

South East Essex College

Inspection report

Provider reference 130672
Published date July 2008

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on students and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management
- specialist provision in: health, public services and care; information and communication technology (ICT); leisure, tourism and sport; arts, media and publishing; preparation for life and work; and business, administration and law.

Description of the provider

1. South East Essex College is a large general further education college based in Southend, Essex. It is located on six campuses in Southend and the surrounding area. The main campus, built in 2004, is in the town centre. The college is one of several providers offering post-16 education and training in the area. A significant number of local secondary schools have sixth forms. In addition, there is a nearby sixth form college and a large adult education college.
2. In 2006/07 the college recruited around 3,330 full-time equivalent students aged 16 to 18, and 1,200 aged 19 and over. In 2007/08 the number of students aged 16 to 18 increased by around 10%, whereas the number of students aged 19 and over decreased. Education and training are offered in all areas of learning, although provision in some of them is small. The college offers a wide range of full- and part-time courses from pre-entry level to higher education (HE). The college is the lead partner in the NOVA partnership. This delivers work-based learning programmes to large numbers of students across South Essex and the Thames gateway. In addition, the college works with local secondary schools in a programme which provides vocational provision for students aged 14 to 16. The college was awarded a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in media technology in 2001, and a second CoVE in information and communication technology (ICT) Solutions in 2005.
3. At 11%, the proportion of students from minority ethnic heritage is above the 7% in the local population. There are pockets of deprivation within the college's catchment, although the college is not categorised as one serving an area where this is widespread. Unemployment in Southend is slightly higher than the Essex and UK averages. The achievement of GCSEs in local secondary schools is higher than the national average, though with some variations between schools. The mission of the college is 'to be a leading college providing people and businesses with the knowledge and skills needed for success'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care	Good: Grade 2
Information and communication technology	Good: Grade 2
Leisure, tourism and sport	Outstanding: Grade 1
Arts, media and publishing	Good: Grade 2
Preparation for life and work	Good: Grade 2
Business, administration and law	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The effectiveness of provision is good, which is in agreement with the college's self-assessment. Many aspects of the college have improved since the last inspection. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are now at or above the national average and most are improving. For adult students at foundation level they are below the national average. Retention and attendance have improved. Overall, students make good progress in class and acquire good workplace skills. Many progress to university or employment. For the large General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level provision, students achieve as expected and pass rates are close to the high national average. Success rates on NVQ programmes are high.
5. Teaching and learning are good. The well designed college lesson observation system is applied systematically and the college has a good understanding of its own teaching and learning. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. Assessment is effective and students have a good understanding of what they should do to improve. Resources for teaching and learning are good, and often outstanding. The college evaluates additional learning support needs very well and support is provided promptly for all those who need it, including part-time students. Supported students achieve much better than their peers. The college recognises the need to challenge all students more, and in particular the most able.
6. The responsiveness to meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. The curriculum is broad and takes good account of market intelligence and demand. Progression routes are extensive and well developed. The NOVA partnership offers vocational training opportunities for many students in a wide range of apprenticeships and other provision. Partnership working is outstanding and the college takes a lead role in many aspects of the provision of learning opportunities for young people. Employer engagement is excellent, and the college responds flexibly to employers' requirements. The provision of work experience is good across the college. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good overall and to social inclusion in particular it is outstanding.
7. Students receive good guidance and support. Support for students entering the college from school is very good. Additional learning support and academic support are very effective. The college offers a wide range of specialist facilities and help for those who need them. Careers and other advice and guidance are good. Students value one-to-one tutorial sessions. However, time in group tutorials is not always used effectively.
8. Leadership and management are good. The principal provides strong and effective leadership and is well supported by able colleagues. Communication is excellent. Collaborative arrangements are managed effectively. Quality assurance is good. The monitoring of teaching and learning is accurate and systematic. Self-assessments are largely accurate, though the quality of target

setting is variable and occasionally insufficiently precise. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. Governance is outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The college's capacity to improve is good with outstanding features. Quality assurance arrangements are robust. The college has improved the quality of teaching and learning. It has developed an accurate and very effective lesson observation system. The proportion of inadequate lessons is very low. This has contributed to the steady upward trend of improvement in students' achievement. The self-assessment process is inclusive. The self-assessment report is largely accurate and used effectively as a tool to promote improvement. However, it lacks precision in a few areas; for example, a few strengths are overlooked and some areas for improvement, such as attendance, are not sufficiently highlighted. Staff and managers at all levels show an outstanding commitment to improve. Communication is excellent. The college is held in high regard by the local community.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

