

MidKent College

Inspection report

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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 learners 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; engineering; construction; hairdressing and beauty therapy; literacy, numeracy and key skills; and business, administration and law.

Description of the provider

1. MidKent College is a large general further education college situated in Maidstone and the Medway towns. The college has three main centres in Maidstone, Chatham and Rochester. The Kent Universities' Medway campus accommodates the college's access to higher education (HE) provision along with some full-time HE programmes. In 2007/08 the college enrolled over 6,300 students and had a budget of £30 million. However, in 2008/09 the college budget has increased significantly to £45 million as a result of a large contract with the Ministry of Defence. Of the 3,800 16 to 18 year-old students in

2007/08 almost 90% were studying full-time. Around 70% of the adult students are part time. The college offers programmes in all 15 sector subject areas. Construction, hair and beauty, engineering, health and care, and information and communication technology have the highest enrolments. The college has a well established 14 to 16 provision and outreach facilities in two local secondary schools. In addition the college has work-based learning provision in four curriculum areas and a small Train to Gain programme.

2. In 2007/08 students from minority ethnic backgrounds formed about 8.8% of the student body. This proportion is larger than that for residents of working age in either Medway or Maidstone. The Medway area is a unitary authority with a population of around a quarter of a million. Substantial growth is projected under the Thames Gateway development. Unemployment in Medway has fallen to 3.5%, close to the national average. Take up of HE is amongst the lowest in the country. Like Kent, Medway operates selective education at 11-plus. In addition to five grammar schools there are 14 non-selective secondary schools. In 2008 some 66% of school leavers in Medway local authority obtained 5 or more A*-C GCSE passes, close to the national average. Maidstone, in Kent, is a generally prosperous area with a population of around 136,000. Most businesses in the area are small or medium sized enterprises, with most employing fewer than 10 employees. There are 14 schools in or near the town including four grammar schools. Most high schools have sixth forms; some quite small and some poorly performing. In 2008 around 67% of school leavers in the Kent local authority left schools with 5 or more A*-C GCSE passes. A number of schools within the college's catchment area have GCSE pass rates well below the national average.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care	Good: Grade 2
Engineering	Good: Grade 2
Construction	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Outstanding: Grade 1
Literacy, numeracy and key skills	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates have steadily improved over the past three years. At levels 1 and 2 for 16 to 18 year-olds in 2007/08, success rates were well above national averages. Work-based learning advanced apprentices achieved outstanding success rates. Overall, students make progress in line with their prior attainment. However, those on General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level make less progress.
4. Teaching and learning are good. The proportion of good or better lessons has increased. Teachers carefully direct discussions using probing questions to check students' understanding. In a minority of lessons teachers do not focus enough on learning outcomes. The college provides good specialist support to meet students' additional learning needs. Teachers effectively assess students' work and provide useful feedback. However, a minority of targets are not sufficiently detailed or useful.
5. The college's responses to meeting the needs and interests of students and educational and social inclusion are good. Partnership arrangements to support the local community are good. The college is particularly effective in its response to meeting the needs of young people not in education, employment or training. Advice, guidance and support for students are good. Pastoral and welfare support are particularly effective. Students' additional learning needs are effectively diagnosed and additional support is good. Support for vulnerable students and those with disabilities is good.
6. Leadership and management are good. Very effective management action has raised students' achievement significantly over the past four years. Provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy was judged to be outstanding. Engineering, health, public service and care and business, administration and law were found to be good. The provision in construction and literacy, numeracy and key skills was judged to be satisfactory.
7. Senior managers and governors have a clear and well conceived vision and strategic direction for the college. Managers have a strong focus on raising standards through the implementation of rigorous quality assurance procedures. Self-assessment accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Quality improvement plans are clear and succinct and comprehensively address weaknesses identified in self-assessment. Lesson observation is good and is increasingly effective in informing staff development.
8. An extremely well managed building programme has been completed and the new Medway campus will operate from September 2009. Governance and value for money are good. Governors are well informed about progress, have good access to reliable data and are committed to the continuing improvement of the college. Equality of opportunity is good. The college has a strong sense of

