	2	No. of starts	32	36	24
		% retention	72	72	79
		% pass rate	80	97	82
Intermediate certificate in retail operations	2	No. of starts	15	12	14
		% retention	60	75	86
		% pass rate	78	44	92
National pool life guarding qualification	2	No. of starts	198	122	84
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	96	100	96
GNVQ advance leisure and travel	3	No. of starts	43	53	53
		% retention	71	72	68
		% pass rate	80	97	82

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

86. Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering travel, leisure and sport programmes. The quality of teaching is good. For most lessons, there was clear planning that specified learning objectives and suggested imaginative use of resources. Students were motivated and engaged in a range of activities and their interest was stimulated and maintained through reference to issues specified to the industry appropriate, use of relevant group or individual activities and industry-based projects. Teachers always took account of the different abilities of students and their learning profiles. Learning was fun and students responded well to this. Good teaching and encouragement produced good results and enabled students to deal with complex tasks and activities.

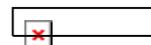
87. Key skills are taught by curriculum team members on level 1 and 2 travel programmes and are an integral part of the work. At level 3, key skills are inadequately matched to the curriculum, with insufficient inclusion of tasks specific to the industry. Key skills workshops are available for most students. Students of the first award in leisure complete a first aid certificate. There are no additional qualifications available to students on the first diploma in sport.

88. There is good tutorial support for students, providing frequent opportunities for students to review and assess their progress. Students make use of a diverse range of faculty specific and college-wide support systems, including induction, learning profiling, diagnostic assessment and pastoral care. An 'assignment hour' has been introduced in response to feedback from local universities in an attempt to remedy potential skill deficits among students on vocational courses. During this additional hour of support, students concentrate on developing the skills needed for HE, such as examination techniques. Students are routinely praised and encouraged to achieve well.

Leadership and management

89. Leadership is good and managers encourage their team to extend industrial knowledge and expertise in order to improve the overall quality of learning. Teachers are involved at all stages of programme development. All teachers participate in annual performance review and appraisals. Regular meetings take place to review the quality of programmes and the students' experience. Forward planning for future curriculum developments takes place effectively at these meetings.

Health and childcare



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on most courses
- well-planned lessons that meet a wide range of students' needs
- good employment and progression opportunities as a result of effective partnerships
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- strong curriculum management and development.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GNVQ advanced health and social care and AVCE health and social care
- failure to demand enough of some students.

Scope of provision

90. There is a good range of full-time and part-time provision for students aged 16 to 18 and adults in early years, care, health and counselling. There is a large franchised provision, mainly of first aid courses, based on five providers in the local area. Part-time counselling provision has been a growth area in recent years, with courses ranging from short introductory courses, which are also offered in community centres, through to the two-year part-time diploma. Collaboration with outside agencies is increasing opportunities for widening participation and improving opportunities for employment and progression to HE. With the local health trust, a new cadet scheme, run as a modern apprenticeship, has been developed and, for students over 19, a fast track level 2 NVQ care course. A compact arrangement with a local HE college has increasingly taken successful students into nurse training. Courses have been offered as a result of collaboration with the Early Years Partnership.

Achievement and standards

91. Most retention and pass rates are good; on eight out of nine part-time courses, between 81% to 100% of students who complete the course pass and, on seven out of nine full-time courses, between 85%-100% of students complete the course successfully. Students' written work is well organised and shows clear development of good practical and academic skills. Their ability to cope with private study and research demonstrates good development of time management, study skills and the ability to work independently. Classroom learning activities demand collaborative working and students demonstrate good teamwork and interpersonal skills. The attainment of students in lessons and assessed work is good; they are able to draw extensively from their work or work placement experience to provide evidence from care or early years settings that help them develop their understanding. There is good progression to HE or work in the vocational area; for example, 78% of students from the diploma in early years progress to early years posts, 54% of national diploma in early years students progress to HE and 46% into employment. Increasing numbers of students are progressing from level 2 to level 3 courses. Retention rates for the GNVQ advanced and subsequently the AVCE course have been poor, as is the proportion of students achieving high grade passes. The achievement of key skills at levels 2 and 3 is weak.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health and childcare, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
First aid at work	1	No. of starts	810	3,386	3,386
		% retention	100	99	100
		% pass rate	95	100	100
First diploma in caring	2	No. of starts	15	28	20
		% retention	67	79	95
		% pass rate	90	79	100
NVQ care	2	No. of starts	14	36	49
		% retention	100	97	96
		% pass rate	100	100	96
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	No. of starts	11	13	**
		% retention	27	54	**
		% pass rate	100	86	**
National diploma in caring services *	3	No. of starts	51	37	20
		% retention	92	81	70
		% pass rate	100	97	92
Diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	28	30	23
		% retention	75	63	91
		% pass rate	100	100	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* now early years