10. The college has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Retention rates have steadily improved and are broadly in line at all levels with comparable colleges. Lesson planning is good and most teaching meets the range of students' needs effectively. Low level noise disruption created by students walking through open plan studios has not been resolved effectively. Quality assurance systems have improved markedly. They are robust and systematic and have helped to secure key improvements throughout the college. Success rates are improving.

Key strengths

- successful focus on raising standards at all levels
- good and significantly improved teaching and learning
- responsive and extensive curriculum
- highly effective additional learning and pastoral support
- outstanding promotion of equality and diversity
- excellent partnership and collaborative working
- excellent specialist resources
- very strong and visionary leadership
- good communication, teamwork and morale.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- success and attendance rates on a minority of courses
- the quality of the learning environment in a few areas of the college
- ensure that all students, especially the most able, are challenged to achieve their best.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good. This agrees with the college's self-assessment. Success rates have improved steadily and are now above the national average. However, the rate of improvement is variable. Retention rates have shown an improving trend and are close to the national average. Relative to their starting points, students make good progress in lessons. Many achieve high standards.
12. At foundation level, success rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved markedly in 2006/07 and are now high. For adults, however, the overall success rate remains below the national average. At intermediate level, overall success rates show an improving trend. They are well above the national average for students aged 16 to 18, and just above for adult students. Students retaking mathematics and English achieve well, with very good achievement of high grades in English. The retention rates on intermediate level courses have shown consistent improvement since the last inspection and in 2006/07 were just above the national average.
13. For the large numbers of students aged 16 to 18 on advanced level provision, overall success rates show small improvements which have kept pace with the national average. For adults, improvements to just above the national figure were evident in 2006/07. Overall success rates for A level subjects were slightly higher than the national average for 2006/07, slightly lower for AS subjects. Retention rates have shown a steady improvement and in 2006/07 they were around the national average. In-year college data indicate further improvement in 2007/08. A high proportion of students progress to HE. Pass rates for A level subjects are around the high national average though uneven across the range of subjects offered. When compared to their GCSE grades on entry, these students progress in line with expectations, though this varies significantly between courses. The proportion of students who achieve high grades is higher than the national average. However, for GCE A level courses it is around the national average but lower for AS courses.
14. Success rates for NVQs are consistently higher than the national average. Short course success rates are good. Success rates for national diploma courses are around the national average overall, but many have a high proportion of high grade passes that show an improving trend. Success rates for female students are slightly higher than for males on long courses at levels 2 and 3. The achievement of students from minority ethnic heritage is slightly lower than for other students. Success rates for key skills have improved markedly since the last inspection and are now close to or above the low national average. Attendance at classes is satisfactory and improving.
15. Within the NOVA partnership, success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices programmes have steadily improved over a three year period, and are below the national average.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. The observation of teaching and learning is accurate and systematic. Staff training and development have improved the proportion of teaching, which is significantly good or better. The staff intranet provides a wide range of resources that support teaching and learning. Sharing of good practice is increasingly effective. However, the college recognises that the quality of teaching and learning is not yet consistently good in all lessons.
17. Detailed lesson planning ensures that students' time is used productively. Most teaching meets the different needs of students. Clear objectives are shared and progress is monitored carefully. Students know how to improve their work. Most students make good progress in lessons and produce a high standard of work. Students develop good workplace skills and demonstrate professional standards in their practical and theoretical work. Attendance is improving but there remain a few courses where low attendance persists and this affects the quality of teaching and learning. Whilst the college has begun work to meet the needs of gifted and talented young people, the most able students are not always challenged sufficiently to reach the highest standards. Assessment and verification processes are good. Students enjoy their time at the college.
18. Resources to support learning are good and most classrooms are equipped with information and learning technology (ILT), including interactive whiteboards. In many areas these are used well to enliven lessons. Many students benefit from the extensive resources on the college's virtual learning environment and intranet. Whilst specialist resources and most accommodation are good, learning in some areas is affected by the movement of students through teaching areas. Initial assessment of additional learning needs is comprehensive and very effective support is provided promptly. Students receiving support achieve significantly higher success rates than those who do not.
19. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. The very broad range of curriculum covers all 15 sector subject areas. Curriculum planning takes close account of regional and local market information to identify gaps in provision and ensure subsequent careful development of new provision. Coherent pathways from entry level to HE are offered in most curriculum areas. Internal progression rates are high. An extensive range of vocational provision is offered to students aged 14 to 16 through the NOVA partners, and many subsequently continue to study at college when they leave school. Highly effective programmes are provided for pupils excluded from school. The college continues to offer part-time further education courses to adults, many of whom are under-represented in education and training; for example, weekend college has successfully engaged adults on a range of short taster courses.
20. Partnership working is outstanding. Community partners, employers and schools value highly the college's key role in widening participation and developing greater cohesion across education and training providers in the