community and provides a safe and harmonious environment for students. Equality and diversity have a high profile supported by the excellent work of equalities champions. However, the reinforcement of equality and diversity in the curriculum is inconsistent.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. Managers and governors have made good progress in addressing the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and have a strong track record in setting and meeting challenging targets for students' achievements. The college is very well placed to continue the trend of improvement in students' achievements. The self-assessment is accurate and quality assurance processes are rigorous. Staff make good use of target setting, self-assessment and lesson observations to raise standards. Management information is accurate and reliable and readily accessible to managers. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The college manages its finances extremely well and is in a strong financial position. Governors play a strong role in the development of the college. Well conceived strategic priorities have been developed and are shared by all staff. Building work on the Medway campus has been extremely well managed and is set to provide outstanding accommodation and resources for students.

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

10. The college has made good progress in improving the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Long course success rates have improved very significantly and rose above the national average in 2007/08. The college has taken appropriate steps to improve accommodation and resources for current students at the Medway campuses, pending the opening of the new building in September 2009. Teaching and learning have improved. Assessment practices have also improved. Management of work-based learning has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now good. Success rates for work-based learners are high. The monitoring and evaluation of equal opportunities practices are thorough including the careful analysis of success rate data for different groups of students.

Key strengths

- good and improving success rates
- highly effective actions to improve work-based learning
- good teaching and learning
- outstanding provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy
- good support for students
- highly effective partnership working
- very strong senior leadership and governance
- very clear vision and strategic direction
- very good financial management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- attainment on GCE A level programmes
- key skills attainments
- target setting and review of students' progress.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Inspectors agree with the college self-assessment judgement that achievement and standards are good. Success rates at all levels have steadily improved over the past three years. In 2007/08 success rates on long courses were, at 78%, above the national average. The bulk of the full-time provision in the college is at levels 1 and 2 for 16 to 18 year-olds and in 2007/08 success rates were well above recent national averages. Success rates for adult students at level 1 were also well above average. However, success rates for 16 to 18 year-olds on level 3 programmes were below average. Short course success rates have also improved and were good in 2007/08. In 2007/08 success rates were outstanding for advanced apprenticeships and good for apprenticeships. Part-time 14 to 16 year-old pupils on vocational courses achieved good success and progression rates.
12. Students generally make progress in line with their prior attainment. However, those on GCE A level and some Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) programmes do not make good progress. Students enjoy their studies and training. Development of occupational skills and personal confidence is good.
13. Over the past three years retention rates have improved and in 2007/08 they were at or above recent national averages. Retention on adult programmes at levels 1 and 3 were well above average. Students' pass rates also show the same trend of improvement. Achievement rates for students on vocational courses were above national average in 2007/08, especially in hair and beauty where achievement was outstanding. However, pass rates for students on GCE A level courses have been below national average for three years. Students aged 16 to 18 with a disclosed disability achieved higher successes than their peers, although adult students with a disclosed disability did not. There is some evidence on a minority of courses that some students make slightly less progress than others.
14. Key skills attainments have improved over three years and were broadly at recent national averages for 16 to 18 year-olds at levels 1 and 2 in 2007/08. However, attainment rates in key skills at level 3, for both adults and 16 to 18 year-olds, were below national averages.
15. Attendance across the college is generally good and improving but was low in key skills lessons during the inspection. Students show good awareness of health and safety procedures. Safe working was observed in laboratories, studios, workshops and in the workplace during the inspection.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. The proportion of good or better lessons has increased and most inadequate teaching has been improved. However, in 2007/08 some lesson observation judgement records were found to be slightly over generous. Some did not clearly identify the impact of teaching on learning and areas for improvement were not clearly stated. Managers have worked closely with the teams of observers and judgements in 2008/09 are improved.
17. Teachers design stimulating assignments that motivate and develop students' skills very effectively. In most lessons teachers use innovative and highly effective strategies to help students remember and understand difficult concepts and ideas. Teachers carefully direct group discussions using probing questions to check students' understanding. Training and assessment opportunities are good in work-based learning. Teachers have high expectations for their students and set tasks that challenge all students irrespective of their differing levels of skill and ability. In a minority of lessons teachers do not focus enough on learning outcomes and learning objectives are little more than a list of tasks. Teaching in these lessons is dull and uninspiring and some teachers spend too long talking without noticing students are disengaged. The college self-assessment report recognises that this is an area for development.
18. The college has effective arrangements for identifying and providing a wide range of specialist support to meet students' additional learning needs. However, in some lessons where teachers adopt a whole-group or didactic teaching approach, learning assistants' work with individual students is hindered.
19. Teachers effectively assess students' work and provide useful feedback to enable further improvement. However, targets set in individual learning plans are not sufficiently detailed or useful. Reviews using these learning plans are insufficiently rigorous.
20. The college's responses to meeting the needs and interests of students and educational and social inclusion are good. The college offers courses in all subject areas and has a broad range of vocational provision across all levels and subjects. Entry and curriculum routes are clear and progression is good. Partnership arrangements to support the local community are good. College managers take a leading role in local initiatives to encourage participation in education and training. The college is particularly effective in its response to meeting the needs of young people not in education, employment or training and works well with Connexions to support students. Links with schools are extensive and the college plays an active part in developing diplomas. Responsiveness to employers' training needs is effective and improving.
21. Curriculum enrichment is satisfactory and, in some sector subject areas, outstanding. Whole college enrichment activities are satisfactory. Co-ordination of activities has recently improved with the recruitment of a salaried student

