

Aquinas College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		24–27 September 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding-1
Outcomes for students		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for students

This provider is good because:

- Governors and senior managers emphasise the principles of the Catholic mission to raise students' aspirations and prepare them to face the challenges of an increasingly secular environment beyond the college. They are committed to providing high-quality education and strive to ensure that policies and procedures focus consistently on the spiritual well-being of the whole college community.
- Most students at advanced level, especially at AS level, and on vocational courses are making good progress. A recent and clear focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is helping more students to achieve as well as they could.
- Students' results in examinations have improved since the last inspection, especially in the last two years. An increasing number of students are now doing very well and the proportion progressing to university or employment, though declined, remains high.
- Pastoral support is strong. All staff are committed to ensure that the welfare they provide for students is of a very high standard. Students in need of additional help receive this promptly. Good advice and guidance ensure that students are on the correct course.
- Students benefit from the excellent range of trips, visits and enrichment activities that help to broaden their skills, knowledge and interests.
- Students enjoy college life. They feel safe in a culture of tolerance and respect as they are nurtured into adulthood and readiness for the next stage in their lives.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Although the proportion of lessons graded as good is high, too few are outstanding because teachers are not providing sufficient challenge for many students, especially the most able.
- A few areas of underperformance remain and there is still too much variance in the progress students make.
- The development of students' skills in written English and in mathematics is not sufficiently well planned for in lessons.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Eradicate the remaining areas of underperformance and improve students' results more rapidly through ensuring that all teachers use data available to help plan lessons that include activities that provide stretch and challenge, especially for the most-able students.
- Strengthen still further the rigour of arrangements to assure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Set clear and precise actions for improvement for individual teachers following lesson observations. Evaluate more fully the impact of staff training and use this to inform self-assessment.
- Revise and implement the policy for developing students' intermediate-level English and/or mathematical skills. Ensure that teachers incorporate the development of written English and/or mathematical skills in lessons.
- Conduct more detailed analysis of the performance of different groups of students and use this to inform strategies for improvement at all levels.
- Analyse and use data more systematically at curriculum level to set precise and measurable targets for improvement within agreed timescales.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for students	Good
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- In the last two years senior managers have been relentless in their drive to improve students' achievements. A strong focus on tackling under performance and eradicating weak teaching has resulted in a marked increase in the proportion of students completing their courses successfully.
- The college's most recent data indicate that results for students on advanced-level courses, which comprise the majority of the college's work, were in line with or better than the sixth-form college average. However, the improvement in overall achievement over the last two years masks underachievement in a few subject areas.
- On AS courses improvements are marked across a wide range of subjects. An increasing number of students are achieving high grades of A*, A or B. Many, such as those taking arts subjects and modern foreign languages, make good progress in comparison with their results in GCSE examinations.
- At A level, success rates have increased and are high. The proportion of students achieving high grades is around average levels. The progress students make, especially those who begin with high levels of prior attainment at GCSE, is not as good as it could be in many subjects.
- Students taking vocational courses achieve very well and make at least good progress compared with their starting points, especially, for example, in music, law and sport. Students on foundation- and intermediate-level vocational courses achieve consistently outstanding results.
- The percentage of students achieving grades A* to C in GCSE English has declined over the last two years and is low. In GCSE mathematics, the proportion of high grades has also fallen, but remains above average. The college delivers a small but varied amount of adult provision in the evenings. Outcomes on adult courses are generally good.
- All students follow a general religious education programme although this is not formally accredited. Results on the A-level religious studies course are high as is the proportion of students achieving high grades.
- Data show that gaps in achievement between females and males have narrowed. Performance among the small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is variable, making it

difficult to discern any particular trends in performance. Students who need additional help with their studies achieve well.

- The standard of students' work seen during inspection is good and students enjoy learning. Vibrant displays of students' work adorn the areas in art and design. In biology, students reinforced their learning and understanding about the meaning of systole and diastole while briefly dancing the 'conga'. Students are confident and articulate and their behaviour is exemplary. Attendance of a significant minority of students could be improved.
- A high proportion of students gain a place at university and a good number are successful in their applications to the Russell Group universities. A strength of the college is its work with employers and the effective promotion of apprenticeships to students seeking an alternative to university.
- Many students give generously of their time in support of charity work both locally and in the third world. Students work with the Youth St Vincent de Paul Society by visiting the elderly and helping with reading in primary schools. Each year a group of students visits India where their efforts contribute to the support of 200 children in Mumbai. Respect and tolerance are integral to the life at Aquinas and this is evident through the welcoming ethos that permeates the college.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Leaders and managers demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A robust recruitment procedure, a thorough induction programme and extensive support during the first year of teaching are features of the college's renewed focus on classroom practice. Experienced teachers facing difficulties are given long-term, intensive support by managers and trained mentors. This has resulted in a marked improvement in the performance of many teachers. In a few cases where performance has not improved, teachers have left the college.
- In the best lessons, teachers plan a good range of strategies to engage students of all abilities and help them develop good independent thinking skills. In these lessons, students participate enthusiastically in group discussions and peer assessment which help deepen their learning and understanding. For example, in a sports lesson students developed good critical thinking skills through having to make decisions and solve problems when planning coaching sessions.
- In many lessons teachers make good use of a variety of techniques to assess students' learning. For example, mini whiteboards are used imaginatively and frequently, as are quizzes. Teachers also make effective use of directed questioning to check students' understanding and to stimulate further debate. In the best lessons, teachers probe and extend students' learning to enable them to achieve their best. However, not enough teachers do this, especially for the most able.
- In the few lessons that require improvement, teachers do not take adequate account of information about students to help plan work that meets the needs of all ability groups. Students listen carefully to the teacher but are often passive because the teacher provides too few opportunities for them to participate in the lesson and this slows progress. Teachers answer their own questions and do not give students sufficient time to think for themselves. The work set for students in lessons requiring improvement is often not demanding enough.
- Accommodation and resources to support learning are excellent. Most teachers make imaginative use of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) to make learning interesting and relevant. For example, adult students reviewed film clips and contributed to a stimulating discussion which further developed their thinking and oracy skills. In a sports lesson, online video clips enhanced students' understanding of the under-representation of minority groups in the sporting world.
- Teachers are motivated and passionate about their subjects and most have high expectations for their students. Teachers provide effective individual support and additional sessions to help