area. The college leads the Thames Gateway South Essex consortium for Train to Gain very effectively.

21. Through the NOVA partnership, young people benefit from work-based learning opportunities. Employer engagement is excellent. The college responds flexibly to the needs of employers by providing, for example, employer specific programmes, NVQ provision and short courses through the business college. The college has CoVEs in media and ICT that make significant contributions to local business needs. Students on full-time vocational courses have very good opportunities for work experience and projects with local companies. The college recognises that feedback arrangements from employers need further development.
22. A diverse and appropriate enrichment programme extends students' occupational and social skills. Students thoroughly enjoy the imaginative community projects, competitions, visits and events that are well designed to reflect their varied interests and preferences; for example, media students prepared a promotional video for a hospice, followed by a presentation to local businesses. Students make good positive contributions to the community.
23. The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good overall and to social inclusion in particular it is outstanding. There is pro-active engagement with learners who might not otherwise attend college. The broad range of programmes have good progression routes. Support for learners with additional support needs, including literacy, numeracy and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is very good.
24. Students receive good guidance and support. Prospectuses and leaflets are very well designed, useful and relevant. A team of specialist advisers work closely with curriculum staff to provide impartial information and guidance to prospective students. Arrangements to support young students in the transition from school to college are excellent. Adults are invited into college prior to course interview to discuss the support and services available to meet their personal circumstances. A college job-shop helps students to find suitable part-time work. Careers guidance for applicants to HE is very effective. The destinations of full-time students on introductory courses, however, are monitored insufficiently.
25. Additional learning support is highly effective and is arranged promptly by an experienced team. Ongoing support is effective in developing students' confidence and helping them to achieve their qualifications. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well supported and play a full role in college activities.
26. Students have regular and useful individual tutorials to discuss their progress with tutors. Whereas many tutors are imaginative and adept at developing students' social and personal skills during group tutorials, too many students have few directed activities and consequently make poor use of tutorial time. The college values students' opinions and has clear strategies to act on their

views, including those expressed by the student council and the equality and diversity group.

27. The support services work cohesively and are effectively managed. Regular reviews of all aspects of student guidance and support lead to well targeted action plans and continuous improvement.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

28. Leadership and management are good. This agrees with the college's self-assessment. The principal provides visionary and strong leadership and is well supported by a competent senior leadership team. The college plays a key strategic role in the local community, significantly contributing to regeneration of the Southend area. Since the last inspection the development of a new main building and a rapid and large growth in student numbers have been well managed. Improving the quality of teaching and learning has been given a high profile and has been central to raising students' achievement and standards. Overall success rates show a steady upward trend and were at or above the previous year's national average in 2007. However, the rate of improvement across the sector subject areas is uneven.
29. There are excellent collaborative partnership arrangements which meet the needs of stakeholders effectively; for example, the NOVA partnership of 13 work-based learning providers is well led by the college. It provides improved opportunities and experiences for students in Southend and the Thames gateway area. The management team has established a culture of co-operation and mutual respect throughout the partnership.
30. Quality assurance is good. Key aspects of the college's work, such as the monitoring of teaching and learning, have been strengthened significantly. Comprehensive and clearly directed training and development support improvement. The use of data by leaders and managers at all levels to analyse, monitor and evaluate performance is very good. Action plans are comprehensive. However, the quality of target setting is uneven. Some targets are too vague to monitor effectively. The self-assessment process is well established across all areas of the college and involves all staff. The self-assessment report is thorough, largely accurate and used well as a management tool to improve provision.
31. Communication is good. A whole college culture of open consultation and effective teamwork promotes improvement successfully. Curriculum management is good. Actions taken by curriculum managers to improve students' success are effective. However, in some curriculum areas, not all actions have yet impacted fully on students' success rates.
32. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college's response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the

Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2002 (SENDA) is very good. Race, disability and gender schemes and plans are in place. The reporting of performance by different groups of students and staff is meticulous. Positive action is taken to challenge discrimination and preconceptions. The promotion of equality and diversity within lessons is good and in visual, performing arts and media it is exemplary. Success is recognised and celebrated well. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current requirements. Appropriate checks are in place to ensure all staff can work safely with children and vulnerable adults.

33. Governance is outstanding. Governors are very committed and student-focused and they bring a wide range of expertise to their role. They regularly monitor academic performance and provide senior managers with good levels of challenge and support. Financial management is strong.
34. The innovative and contemporary design of the main college site provides a safe and attractive environment that is well respected by students. The ventilation in some areas of the new building, however, is unsatisfactory, often leaving rooms very warm and not always conducive to learning. There is some overcrowding in a minority of curriculum areas such as art, design and media. The quality of specialist resources, including the library and ICT resources, is excellent. The college provides good value for money.

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care

Good: Grade 2

Context

35. The college offers full- and part-time courses from level 1 to level 4, including introductory diploma and Council for Awards in Children's Care in Education (CACHE) foundation courses, first diplomas in health and social care, children's care, learning and development and public services, access to HE programmes in health and nursing and social work, certificate and diploma in childcare and education. Part-time courses include NVQs in care, children's care and development and counselling courses at levels 2, 3 and 4 for adult students. There are 521 students on full-time courses, 460 of whom are aged 16 to 18. Part-time courses have 461 students, most of whom are adults. Students are able to progress to higher level courses such as foundation degrees in counselling.

Strengths

- high success rates on public service and counselling courses
- high standards of students' work
- much good teaching
- good use of vocational enrichment activities
- very effective academic and personal support for students.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates on level 2 childcare courses
- insufficient coordination of curriculum.

Achievement and standards

36. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates on public service and counselling courses are high. Success rates on many other courses have improved and are above the national average, particularly at level 3. Success rates on most other courses, including key skills, have risen steadily to around the national average except for a small number of level 2 childcare courses where they remain low. Retention rates have risen considerably and are now good on many courses. The percentage of students gaining higher grades is high on level 1 courses.
37. The standard of students' work is good. Written work demonstrates a clear understanding of relevant research techniques and an accurate interpretation of complex data. Students produce good presentations demonstrating good ICT skills. Students make good progress. Progression between levels and into work or HE is good. Learning resources are satisfactory. A good range of books and professional journals is available.

Quality of provision

38. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned. Clear schemes of work, lesson plans and student group profiles are used to plan lessons that meet the varied needs of students. Most lessons are lively and ensure full involvement of students. Particularly good use is made of questions to prompt discussions and measure learning. Assessment and marking are accurate, with constructive feedback on how students can improve their future work.
39. Programmes meet the needs and interests of students well. There are a good range of progression opportunities, from level 1 to foundation degree level. The needs of employers are met effectively. Enrichment activities contribute effectively to students' enjoyment and achievement; for example, many students gained an additional qualification in counselling skills. A wide range of work placements, including care homes, day nurseries, homeless shelters and pharmacies meet the preferences of students. Students are involved in interesting community activities related to their course aims; for example, public service students successfully competed for funding to produce a campaign to raise awareness about drug and alcohol misuse.
40. Guidance and support are good. Additional support for students is very effective. Good individual support is provided in lessons for students with dyslexia to improve literacy skills. Students who receive additional learning support have higher success rates than other students. Individual tutorials are highly regarded by students. Target setting and the monitoring of students' progress are thorough. Students benefit from imaginative enrichment activities relevant to their programmes. Childcare students gain useful additional qualifications, including counselling skills.