** course not running

Quality of education and training

92. Well-planned and well-structured lessons ensure that a wide range of students' needs and abilities are met. Teachers have good knowledge of students' preferred learning styles and develop

teaching methods to meet the range of styles and help students' development. Teachers develop imaginative activities for group and individual work; lessons which sustain students' interest and motivation. Teachers are skilled at developing students' abilities to analyse, evaluate and to develop good understanding of difficult concepts and complex theories alongside practical work-related skills and knowledge. Students also develop good skills of working collaboratively, researching and working alone without supervision. Teachers share materials, knowledge and resources. This good teamwork ensures the continuing improvement and development of teachers' skills and contributes to the students' good achievements. Few students, however, aspire to high grades. Although schemes of work and lesson plans identify where key skills elements could be integrated with lessons, there is no development of key skills in lessons. On many programmes, however, the subject tutor and key skills tutors do liaise effectively and this is starting to lead to the better development of students' key skills outside of lessons.

93. Teachers are well qualified in their vocational area or teaching subject and all hold an appropriate teaching qualification or are working towards one. They set themselves high standards and take the opportunities offered by the college to update themselves in their vocational area with five days of work placement. They also use college development days to improve and develop their teaching skills. Students have a wide choice of work placements. The scheme is managed very effectively to ensure that students retain their motivation and ability to meet awarding body requirements. There is also a well-organised programme of residential and day visits and visiting specialist speakers. Accommodation and the range of materials and specialist resources are good, but the opportunity to develop the use of ILT-based learning in class activities is weak.

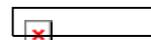
94. Good monitoring of students' progress on full-time courses has improved retention and pass rates. Progress reviews encourage students to evaluate their performance and take an active part in target setting. On a small number of units, the monitoring of students' progress is inadequate. Assessment strategies are designed to meet students' needs and contribute to improved achievement. Good internal moderation systems ensure accurate and fair assessment and marking clearly related to awarding body criteria. Teachers correct spelling and grammar and explain to students how they could improve their grade.

95. Pre-entry guidance for full-time students is good. Full-time and part-time students have a good induction programme that helps them settle into the course and college quickly. A well-structured tutorial programme supports students. Pastoral tutors also track and monitor students' progress thoroughly and work effectively with subject teachers to support students. Initial assessment is very thorough. Students do not always take up the support offered by the central learning support services and students identified as needing learning support do not necessarily use the services.

Leadership and management

96. Leadership and management are strong. The vision of how to improve all aspects of provision in this area is clear and is being implemented. Roles within the faculty are clearly defined and well understood and teachers set high standards for themselves and work effectively as teams to develop good teaching and well-organised courses. Servicing staff find it difficult to attend team meetings. Quality assurance on all courses is thorough and effective in improving the quality of the learning provision and all teachers are fully involved in the self-assessment process, development and action planning. Good equal opportunities practices are part of all aspects of work in the curriculum area.

Visual and performing arts and media



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good teaching in performing arts
- good accommodation and resources
- wide range of programmes.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GNVQ intermediate art and design
- unsatisfactory pass rates on foundation studies
- poor provision for multi-media.

Scope of provision

97. The college offers a broad range of courses in visual and performing arts and multimedia from entry level to level 3 in most subjects. There are currently 266 full-time students at the main site and a further 42 full-time students at a nearby theatre school who are following light entertainment and variety programmes. Part-time courses are offered at the main site and at community centres; there are currently 842 students on these programmes. There are level 2 programmes in art and design and performing arts and at level 3 there are national diplomas in graphics, multimedia, performing arts, and an AVCE and the diploma in foundation studies in art and design. There are opportunities for internal progression on to the first year of a degree course in fine art, which is operated in partnership with a local university. The part-time provision includes accredited courses in drawing and painting, interior design, photography and soft furnishings. There is also a substantial community learning provision.