union president. Activities to support charities are good. However, the range of sports and leisure activities is narrow.

22. Advice, guidance and support for students are good. Initial advice and guidance procedures are well established. Induction arrangements effectively help students to settle quickly into college life. Pastoral and welfare support are particularly effective. Personal tutors are very enthusiastic and most full-time students benefit from weekly timetabled tutorials. However, inspectors observed some unsatisfactory tutorials.
23. Welfare support services are well managed and are appreciated by the students. The careers service is effective and advice and support for students progressing to higher education are good. Students' additional learning needs are effectively diagnosed and additional support is good. Support for vulnerable students and those with disabilities is good.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

24. Leadership and management are good but not yet outstanding as the college judges them. Highly effective management action has raised students' achievements very significantly over the past four years. Long course success rates were above national average in 2007/08. At the previous inspection framework completion for apprentices and the management of work-based learning were poor; success rates for these students are now high and work-based learning is well managed.
25. The principal, well supported by senior managers and governors, has a clear and well conceived vision and strategic direction for the college that is shared and valued by staff. Targets are well planned and the college is making good progress in achieving its ambitions for its students. Managers and staff feel a strong sense of accountability and empowerment to achieve their objectives. Communication is good and staff value highly the open and consultative style of the senior leadership team.
26. Managers have a strong focus on raising standards through rigorous quality assurance procedures. These are having a significant impact on performance but the rate of improvement across the college has been uneven. The quality of provision in six of the sixteen curriculum schools remains satisfactory, as stated in the self-assessment report. Self-assessment accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Quality improvement plans are clear and succinct, and comprehensively address weaknesses identified in self-assessment.
27. Managers have good access to timely and accurate attendance and success rate data and use these well to monitor performance and set improvement targets. The college makes good use of students' views to inform the development of the college's provision. Lesson observation is good and is increasingly effective

in informing staff development and training priorities, although there is evidence of over-grading in a minority of lessons. Observers are more adept at translating the key features of lessons into sharp and focused feedback and action planning for teachers.