Leadership and management

41. Leadership and management are good. Team leaders and heads of schools provide clear direction and leadership. Data reports are used routinely by course leaders to monitor attendance and retention rates. The promotion of equality and diversity is well embedded. Schools carry out individual self-assessments and course reviews. Quality assurance is rigorous and self-assessment is accurate. However, courses are spread between three schools across the college and there is an over-reliance on informal arrangements to coordinate programmes between schools.

Information and communication technology (ICT) Good: Grade 2

42. The college offers courses in information and communication technology (ICT) from level 1 to level 4. Full-time provision includes: first diploma for ICT practitioners; E-quals diploma for information technology (IT) practitioners and the national diploma IT practitioners. Part-time courses include level 1 City and Guilds certificate for IT users and the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). There are approximately 472 students on ICT programmes, of whom 312 are full-time and 160 are part-time. Most part-time students are adults.

Strengths

- high success rates on most programmes
- high standard of work produced on BTEC first and national diploma courses
- good teaching and learning
- highly effective support for students on part-time courses
- good links with the local community and businesses
- good management.

Areas for improvement

- insufficient recording of students' targets on part-time level 1 courses
- insufficient access to information learning technology (ILT) in some classrooms.

Achievement and standards

43. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and adults are high. Part-time students achieve particularly high success rates, significantly above the national average.
44. The standard of work produced by full-time students on BTEC first and national diploma courses is good and their achievement of high grades is also good. Students benefit from detailed feedback on their work and make improvements. Students on all courses make good progress. Attendance is satisfactory and students are punctual.

Quality of provision

45. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching maintains students' interest and enjoyment through the good use of questioning and a wide range of practical activities. Learning resources are not available in all ICT teaching rooms and locations. The monitoring of students' progress is mostly effective, though for part-time students there is insufficient recording of targets so that students are not always clear about what they need to do to improve. Staff have good access to relevant on-line attendance, retention and achievement data to identify students at risk of underperformance. ICT students make good use of the college's virtual learning environment, which they can access from home.

46. Students and staff benefit from a good range of courses that meet their needs and interests well. Good progression opportunities exist from level 1 to level 4. Progression from levels 2 to 3 and to HE is good. Enrichment activities for ICT learners are satisfactory. Students benefit from visits and speakers, and one group of learners recently visited Japan to further their knowledge and understanding.
47. Guidance and support are good. Part-time students are particularly well guided and supported. Students receive relevant diagnostic and IT skills tests and are guided to the right qualifications. Students speak positively about the level 1 learning materials created by college staff.

Leadership and management

48. Leadership and management are good. The college has good links with the local community through its outreach activity. The ICT CoVE provides training for local business and for ICT support staff in local schools. ICT courses are managed effectively across the college's schools through regular course and staff meetings. Staff development also provides opportunities to share good practice and to learn new skills. Links from staff training to programme reviews and to the self-assessment reports are good. Students' feedback is also used effectively in the self-assessment process. Equality of opportunity is well promoted. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the self-assessment reports from the four schools providing ICT courses are accurate. There is effective sharing of information and good practice at regular staff meetings.

Leisure, tourism and sport

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

49. The college offers courses from level 1 to level 4, including first and national diplomas in sport, and travel and tourism. Currently, there are 134 students on courses in travel and tourism and 389 students on courses in sport. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and are full-time.

Strengths

- high success rates
- good achievement of high grades on vocational programmes
- outstanding teaching and learning
- extensive range of provision in sport, and travel and tourism
- very strong industry and partner links in sport and travel and tourism
- highly effective individual pastoral and academic support
- strong and effective curriculum leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- insufficient review of performance against internal targets.

Achievement and standards

50. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates for most courses are well above the national average. Retention has improved and is high. A large proportion of students studying on first and national diploma courses achieve high grades. Students' attendance is good. Students make good and sometimes outstanding progress. The tracking of achievement on key skills is not well developed, although success rates have improved to around the national average.