Achievement and standards

98. Attendance and punctuality have improved significantly since the last inspection, except on the national diploma in multimedia where both are poor. Retention rates are also unsatisfactory on this programme, as they are on the GNVQ intermediate art and design. Pass rates are significantly below national averages on the diploma in foundation studies, though most of students who complete the course do progress to HE. Pass rates on most of the other art and design full-time programmes are at or near national averages and on the two performing arts programmes they are above national averages. Practical work in most lessons, particularly figure drawing and textiles, is of a good standard and all students have appropriate opportunities to present their work in a public forum. Performing arts students particularly benefit from their annual musical theatre production. The use of client projects gives graphics students good awareness of industry demands.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation art and design	1	No. of starts	44	38	42
		% retention	86	92	83
		% pass rate	97	80	80
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	15	12	29
		% retention	87	75	62
		% pass rate	77	78	72
BTEC first diploma in performing arts	2	No. of starts	44	35	18
		% retention	91	69	89
		% pass rate	70	79	100
BTEC national diploma in performing arts	3	No. of starts	29	34	32
		% retention	62	82	78
		% pass rate	89	100	92
BTEC national diploma in design	3	No. of starts	69	65	39
		% retention	59	58	67
		% pass rate	88	89	96

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

99. The teaching is mainly good, especially in performing arts, or satisfactory. Schemes of work and lesson plans are used effectively in teaching. Some assignment briefs are exemplary in their clarity. In the good lessons, teachers insist that students observe appropriate disciplines. Art students produce bold and confident figure drawings in strictly time-controlled circumstances. Performing arts students have to be properly attired in appropriate clothing and footwear for movement lessons. Assignments are designed to involve much independent and collaborative learning and students are expected to organise their own work effectively. Most students enjoy their studies and appreciate the supportive relationships they have with teachers. In some lessons, there is insufficient insistence on punctuality and attendance. On one occasion, there was only one student present for the beginning of a class and the register and other college documentation indicate that this is a regular occurrence for this particular programme. In a minority of lessons, students are passive and not required to take notes during teachers' presentations. In a few cases, teachers did not check that students understood the work.

100. Resources are good. Though occasionally crowded, the art accommodation has good light and there is easy access to specialist equipment. All students have their own workstations. The graphics, multimedia and photography programmes are located in a clean and well-resourced dedicated building. The conversion of other spaces into performing arts accommodation is good and provides a theatre that is also a dance studio with mirrored walls and barres. The resource centre is excellent and students have completely open access to ICT facilities.

101. Teachers are mainly well qualified and those without teaching certificates are encouraged and supported, through staff development initiatives, to acquire appropriate qualifications. The professional experience of many of the teachers underpins the vocational aspects of their teaching. Assessment periods are built into the programme calendar at the beginning of the academic year. While there is not a harmonised approach to assignment design across the area of learning, the better briefs contain clear information about the aims, tasks, evidence required and assessment criteria. Teachers' feedback in these instances is both helpful and exhaustive and distinguishes between the process and product in recognising the contribution made by each student in collaborative assignments. External verifiers for the awarding bodies endorse the methods and

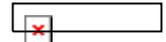
integrity of assessment.

102. The college offers a broad range of vocational and general education courses that mainly meet the needs of adults and students aged 16 to 18. Students can progress from intermediate to advanced courses within the area of learning. Art and design teachers arrange annual trips abroad, and visits to local galleries and exhibitions are a central part of the courses. There is good tutorial support and procedures are vigorous and highly structured. Students are required to identify their preferred style of learning and, in addition to the weekly group tutorials, students have one-to-one sessions each term where agreed targets are stringently reviewed. Additional learning needs are identified at enrolment and appropriate support provided.

Leadership and management

103. Good communication between managers and teachers has led to an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the area of learning, which is reflected in the clear self-assessment report. Curriculum leaders are expected to manage of their programmes and are set targets for enrolment, retention, attendance and achievement. Teachers are beginning to realise the significance of such data and its usefulness in measuring progress. Course teams meet regularly and implement agreed actions. Performance is evaluated through annually observing the teaching of all full-time teachers and identifying subsequent professional development through supporting additional studies and encouraging attendance at curriculum-related events.