28. Senior managers have been very successful in planning and completing major projects to develop the college. A very large contract has recently been signed with the Ministry of Defence to provide training in construction for soldiers in the Medway area. The college has taken well considered steps to improve facilities since the previous inspection. Managers acknowledge accommodation and resources as an area for development and an extremely well managed building programme is set to address this in September 2009 with the opening of the new Medway campus. Value for money is good. The college is in a strong financial position and manages its finances extremely well.
29. Governance is good. Members of the corporation have a valuable and diverse set of skills. Governors are well informed about progress, have good access to reliable data and are committed to the continuing improvement of the college. They are both supportive of, and appropriately challenging to, the principal and senior managers.
30. Equality of opportunity is good. The college has a strong sense of community and provides a safe and harmonious environment for students. Equality and diversity have a high profile around the college supported by the excellent work of committed equalities champions. Community links and partnerships with local organisations and employers are good. The curriculum continues to become more inclusive and responsive to local needs. The college's response to legislation for equalities and in race, gender and disability, is good. Arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults are sound. However, the reinforcement of equality and diversity in the workplace in work-based learning is insufficient and teachers' plans for equality and diversity in lessons are not consistent across the range of provision.
31. Teaching staff are well qualified and the college has responded well to recent initiatives designed to improve the qualifications of its staff. Appraisal is good. The wide range of staff development opportunities is well designed to improve teachers' professional practice and meet the strategic priorities of the college.

Sector subject area

Health, public services and care

Good: Grade 2

Context

32. The college offers full- and part time courses from entry level to level 3 in health and social care, childcare, public services, counselling and access to higher education. Over 300 16 to 18 year-olds take courses in health and social care. Around 180 adult students take national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in health and social care, 50 take counselling courses and over 100 follow the access to higher education.

Strengths

- high success rates
- good teaching and learning
- highly effective development of vocational skills
- very good enrichment activities which enhance learning
- good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- inconsistent target setting and review
- ineffective use of learning assistants in lessons.

Achievement and standards

33. Students' achievement is good. Success rates are high on many courses. Retention is low on some courses. Achievement in key skills is good. Students aged 14 to 16 make good progress and achieve well. Attendance is good. Progression to employment and further study is good. Students achieve high standards of vocational skills and knowledge. Adult students successfully achieve their NVQ goals.

Quality of provision

34. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are very effective. Teachers are well qualified and have extensive professional experience which they use to make lessons interesting and vocationally relevant. In a public services lesson, students successfully practised command and control in a simulated exercise to rescue a fallen colleague in a minefield. In most lessons teachers have high expectations and students are set challenging tasks. Students acquire a high level of vocational skill through good quality work placements. A minority of lessons lack pace and learning assistants are not used effectively.

35. Assessment is thorough and accurate. Students receive detailed feedback which enables them to improve the standard of their work. Some assessment, however, does not sufficiently focus on individual progress. Assessment in the workplace is highly effective. Initial assessment identifies the needs of students with specific difficulties or disabilities. Support is quickly put in place.
36. A broad range of provision and activities meets the needs and interests of students well. There is a strong focus on developing basic skills and improving students' communication. Enrichment is very good and makes a positive contribution to students' learning. Students take additional vocationally related qualifications to widen their experiences.
37. Support and guidance are good. The tutorial programme contributes well to students' personal and social development. Students receive good individual academic support. However, individual target setting and review of progress are inconsistent in quality. Students are fully aware of equality and diversity issues as well as health and safety issues.

Leadership and management

38. Leadership and management are good. Strategies to improve success rates have been successful on most courses. Self-assessment is accurate. Quality assurance is rigorous and has contributed significantly to improvements in teaching and learning. Communication is good. Staff feel well supported. Overall, resources are satisfactory but there is some poor accommodation for current students. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

Engineering

Good: Grade 2

Context

39. The college offers full- and part-time courses from entry level to level 5. Courses are available in electrical installation, motor vehicle, mechanical engineering, fabrication and welding, operations and maintenance, manufacturing and electrical engineering. There are also short specialist courses for industry. Of the 1,400 students, 600 are adults, over 700 are part-time and 160 are aged 14 to 16. There are 111 work-based learners in engineering.

Strengths

- high success rates on most courses
- good quality of students' work
- much good teaching and learning
- wide range of provision with good progression
- good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates on levels 1 and 2 communication key skills
- weak target setting and review.