Quality of provision

51. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Lessons are well planned with a very good variety of teaching and learning activities. ILT is used very effectively. Teachers ensure that students develop very good ability to work independently. In a small minority of lessons, there is insufficient checking of learning and more able students are not challenged adequately. Assessment is well planned and organised. Feedback on assessment ensures that students are well informed about how to improve the standard of their work. Students' attendance is monitored carefully and is good.
52. The extensive range of programmes and activities meets the needs and interests of students well. The area works with a range of partners in the private and public sectors to offer additional work-related activities to enhance students' employability. Careers education and guidance are well planned and are linked to industry effectively; for example, students have visited Easyjet and David Lloyds' Leisure to learn about their training programmes. Many students

progress through the college from foundation to degree level. Guidance and support are outstanding. There is very good pastoral guidance from tutors and assessors to support students in the achievement of their qualifications. In tutorials, effective academic support monitors and tracks progress through action planning and target setting. Targets for students are set and monitored well through tutorials.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management are outstanding. Curriculum management is purposeful, leading to continued improvements in standards. Quality assurance processes are effective and the self-assessment report is accurate. Tracking and monitoring of learning are very good. There is a comprehensive and accurate system for observing teaching and learning. Offsite facilities for sports students are excellent. Communication is well structured and effective. Teams hold regular meetings to share information and discuss students' progress. Course reviews are rigorous and identify strengths and areas for improvement clearly. Actions identified lead to improvement. However, although documents refer to national averages, their use by staff to set precise and measurable targets for improvement is underdeveloped.

Arts, media and publishing

Good: Grade 2

Context

54. The area has a total of 980 students. Of these, 424 are studying on art and design courses and 556 on media and performing arts courses. Approximately 200 students are on level 1 and level 2 courses. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18 and are on full-time courses. Around 140 students are aged 19 or over and are mostly on part-time courses.

Strengths

- high success rates
- high standard of practical and performance work
- much good teaching and learning
- successful range of enrichment activities and links with employers
- good leadership and management
- excellent accommodation and specialist resources.

Areas for improvement

- low success and retention rates on some long courses for adults
- some cramped studios and classrooms
- low attendance in some sessions.

Achievement and standards

55. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates on many courses are above the national average; for example, the first diploma in performing arts and the national diplomas in fine art and graphic design have been above the national average for three years. Students on the introductory diploma course in art and design and first diploma in performing arts achieve a high proportion of distinctions and merits. However, success and retention rates on the access courses, the part-time diploma in foundation studies and AS media courses are low. Standards of students' work are very high on performing arts, and art, design and media courses. Some observed lessons in media and performing arts had low attendance.

Quality of provision

56. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan learning thoroughly and provide challenging tasks. Information on aims, objectives, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are shared well with students. Teaching supports students with diverse needs and abilities very well. In a few lessons, there is a lack of direction and insufficient challenge. Assessment and the marking of students work are good. Students receive good constructive feedback and good support from their teachers. Additional learning support is well planned and timely. The new purpose designed accommodation gives students access to excellent specialist resources and enables good learning.

57. The area demonstrates a good response to the needs and interests of students. They benefit from an extensive variety of additional activities and links with employers. The range of courses offered is exceptionally good and has coherent progression routes that enable many students to achieve further qualifications.

Leadership and management

58. Leadership and management are good. Organisation and structure are effective and efficient. Managers provide a clear strategic direction. Communication is good. The monitoring of students' performance is rigorous and makes good use of accurate information. The self-assessment report is self-critical and accurate. Course reviews are thorough and contain useful plans for improvement. Staff are well qualified and have a good range of up-to-date professional experience. The deployment of staff and resources is good. However, a few studios and classrooms are inappropriately used with people walking through and sometimes disturbing lessons. Strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained and managers have made significant progress on areas for improvement. Equality and diversity are promoted effectively and well monitored. Managers make good use of students' surveys to check their views. The area has a good range of industry standard computer technology. However, some studios and classrooms are cramped.

Preparation for life and work

Good: Grade 2

Context

59. The college offers courses from entry level 3 to level 2, including key skills in application of number, communication and ICT. It includes discrete provision for 175 students with learning disabilities and difficulties (LDD) or more complex needs. Literacy, numeracy, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses have 71, 65 and 79 students respectively. The college provides extensive in-class support for literacy, numeracy and language.