Humanities



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- well-planned lessons

- effective use of targets to promote learning

- good assessment of and feedback on students' assignments.

Weaknesses

- poor retention and pass rates on GCSE courses

- poor pass rates on GCE AS courses

- weaknesses in the management of some subjects.

Scope of provision

104. There are about 70 students, mostly aged 16 to 18, studying full-time GCE AS, including one or more humanities subjects. These include, psychology, sociology and law. A smaller group is taking these subjects at GCE A level. A group of around 17 adults study on a full-time one-year access course preparing them for degree courses in humanities or a career in teaching. There is a good range of evening courses for adults at the main college and at a number of sites around the area.

Achievement and standards

105. Pass rates at GSCE and GCE AS are below the national averages. Over two-thirds of adult students on full-time courses complete them and the large majority are successful in gaining their qualification. The success rate of full-time students on GCE A-level courses is around the national average and students achieve higher grades than they would have been expected to achieve on the basis of their school results at 16 plus. Some 60% of adult students and those on GCE A-level courses progress to HE. Students are encouraged and helped to develop their ability to discuss and debate in class and are expected to produce regular written work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	**	7	10
		% retention	**	86	40
		% pass rate	**	83	100
GCSE psychology *	2	No. of starts	65	87	44
		% retention	55	87	59
		% pass rate	69	37	92
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	41	31	10
		% retention	59	58	100
		% pass rate	65	56	100
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	61	47	16
		% retention	54	53	75
		% pass rate	70	53	100
GCE AS law	3	No. of starts	**	36	55
		% retention	**	64	73
		% pass rate	**	43	53
GCE AS general studies	3	No. of starts	**	84	51
		% retention	**	81	61
		% pass rate	**	46	30
Access	3	No. of starts	**	15	11
		% retention	**	67	73
		% pass rate	**	100	88

GCE A-level general studies	3	No. of starts	54	42	13
		% retention	81	81	85
		% pass rate	82	73	82

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* college figures

** course not running

Quality of education and training

106. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a good range of teaching methods and involve students in an active way. Teachers set students a range of tasks to ensure that learning has taken place and that their understanding is developed. In psychology classes, students studied in a highly structured way. They were provided with notes by the teacher, which included sections they had to complete during the class after group discussion. During the next lesson, their level of knowledge was assessed through carefully targeted questioning before the same topic was tackled again at a deeper level. When knowledge and understanding were at an appropriate level, students undertook a range of carefully graded written exercises to make sure that they understood all the key points. Students enjoyed this approach and it was very effective in ensuring that a difficult topic was well learned.

107. Good feedback is given on written work. On the access course, in particular, students know exactly how marks for written work are allocated and when it is marked they are told what they need to do to improve further. The mature students have extra help to get them back into the routine of producing written work. The confidence level of these students soon rises and they produce good work.

108. Teachers produce good duplicated notes that are valuable aids to learning. However, some classes are provided with very large quantities of sections copied directly from textbooks.

109. The quality of accommodation is good. It is well maintained and all students have access to excellent IT facilities. Humanities students have a learning base room for private study and they are also timetabled in this room every week. They can use it at any time to access information through the Internet and to format and print their work.

110. Teachers are well qualified and keep up to date with developments in their subject through regular in-service training. They are enthusiastic and share their understanding with students. Most full-time courses are taught by more than one teacher and this helps to ensure both better continuity in the case of absences and a variety of teaching methods. Teachers need to work more in teams, however, so that they can share ideas and resources more effectively, support one another and have a better overview of the courses they are teaching. A third of teachers are new to the college. In some subject areas, this has not been well managed and it has proved disruptive to students' learning.

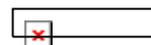
111. All students are assessed on entry and additional help is provided where any learning needs are identified. Students with disabilities are especially well supported with additional help provided in class. All students aged 16 to 18 have individual learning plans and negotiate targets with their tutors. These help them to appreciate how much they are capable of achieving. The targets boost self-confidence and raise their aspirations. Students are very well supported through the tutorial programme. Personal tutors have an important and wide-reaching role, which contributes significantly to raising standards, as well as supporting and guiding students more generally.