Achievement and standards

40. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates on most courses are high. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved in 2007/08 and were above national average. Adult success rates were in line with the national average. Success rates in the level 1 certificate in vehicle body repair and on the level 3 certificate in electro-technical technology have steadily improved and were significantly above national averages. In contrast, success rates on level 2 performing engineering operations and on the level 3 national diploma in vehicle repair and technology were well below the national averages. Retention on most courses was at least in line with the national average. Success rates on levels 1 and 2 literacy key skills in 2007/08 were low and below the national average.
41. The completion rate for learners on advanced apprenticeships is now significantly above the national average. For apprenticeships, the rate steadily improved over the past three years and is now satisfactory. Timely completion rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are well above the national average.
42. The quality of students' written work is good. Students carry out realistic work to industry standard and develop good occupational skills.

Quality of provision

43. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Lesson planning is thorough with clear and measurable aims and objectives. Teachers use demanding activities that challenge and motivate students and regularly check their progress. In practical lessons, teachers emphasise health and safety strongly and students carry out risk assessment well. Key skills are delivered in a vocational context. In the minority of lessons, teachers do not plan students' activities sufficiently and lessons are too teacher-led. The use of information learning technology (ILT) is satisfactory. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactory.
44. The wide range of provision meets the needs of employers well and provides students with good opportunities for progression. Links with employers are productive. For example, the college delivers courses at a local karting circuit and motor vehicle students use its facilities for enrichment activities.
45. Support and guidance for students are good. Initial assessment enables students to enrol on appropriate courses. Tutorials are effective. However, target setting and review of students' progress is weak. Reviews are vague; targets not realistic or time bound and do not provide adequate guidance for progress.

Leadership and management

46. Leadership and management are good. Managers have successfully taken action to improve teaching and learning and students' success rates. Communication is good and team meetings are productive. Managers seek students' views to improve the provision. Resources are satisfactory. The self-assessment report is largely accurate. Equality and diversity are promoted adequately. The management of work-based learning is good.

Construction

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

47. The college offers full- and part-time courses from level 1 to level 5 in technical and professional studies and building crafts and services. Specialist NVQs are available in crafts, site management and civil engineering. Of the 1,318 students, 743 are part time and 317 are adults. Of the 103 work-based learners, 26 are on advanced programmes. Vocational programmes are provided for 59 14 to 16 year-old students from local schools.

Strengths

- very high success rates in work-based learning
- good skills development in workshops and in the workplace
- good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- low retention on programmes for adults
- too much uninspiring theory teaching.

Achievement and standards

48. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates have improved significantly and are now around the national average. The national diploma in construction and the level 2 construction award have high success rates. Success rates for adults at levels 1 and 2 are low. Key skills success rates have improved to around national averages. Advanced apprenticeship success rates are outstanding and apprenticeship rates are good. Student retention has improved but adult retention rates are low. The standard of students' work is satisfactory and the quality of practical work is good. The quality of construction technicians' written work is high. Attendance is good.

Quality of provision

49. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory although the college assessed these to be good. Occupational skills are well developed in workshops and in the workplace where students are encouraged to work tidily and safely. There is too much uninspiring theory teaching with too few changes of activity and insufficient or inadequate checking of learning. Assessment practices and internal verification are appropriate and comments on marked work range from satisfactory to good. The embedding of key skills in lessons has successfully made these subjects more interesting for students.
50. The range of provision for students is satisfactory and provides clear progression routes. Courses adequately meet the needs of students and employers and good links with schools provide opportunities for pupils to access

construction qualifications. The range of enrichment activities is wide and curriculum enrichment participation by students is good.

51. Support for students is good. Initial assessment is effective and in-class support is well provided by learning support assistants. The support provided by personal tutors is strong and students speak highly of this. Level 3 students, trained by the college, gain useful experience by acting as learning mentors to younger students who value this.