Strengths

- high success rates by students receiving support
- good achievement of personal and social skills for students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties
- much good teaching and learning
- good range of programmes
- very good academic and personal support
- good curriculum management.

Areas for improvement

- low key skills level 2 success rates
- insufficient development of independent writing skills.

Achievement and standards

60. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high for the significant number of level 1 students receiving academic support. Students with LDD make significant gains in personal and social skills. They improve basic work skills and employment prospects. ESOL students become more competent at listening and speaking in their daily lives and at work.

61. Success rates on key skills have improved in recent years. Although the success rates at level 1 are now satisfactory, they remain low at level 2. The standard of students' work is good and most students progress to higher level courses. Students are highly motivated and manage their other responsibilities effectively in order to attend classes. Students are supported well to pass their examinations. However, they do not always develop independent learning skills sufficiently well, particularly in writing.

Quality of provision

62. The overall quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good and this agrees with the college's self-assessment. Initial assessment is thorough. Lessons are well planned. The extensive resources are used well. Teaching teams work well together. Students make good progress in lessons. Students' progress is monitored closely and thorough assessment ensures they know how to improve their work. The college offers a good range of programmes to meet

the needs of students. Programmes are structured flexibly and students can enrol and take examinations at any time. Students benefit from a good variety of classes. Individual learning plans include well matched work experience. In-class support is timely and related appropriately to students' vocational areas. Support for students is very good. Learning support assistants provide very good study and personal support, and follow up non-attendance. Additional literacy, language and numeracy support helps students to develop skills and achieve qualifications.

Leadership and management

63. Curriculum management is good. The college has managed rapid growth in student numbers and improved the quality of provision. The college promotes equality and diversity very well. Communication and team-working, including the sharing of good practice, are highly effective. Lesson observations are thorough. Inspectors' judgements on the quality of teaching match the findings of the self-assessment report. Tutors are experienced and well qualified. Staff are enthusiastic and committed. Managers provide effective support promptly, including abundant professional development opportunities. Managers give an accurate evaluation of this diverse area of learning by producing self-assessment reports on each component. These include the views of most staff and students through a rigorous course review process. Most areas for improvement identified through the quality improvement plan have been tackled successfully.

Business, administration and law

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

64. Full- and part-time courses are available from level 1 to level 4 in business studies and management, business administration, accounting and finance, and law and business skills. Students can study BTEC first and national certificates and diplomas, ILEX certificates and diplomas, GCE A and AS levels, and other vocational qualifications. Of the 492 full-time students, 475 are aged 16 to 18. Most of the 259 part-time students are adults.

Strengths

- high success rates in foundation book-keeping and accounts, legal secretaries' certificate and diploma, NVQ4 accounting, BTEC first diploma in business
- well planned teaching and learning
- extensive range of programmes
- effective steps taken to secure improvement.

Areas for improvement

- low retention on business studies and GCE AS law programmes
- inconsistent quality of monitoring students' progress
- under-developed links between theory and current practice.

Achievement and standards

65. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates are high on several courses. Pass rates have been outstanding on the legal secretaries' diploma programme in the last three years. Success rates are low on the BTEC national diploma in business and retention is low on the GCE AS law, BTEC national diploma and NVQ2 accounting programmes. Recent statistics show improving retention rates on several courses. The standard of students' work is good. Business administration students develop very good occupational skills. Business studies and GCE A level students develop effective study skills. Adults returning to study develop in confidence and acquire useful and practical employment skills.

Quality of provision

66. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan their lessons well to meet the needs of individual students. Most lessons are busy and purposeful and students enjoy the different teaching and learning activities. However, many teachers do not refer to topical business items in the local or national news or encourage students to discuss their own experiences as business-related consumers, observers or employees. The legal secretarial programmes have very well developed links with employers which motivate the students and enrich their learning. Teachers use a narrow range of methods to check understanding in lessons. Questioning is often broad and imprecise and elicits responses from only a small number of students. Students receive good written

feedback on their work and value the detailed and helpful comments made by their teachers.