Leadership and management

112. The humanities area is well led and there is a clear understanding of what is to be achieved.

The area has made major changes in recent years and some of the changes in the way teaching is planned are not fully effective. Curriculum leadership is more effective in sociology and psychology than in law and general studies. Some new teachers have received insufficient support to settle them into their subject teaching. There are, at present, no alternative courses to GCE A level for students with an interest in humanities. The lack of courses at level 2 also represents a significant gap in view of the college's commitment to inclusiveness.

Foundation programmes



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- good support for students
- effective curriculum planning to meet students' needs in literacy and numeracy.

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching resources
- inadequate initial assessment and monitoring of progress for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- poor pass rates on some numeracy courses
- insufficiently demanding teaching.

Scope of provision

113. The inspection covered foundation programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a range of provision in literacy and numeracy from entry level to level 2. There are currently 91 students on separate specialist course; 15 full-time and 33 part-time students on the 19 plus 'skills for life' course and 43 full-time students on a modular access programme. There are 566 students studying literacy, numeracy and ICT. A range of courses are offered on the main college site, through franchised provision at a local adult education centre and at community venues, including a family learning programme in local schools. The curriculum is currently in transition as the college is examining the suitability of externally accredited programmes. In literacy and

numeracy, many qualifications are now offered through the local Open College Network (OCN). A similar transition is planned in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students with learning difficulties and/or difficulties follow a range of college enrichment activities.

Achievement and standards

114. Retention rates are at or near the national average. There are good retention and pass rates on the certificate in lifetime skills. There are some very poor pass rates on the City and Guilds numeracy course, which was 42% below the national average in 2001/02, and on pre-GCSE numeracy, which was 31% below the national average in 2000/01. Students attend regularly and are punctual.

115. There is evidence that some students progress to higher level courses. For example, in literacy and numeracy, six students have progressed from everyday English to pre-GCSE English and a number to vocational programmes of study. There is insufficient progression for students at pre-entry and entry level.

116. A revised system of initial assessment in literacy and numeracy has been introduced this year. Teachers are currently being trained in the use of new methods to diagnose in detail strengths and weaknesses in spelling, grammar and mathematics. Effective individual learning plans are in place for all literacy and numeracy students. Initial assessment of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is ineffective. Pre-course visits are used for general observation and the initial assessment is insufficiently diagnostic. Students are not assessed in some areas, such as catering, and the goals in their individual learning plans are too imprecise to form a basis from which to measure progress.

A sample of retention and pass rates in foundation programmes, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Modular access programme	entry	No. of starts	18	36	36
		% retention	100	97	94
		% pass rate	100	100	85
Certificate in lifetime skills	entry/1	No. of starts	*	**	102
		% retention	*	**	99
		% pass rate	*	**	92
Associated Examining Board achievement tests literacy (one year)	1	No. of starts	29	13	**
		% retention	97	100	**
		% pass rate	33	62	**
City and Guilds 3750 numeracy stage 1	1	No. of starts	6	35	16
		% retention	100	69	81
		% pass rate	33	50	23
Pre-GCSE numeracy	1	No. of starts	44	63	*
		% retention	82	84	*
		% pass rate	50	17	*
Everyday English	1	No. of starts	38	*	152
		% retention	79	*	71
		% pass rate	17	*	77

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

117. There is insufficient good teaching and very few examples of very good teaching. In the best lessons, the content is well matched to the specific needs of the students. For example, in a family learning pre-GCSE lesson, the teacher used an exercise in character analysis to promote critical discussion on what motivates people and how they behave within relationships. The text was clearly related to relevant media examples, enabling the students to give perceptive reasons for their responses and judgements. In a group tutorial for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, students were examining work skills. The tutor broke the task down well and related the information to students' own life experiences. The students were able to identify effectively the difference between personal qualities and the essential and transferable skills required for different jobs. In many lessons, teachers use a narrow range of teaching methods and activities and do not take sufficient account of the needs of individual students. Students are insufficiently challenged and spend too much time copying information from boards or worksheets. Teachers do not always show knowledge or understanding of the effects of disabilities upon learning. For example, in some lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the subject matter bore little relevance to the students' lives.

118. There is effective curriculum planning to meet students' learning needs in literacy and numeracy. Schemes of work have been produced at all entry levels and level 1. All lesson plan activities are cross-referenced to core curriculum elements and tutor and student records of work monitor individual learning progress against their identified goals. The planning and recording of individual students' progress is inadequate in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Individual learning goals are not consistently identified or recorded in lesson plans and lesson plan activities are not used to develop individual learning. Information recorded often describes the activities undertaken rather than the small progress steps achieved. Records lack the detail necessary to measure the progress made by individual students towards their identified goals.