Leadership and management

52. Leadership and management are good. Managers have significantly improved provision and success rates since the last inspection. Strong leadership has been effective in developing staff trust and teachers' morale is high. Roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood. Regular timetabled meetings review progress against challenging targets. Teaching observations are carried out regularly and a good number of drop-in observations are undertaken by heads of school. The self-assessment reports are broadly accurate but over-estimate the quality of teaching and learning. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The quality and management of resources are good. Workshop and classroom facilities at the Oakwood Park campus are good and on the other two campuses are satisfactory.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

53. The college has provision in hairdressing and beauty at Maidstone and Medway. Around 780 students are on NVQ programmes from level 1 to level 3. Of these, nearly 400 are in hairdressing. Most are female, full time and under 19 years of age. Thirty-one students are on hairdressing apprenticeships and 51 school pupils are on NVQ level 1 courses.

Strengths

- outstanding success rates
- very good acquisition of practical skills
- very good teaching and learning
- outstanding student support
- outstanding leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- limited breadth of provision.

Achievement and standards

54. Success rates on hairdressing and beauty programmes are outstanding. Since 2005, NVQ level 3 courses have consistently exceeded national averages by up to 26%. NVQ level 1 and 2 courses have exceeded national averages by up to 20%. Apprenticeship rates exceeded timely national framework success by 15% in 2007/08. Students enrolled at the time of the inspection are making very good progress. Many students, including work-based learners, are ahead of termly targets for achievement. Students' acquisition of practical skills is very good. Many students display levels of skill above that expected and are challenged to attempt treatments usually associated with higher NVQ levels. Students produce assignments to a very high standard. Responses during questioning and discussions demonstrate a good grasp of theory. Adherence to hygiene, health and safety and client care are very good.

Quality of provision

55. Teaching and learning are very good in developing students' vocational skills. Teachers use their commercial experience to illustrate key points and set underpinning knowledge in context. Good technical demands are made of students who are expected to work to commercial standards. Students are stretched to achieve challenging targets in all lessons. Level 1 students make particularly good progress. School pupils on level 1 hairdressing demonstrated very good levels of professional standards of dress code and behaviour. Very effective use is made of learning activities, discussion, small group work and ILT to promote learning. Students' confidence and motivation are being developed to encourage good customer care. Key skills development is good

and integrated into vocational lessons and assignments. Students have access to a wide variety of opportunities for additional experiences to enrich the curriculum.

56. Support for students is outstanding. Students speak highly of the support they receive. Teachers closely monitor and track progress through a system that highlights students who might be at risk of falling behind. Learning facilitators are pro-active in lessons and work closely with vocational teachers to provide appropriate support. Students receiving additional learning support make good progress. Students at risk of withdrawing are highlighted for additional support.
57. The breadth of provision is limited and consists of long courses at NVQ levels 1 to 3 in hairdressing and beauty and a number of short courses in holistic therapies.

Leadership and management

58. Leadership and management are outstanding. Commitment to continuous improvement is strong. Self-assessment reports are accurate and reflect judgements at inspection. Arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity are adequate. Quality systems are well embedded. Teachers are actively involved in reviewing and evaluating effectiveness of the curriculum. Communication is very good. There is an atmosphere of teamwork. Curriculum development and monitoring of progress is well organised. Changes to the curriculum have improved retention and pass rates. Progress to address poor retention rates at hairdressing NVQ level 2 has been very successful. Staff development opportunities are very good.

Literacy, numeracy and key skills

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

59. Some 3,500 students aged 16 to 18 take key skills communication and application of number as part of their full-time vocational programmes. In addition, 71 adult students attend part-time literacy and numeracy classes at community venues.

Strengths

- high and improving pass rates on level 1 communication key skills
- good target setting and reviews to promote learning in adult provision
- effective actions to raise success rates of key skills.

Areas for improvement

- too much dull, uninspiring teaching
- insufficient attention to individual needs of students.