67. The range of provision is very good and meets students' and employers' needs well. Students can follow academic and vocational pathways in general business or specialised finance and business administration programmes. Many students progress well through different levels of courses or gain entry to employment or HE. Guidance and support for students are satisfactory. Students have good access to information, advice and guidance. Initial assessment is thorough and individual needs are recognised and supported. Students value the informal help they receive from their teachers. The tutorial programme is satisfactory. However, targets set in individual learning plans are often imprecise.

Leadership and management

68. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Action is being taken to improve communication and share good practice between the four different areas which are managed separately. There is considerable variability in the achievement and learning experiences of the students across the different areas. This is acknowledged by the college in the different grades awarded by the separate self-assessment reports. These reports are largely accurate in their judgements. Managers and teachers have a strong commitment to improving both the achievement of students and the quality of teaching and learning, and are taking appropriate steps to secure these improvements.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	520	73	65	8	433	67	62	5
	05/06	542	73	69	4	394	59	65	-6
	06/07	686	80	...	...	395	60	...	...
GNVQs	04/05	118	70	68	2	...	...	64	...
	05/06	56	75	72	3	...	...	...	...
	06/07	19	63	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	51	55	68	-13	91	55	66	-11
	05/06	95	81	72	9	40	73	74	-1
	06/07	90	78	...	...	18	100	...	...
Other	04/05	351	76	64	12	342	71	62	9
	05/06	391	70	69	1	354	57	65	-8
	06/07	577	81	...	...	377	58	...	...

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	1089	70	61	9	918	45	60	-15
	05/06	1093	76	66	10	531	69	66	3
	06/07	1097	78	...	...	601	72	...	...
GCSEs	04/05	189	73	64	9	58	40	63	-23
	05/06	97	76	68	8	28	71	67	4
	06/07	110	71	...	...	20	70	...	...
GNVQs	04/05	138	64	67	-3	3	67	75	-8
	05/06	27	89	69	20	13	69	68	1
	06/07	34	85	...	...	2	0	...	...
NVQs	04/05	126	55	57	-2	477	32	60	-28
	05/06	124	73	65	8	195	73	67	6
	06/07	103	68	...	...	200	70	...	...
Other	04/05	636	73	61	12	380	62	59	3
	05/06	845	76	66	10	295	65	65	0
	06/07	850	80	...	...	379	74	...	...

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	2136	68	68	0	802	59	58	1
	05/06	2294	71	70	1	730	60	63	-3
	06/07	2599	72	...	...	749	67	...	...
A/A2 Levels	04/05	343	91	86	5	44	93	69	24
	05/06	294	87	87	0	6	83	72	11
	06/07	376	90	...	...	14	93	...	...
AS Levels	04/05	686	63	66	-3	11	45	52	-7
	05/06	670	72	67	5	...	...	...	...
	06/07	770	64	...	...	...	...	...	...
GNVQs	04/05	195	59	61	-2	18	50	54	-4
	05/06	130	60	66	-6	9	44	57	-13
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	18	39	63	-24	177	53	56	-3
	05/06	19	79	71	8	121	39	63	-24
	06/07	19	95	...	...	138	72	...	...
Other	04/05	894	64	60	4	552	59	59	0
	05/06	1181	68	65	3	594	64	64	0
	06/07	1434	72	...	...	597	65	...	...

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes within the NOVA partnership 2005 to 2007.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No. of students *	College NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate **	College framework rate **	National framework rate **
Advanced Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	17	...	...	18%	34%
		timely	12	...	...	10%	22%
	05/06	overall	101	...	...	38%	44%
		timely	55	...	...	22%	28%
	06/07	overall	138	...	...	51%	56%
		timely	84	...	...	30%	35%
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	136	...	...	34%	39%
		timely	73	...	...	18%	22%
	05/06	overall	433	...	...	53%	52%
		timely	242	...	...	29%	34%
	06/07	overall	567	...	...	57%	60%
		timely	393	...	...	39%	42%

* Students who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of students are then added to the students who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Table 5

Outcomes on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes within the NOVA partnership 2005 to 2007.

Year	Number of starts in year	Achieved Objectives *	Progression **	Still in learning
04/05	443	161	46%	309
05/06	618	395	58%	257
06/07	741	379	62%	246

* These are key objectives identified for each student following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms students' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period