119. Literacy and numeracy students are extremely positive about their move to the main Southport campus. The accommodation is bright and modern and has good access to the well-resourced library and skills centre. The majority of teachers have undertaken specialist training in basic skills and training in the adult core curriculum. Key teachers are working at a local university towards the level 4 breaking down barriers course. A narrow range of resources is used in many lessons. Students spend too much time on worksheets. There is an extremely small range of numeracy resources and a lack of specialist IT resources for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The accommodation for the specialist ICT lessons at Southport is well resourced and well used. However, computers are insufficiently used within the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

120. Students feel that they receive good information and guidance. They speak highly of the support and direction they receive from their teachers. Students make good use of the skills centre workshop to help them to progress in their studies. Good in-class support is provided for all students on the main college campus. Learning support has not been available for students at some of the franchised provision. Full-time students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have regular group and individual tutorials as part of the college's tutorial programme. Subject teachers provide regular feedback on students' personal and learning progress to the group tutor. This maintenance of student responsibility for learning is used to develop maturity and a responsible attitude to learning.

Leadership and management

121. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and literacy and numeracy are managed separately in two different faculties. The management of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is unsatisfactory. There is only one full-time member of staff in this team. Other teachers are part-time or work in other areas of the college. Too few teachers have specialist qualifications in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This has

an adverse effect on teaching and learning and the pace of planned change. The new manager and the new team in literacy and numeracy have set a clear agenda for improvement. There is a strong team spirit and the teachers are committed to improving the learning experiences of students. Teachers' meetings are held regularly. They focus on curriculum review, students' progress and quality assurance procedures. However, there is insufficient liaison with the literacy and numeracy team in the franchised provision. Both teams operate autonomously and there is no sharing of good practice or learning materials. All teachers are involved in self-assessment. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment but identified important additional weaknesses.

Part D: College data

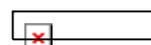
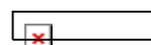


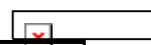
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18	19+
1	39	30
2	35	24
3	23	7
4/5	0	0
Other	3	39
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	785	885	6
Land-based provision	15	43	0
Construction	78	241	1
Engineering, technology and manufacture	267	230	2
Business administration, management and professional	181	2,148	8
Information and communication technology	1,034	2,928	13
Retailing, customer service and	25	48	0

transportation			
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	419	1,350	6
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	156	176	1
Health, social care and public services	387	8,549	30
Visual and performing arts and media	572	1,644	8
Humanities	1,551	2,047	12
English, languages and communication	777	1,405	7
Foundation programmes	913	700	6
Total	7,160	22,394	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001*	1999	2000	2001*
1	Starters excluding transfers	788	915	1,052	2,092	2,450	2,701
	Retention rate (%)	89	86	89	80	79	79
	National average (%)	80	80	79	78	78	78
	Pass rate (%)	64	71	66	58	57	59
	National average (%)	59	65	68	60	66	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,286	982	1,507	1,765	1,713	2,710
	Retention rate (%)	84	79	87	77	79	86
	National average (%)	76	76	76	79	79	78
	Pass rate (%)	72	77	62	67	72	63
	National average (%)	65	66	69	62	65	69
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,139	1,083	1,406	1,094	1,272	1,080
	Retention rate (%)	68	70	76	76	77	79
	National average (%)	75	76	77	78	78	78

	Pass rate (%)	65	74	60	61	60	64
	National average (%)	72	74	76	62	66	69
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	**	**	**	28	44	77
	Retention rate (%)	**	**	**	93	82	84
	National average (%)	**	**	**	84	81	84
	Pass rate (%)	**	**	**	56	53	63
	National average (%)	**	**	**	56	56	53

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 1999 to 2001: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1999 to 2001: College ISR.

** some college data for 2001 is unreliable and some achievement rates are understated*

*** course not running*

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	69	25	6	68
Level 2 (intermediate)	70	30	0	33
Level 1 (foundation)	75	19	6	16
Other sessions	63	25	12	16
Totals	69	26	5	133