Achievement and standards

60. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Pass rates on level 1 communication key skills are high and have improved steadily over the last three years. Success rates on levels 1 and 2 communication and application of number courses have improved significantly from a very low base to satisfactory levels. Success rates on adult literacy and numeracy community courses are high. These students are highly motivated and gain confidence in acquiring new skills and working with others. Numeracy students become significantly more skilled at estimating and calculating. Literacy students make good progress in reading, sentence construction and spelling. Standards of work on key skills are satisfactory. Students benefit from developing their literacy and numeracy skills within their main learning programmes. Attendance rates are satisfactory overall.

Quality of provision

61. The quality of provision is satisfactory as are teaching and learning. Students are actively engaged in working with others on a range of relevant activities related to their main programmes of study. Teachers use a wide variety of activities and resources including information and communication technology. However, too much of the teaching is dull and uninspiring. Tutors rely too heavily on whole group question and answer techniques. They use a limited range of activities and resources and plan insufficiently for active learning. Students have few opportunities to work independently.
62. Vocational teachers contribute to the learning, practice and development of key skills in curriculum contexts. Key skills specialist teachers work effectively alongside vocational teams to develop good practice and to support literacy and

numeracy development in the curriculum. Specialist teachers undertake rigorous internal verification of student portfolios and effectively support vocational teachers and students on necessary improvements. In adult community classes, teachers successfully negotiate specific, relevant targets with students. Tutors review targets regularly giving constructive feedback on further improvements to support students' learning and progress.

63. The range of provision is adequate to meet students' needs and interests. Key skills teachers pay insufficient attention to individual students' needs. Necessary support is identified effectively at the start of programmes. However, tutors make little use of information from the newly implemented, thorough initial and diagnostic assessments to inform lesson planning or set targets for individualised learning. Support workers are often under-utilised in the classroom.

Leadership and management

64. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has taken effective actions to raise key skills success rates. Quality improvement is satisfactory. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate but does not focus sufficiently on areas for improvement in teaching and learning. Training programmes for vocational staff embedding literacy and numeracy into the curriculum are not systematic. Some accommodation and resources for key skills are unsatisfactory. The development of students' awareness of equality and diversity in lessons is insufficient.

Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

65. Business and administration courses are provided for full-time students from levels 1 to 3. Most part-time students take NVQ programmes in accounting and a small number take book-keeping and management. The college also offers higher education provision in business. Of 1,078 students, 63% are aged 16 to 18. Twenty-nine students undertake apprenticeship programmes and 23 pursue NVQs under Train to Gain.

Strengths

- high and improving success rates on most qualifications
- good attendance and strong attendance monitoring
- good teaching and learning
- good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates on NVQ levels 2 and 4 in accounting
- inadequate target setting and review of students' progress.

Achievement and standards

66. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates have improved steadily by seven to eight percentage points each year since 2005/06. In 2007/08, success rates were significantly above the national average for most qualifications. The improvement in success rates reflects higher pass rates for 16 to 18 year-old students and higher retention for adult students. However, success rates on NVQ levels 2 and 4 in accounting were low. Examination module results from the current year and the standard of student work suggest improvement in 2008/09. Timely success rates for the small number of work-based learners are outstanding. Students make progress in line with their prior attainment. National diploma students completed good assignments on the recent economic downturn. Key skills success rates are satisfactory. Attendance is good at 89%.

Quality of provision

67. Teaching and learning are good, though lessons are outstanding. Lessons are well planned and contain a good variety of activities to maintain the concentration and interest of students. Teachers meet the learning needs of individual students well, particularly the less able. Most students make good progress in lessons. In an introductory diploma lesson, students were asked to assemble cardboard boxes quickly to illustrate time and motion monitoring. They enjoyed this activity, which stimulated work on further aspects of monitoring.

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68. Students receive satisfactory feedback on their work and the needs and interests of students are met well. There is a good range of full-time courses and a satisfactory range of part-time courses to meet local employer needs. Student progression between levels is good, with high final progression into employment. Work experience is provided on all full-time courses and students also benefit from a number of visits to employers. However, there is little uptake of cross-college enrichment.
69. Support for students is good. They receive good pastoral support from personal tutors. The tutorial programme provides suitable guidance on themes such as being healthy and staying safe. Preparation for employment also features strongly. Attendance monitoring is good, with very prompt follow up of absentees. Students receive appropriate additional learning support. Individual learning plans lack rigour. Targets for students are insufficiently specific and reviews of progress are superficial and not always timely.

