

# South Thames College

## Partial reinspection report

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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## Introduction

South Thames College is a general further education college in south west London, with its main site in Wandsworth. Provision ranges from pre-entry to degree level courses and the majority of students are on programmes leading to vocational qualifications. Around half the enrolments are at entry or foundation level. Provision at advanced level represents less than 15% of total enrolments. Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses account for around 40% of the curriculum offer. The college merged with Merton College in August 2009.

At the previous inspection in July 2009 the college's overall effectiveness was graded as good. Health, public services and care provision was graded as inadequate and is the subject of this reinspection. A reinspection monitoring visit was completed in March 2010. The college had made significant progress in improvement planning, training its teachers and improving health and social care courses. It had made reasonable progress in improving outcomes and target setting for students.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area/type of provision	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Health, public services and care	4	3

## Context

The college offers programmes in early years and health and social care from foundation to advanced levels. Students on access courses can progress to higher education in nursing, midwifery and social work. There are 176 students aged 16 to 18 years and 216 adult students.

## Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory overall. For the year 2008/09 the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in children's care, learning and development had 100% success rates. However, in the same period, outcomes on many other courses were below national averages. Staff closely monitor the progress of students and current data for 2009/10 show a significant improvement in students' success rates with many achieving high grades.
- The standard of students' work is good. Their written work is well presented. Tutors' feedback is prompt and has evaluative comment clearly indicating what students need to do to improve. Students have a good standard of oral skills and contribute well to discussions. Students acquire good vocational skills, gain in confidence and develop good employability skills.
- The promotion of Every Child Matters is good. Teachers organise lessons to promote sexual health and healthy eating. They use team meetings with learner representatives to plan visits to theatres, universities, museums and hospitals.

A breakfast club has helped to improve punctuality. Students contribute well to the local community and progress into employment in nurseries and family centres.

- Retention rates are satisfactory and improving. Retention rates are currently at 100% for students aged 16 to 18 on foundation and intermediate early years courses. For adult students, they are 100% on early years advanced and intermediate courses, and health and social care foundation and intermediate courses. Access courses also have improved retention rates.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons well to meet the needs of individual students. In workshops students effectively use a daily planning diary to enable them to complete their assignment work or improve their grades. Teachers employ good, positive behaviour management in lessons.
- In-class support is very effective and the key worker system provides one-to-one support for students requiring additional help. Teachers identify key workers' roles in lesson plans ensuring close collaboration. Staff are committed to improvement and are enthusiastic about ways to develop teaching and learning further.
- Improvements in the tutorial system have been effective in enabling tutors to closely monitor students' achievements. Progress reviews and individual learning plans provide guidance with targets negotiated with students. These clearly set out what students need to do to make progress. However, tutors do not systematically review all targets and re-set them when necessary.
- Courses meet students' needs very effectively. The broad range of provision and good progression routes support students in obtaining higher level qualifications. Just over half of young students and a third of adult students re-enrol on to higher level courses. Many progress to higher education. A wide variety of enrichment activities improve students' professional and personal skills. Partnership working is productive and links with local employers are good.
- Care, guidance and support are very effective in improving retention and success. All staff support students in improving their self-confidence and self-esteem. Additional support for students with literacy, numeracy or language needs is good and support staff work well with teachers to enable students to make the most of their lessons. Well-designed assignments contribute successfully to the engagement and motivation of students.
- Leadership and management are good. The programme area is well managed by confident, competent, enthusiastic managers. Managers closely monitor the progress of students, and have put in place very effective strategies to improve success and retention rates. They use data effectively to bring about improvement. Communication is good and all staff are aware of the subject area performance and new developments.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Managers analyse success rates for different groups of students and take action to rectify inequalities in outcomes, which are closely monitored. Students are aware of their rights and

responsibilities and teachers promote equality and diversity effectively in lessons.

- Quality assurance arrangements are thorough. Staff share good practice particularly well. They have made a good contribution to the self-assessment report through team meetings and are aware of priority areas and targets for improvement. Continuing professional development is good and systematically recorded.
- Staff ensure that safeguarding is strongly embedded into courses and tutorials. Students know how to keep themselves and the clients they work with safe. They are confident in knowing what actions to take if they were bullied or harassed. Students feel safe in college.

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

- Continue to implement strategies to improve success rates so that all courses are above the national averages.
- Continue to evaluate the initiatives which are in place to improve retention rates, to ensure that the most effective strategies are systematically used.
- Monitor the use of individual learning plans and the setting of targets to identify more clearly what students must do to progress through their qualification.
- Further develop the guidance and advice offered to students through the tutorial system to enable them to remain in learning and successfully achieve.

## Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

### Self-assessment and improvement planning

What further progress has been made in the monitoring and implementation of the improvement plan in the last three months?	Significant progress
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Since the last monitoring visit in March 2010, managers at all levels have focused relentlessly and effectively on improving how well students prosper. They accurately identify areas for improvement by scrutiny of comprehensive data. They examine the reasons for poor performance and act upon them systematically. Tutors scrupulously monitor each student's progress to identify those at risk of not fulfilling their potential. Particularly effective are the quarterly reviews of every school, in which more senior managers question programme managers about the success of each course and make graded judgements against a wide range of indicators. Specific actions to improve students' motivation and commitment to complete work to time and standard have yielded significant benefits. Examples include building staged achievements into courses, and working much more closely with parents and carers.

The college achieves an excellent balance between central policy and delegated responsibility. Managers enjoy considerable autonomy for improving the work of their own areas. The college continues to manage the merger of two institutions very well. Staff are highly motivated, and levels of professional trust and shared aspiration are high. As a result of rapid and substantial changes to some previously underperforming areas of work, the college confidently predicts considerably higher success rates for 2009/10.

### Outcomes for students

What progress has the college made in countering the decline in the 2008/09 long course success rates for students on the Wandsworth site of the new college? At the previous monitoring visit retention rates had improved. Has this trend continued?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last inspection in July 2009, long course success rates declined to 72% in 2008/09, four percentage points below the national average. This decline comprised a fall of two points in retention but a more significant fall of six points in attainment. Long course success rates were particularly low for students aged 16 to 18 at all three main levels of course, and overall fell to a position in which one third of these students who started a course failed to complete it successfully. Again, the main contributory factor to this decline was attainment rates, which fell seven percentage points to be eight percentage points below the national average.

In 2009/10, retention rates have improved at nearly all long course levels: for students aged 16 to 18 they have improved significantly by five percentage points to

match last year's national average; for adults they have improved by one percentage point and remain just above last year's national average. These improvements are especially notable at advanced level for both age groups. Improved retention will have some positive bearing on long course success rates, although the previous decline will only be reversed on many courses, especially at intermediate level, if attainment rates match this level of improvement.

### The delivery of functional and key skills

What progress has been made in the delivery of functional and key skills? How is this impacting on success rates?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection the key skills provision had been reorganised and was being integrated into mainstream programmes. The embedded arrangements for functional and key skills are now very effective. The placement of a full-time Skills for Life teacher in subject areas, managed by the heads of school, has ensured that functional and key skills now form an integral part of vocational courses, with relevant materials. The Skills for Life curriculum manager provides good staff development and training activities on functional and key skills. She gives helpful and effective support and guidance to her team through regular dedicated team meetings. The college ensures that all new staff receive a very thorough induction into embedded functional and key skills teaching and learning. Skills for Life teachers have developed a good range of learning resources to provide continual support to subject teachers in improving teaching and learning in these skills.

Success rates for key skills qualifications have improved from a very low 3% in 2004/05 to 75% in 2008/09, 13 percentage points above the national average. The college is piloting the functional skills qualifications and achieved good success rates in its first year at 67.4%, five percentage points above the national average. In-year retention rates have improved and are currently 92%. Students completing key skills as part of their apprenticeship framework receive good support. Skills for Life tutors respond well to the requirements of individual subject areas.

### The impact of learning coaches

What impact are learning coaches having on teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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What progress have they made in moving the observation of teaching and learning grades from good to better?
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At the previous inspection a high number of teachers were unqualified. Since then, new teachers have been recruited and others successfully achieved their teaching qualifications. Teaching and learning coaches support the development of this group very effectively. There is a clear and well-established strategy to develop teaching and learning. The college carries out annual observations of every teacher, and further paired observations validate grades. Managers conduct further analysis of observations and clearly highlight any areas of concern or good practice. The profile of graded lessons has improved year-on-year, with 71% good or better teaching and learning in 2008/09, an improvement of four percentage points on 2007/08. This year the profile has improved further to 78%.

Managers have introduced the lesson observation system at the Merton campus and all observers are now trained. The observation grade profile has improved significantly as a result of the support and training provided, with 76% of lessons graded as good or better, an improvement of 31 percentage points on the previous year's profile. Teaching and learning coaches provide good support for teachers who are not performing well, and promote the sharing of good practice. Teachers are able to request support voluntarily, and many have improved on their previous satisfactory or good grades. Teachers now make better use of resources. They plan for individual and group learning more effectively, to ensure a variety of differentiated and challenging tasks which engage students, and meet individual needs.

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