Leadership and management

70. Leadership and management are good. Most weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been addressed. The self-assessment report is largely accurate but lacks evaluation of areas for improvement. Nevertheless, the quality improvement plan is comprehensive and progress is regularly reviewed. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. However, discussion of equality of opportunity in work-based reviews is cursory. Staff development is extensive but there has been no recent commercial updating of full-time staff.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with 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	05/06	1,548	63	69	-6	683	56	65	-9
	06/07	1,878	78	74	4	553	72	70	2
	07/08*	1,694	82	N/A		444	86	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	63	81	68	13	6	67	63	4
	06/07	n/a				n/a			
	07/08*	n/a		N/A		n/a		N/A	
NVQs	05/06	290	74	72	2	2	100	74	26
	06/07	239	77	75	2	11	82	75	7
	07/08*	316	84	N/A		20	80	N/A	
Other	05/06	1,195	59	69	-10	670	56	65	-9
	06/07	1,611	78	74	4	542	72	69	3
	07/08*	1,378	81	N/A		424	86	N/A	

* college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with 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	05/06	1,650	63	66	-3	135	55	66	-11
	06/07	1,892	68	72	-4	946	70	69	1
	07/08*	1,567	78	N/A		686	74	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	182	63	68	-5	70	59	67	-8
	06/07	208	65	75	-10	52	71	70	1
	07/08*	79	72	N/A		39	77	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	62	39	69	-30	22	55	68	-13
	06/07	43	63	74	-11	8	50	71	-21
	07/08*	71	59	N/A		17	71	N/A	
NVQs	05/06	395	64	65	-1	601	57	68	-11
	06/07	470	69	68	1	315	69	69	0
	07/08*	311	76	N/A		193	76	N/A	
Other	05/06	1,011	64	66	-2	658	53	65	-12
	06/07	1,171	69	72	-3	571	71	69	2
	07/08*	1,106	81	N/A		437	74	N/A	

* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with 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	05/06	1,871	68	78	-10	1,244	61	64	-3
	06/07	1,990	71	79	-8	1,069	69	68	1
	07/08*	1,600	74	N/A		988	77	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	241	83	87	-4	97	64	72	-8
	06/07	267	77	87	-10	75	85	76	9
	07/08*	192	81	N/A		80	83	N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	518	61	67	-6	143	59	55	4
	06/07	432	55	69	-14	86	56	59	-3
	07/08*	369	60	N/A		101	75	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	70	60	66	-6	4	25	57	-32
	06/07	n/a				n/a			
	07/08*	n/a		N/A		n/a		N/A	
NVOs	05/06	38	71	71	0	122	61	63	-2
	06/07	42	93	74	19	111	77	69	8
	07/08*	52	96	N/A		155	81	N/A	
Other	05/06	1,004	68	65	3	878	61	64	-3
	06/07	1,278	74	70	4	797	67	69	-2
	07/08*	987	77	N/A		652	76	N/A	

* college data

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by the college 2006 to 2008.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	College NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	College framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	05/06	overall	86	59%	52%	34%	43%
		timely	87	54%	34%	29%	27%
	06/07	overall	52	77%	63%	69%	56%
		timely	56	68%	43%	59%	38%
	07/08	overall	46	96%	68%	85%	63%
		timely	43	88%	48%	81%	44%
Apprenticeships	05/06	overall	170	53%	57%	43%	51%
		timely	172	44%	37%	35%	33%
	06/07	overall	156	62%	64%	52%	60%
		timely	152	58%	47%	48%	45%
	07/08	Overall	105	72%	67%	69%	64%
		timely	113	65%	53%	62%	50%

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

** College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record (ILR)

When available and validated by the LSC