students improve their work or carry out extra work. Students value this support highly. Students use the college's VLE, blogs and 'twitter' extensively and this ensures that learning continues to take place outside the classroom.

- Most teachers provide helpful comments and advice on students' written work to help them get to the next level. In a significant minority of cases, marking is not regular or detailed enough, comprising only of ticks, corrections and a final grade. Teachers monitor students' progress effectively. The college has developed an excellent bespoke electronic monitoring system that enables teachers, students and their parents to have extremely up-to-date information on progress and ensures swift intervention if any student is falling behind.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their oracy skills in and out of lessons. However, the development of written English and mathematical skills is not sufficiently planned for in most lessons.
- Good initial advice and guidance ensure that students choose the correct course to meet their needs. Teachers are very adept at helping students to settle quickly into their courses and college life. As a result students develop confidence and good attitudes to learning very early in their studies. Students who need additional help receive good support. Students of high ability are prepared well for entry to the more competitive universities.
- Pastoral support is highly effective. The weekly tutorial programme is thoroughly planned and includes a non-accredited 'ethics' course, taken by all students, that reinforces the Catholic ethos of the college and allows students to explore current issues within a secure environment. An atmosphere of tolerance pervades the college, and students and staff are highly respectful of each other. However, teachers often miss opportunities to raise students' awareness of equality and diversity matters.
- A very wide range of trips and visits strongly enhances learning and develops students' wider interests and employability skills. Students enjoy an excellent range of enrichment activities, from the Duke of Edinburgh Award to voluntary work and musical productions.
- The college's extensive staff development programme is good and very responsive to both college priorities and to performance appraisal. Key themes include independent learning and assessment practice. Teachers value highly these opportunities to improve and share good practice. However, the arrangements for evaluating the impact of training on improving the quality of provision and outcomes for students lack rigour and do not inform self-assessment sufficiently.

Mathematics

16-19 study programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Students' success rates have improved and are at or above the national averages for advanced-level courses. At AS level, students make good progress based on their GCSE grades, but many A-level mathematics students do not make the progress expected of them. Results in GCSE mathematics have declined but remain high.
- Lessons are carefully planned. Teachers give clear explanations and demonstrate thoroughly how to approach calculations and mathematical operations such as differential calculus. They promote good relationships to support learning and foster an environment that stimulates diligence and hard work. They use questions effectively to check learning, often with immediate feedback from the whole class through display of students' responses on small whiteboards. In a few lessons insufficient challenge is provided for the more-able students.
- Teachers make effective use of well-prepared workbooks and examples that provide good practice in developing skills, helping students while they are working and taking the opportunity to discuss particular issues or common challenges. Teachers encourage problem solving. They use resources effectively to support learning. Good use is made of learning technologies, including graphical calculators, but an over-reliance on worksheets at times limits the range of

learning activities. Students receive helpful guidance about tackling examination questions from the start of their course.

- Students are attentive and hard working. Most make good progress in lessons, demonstrating good understanding and development of skills. Students in one advanced-level class were successfully solving increasingly complex quadratic equations; in others they were using the binomial theorem to calculate probability, the polynomial remainder theorem and the modulus function to solve equations. Students were developing their understanding of the factor theorem through devising an examination question and answering it. GCSE students made rapid progress from successfully completing arithmetic calculations to solving algebraic problems. Attendance and punctuality are good. Students' behaviour is also good.
- Assessment is good. Teachers work with students to set target grades. To inform their planning they use information about students' needs for additional learning support, grades achieved in mathematics at GCSE and AS level and results from assessments. Teachers continually monitor students' progress through work in the classroom, homework and formal assessments. Progress is reviewed regularly using individual learning plans to help keep students on track. Marked work is returned with detailed comments to help students improve their mathematical skills and the presentation and organisation of their files. Teachers readily give their time outside lessons to help students and formal sessions are available for those who need further subject support.
- Teachers ensure that students have the necessary mathematical and algebraic skills for their studies through giving a thorough grounding in the first few weeks of the course. Teachers are alert to the need for mathematics students to develop the language to express their ideas and to understand examination questions. They ensure that students can use specialist vocabulary such as 'indices' and 'surds'. Students are encouraged to use the VLE to catch up on work they have missed, practise and extend their skills and to become independent students.
- The college offers comprehensive information, advice and guidance to help students decide which courses and subjects to choose. The mathematics staff team offers specialist advice before enrolment and during students' courses. Attractive poster displays throughout the department show the wide range of careers that can follow from further study of mathematics, for example, in architecture and computing. Staff foster enthusiasm through showing a wide range of uses for mathematics. External speakers and a variety of visits broaden students' horizons. Progression from advanced-level study to further and higher education and employment is good.
- The college ethos underpins the department's approach to equality and diversity. The department offers places to some students who do not fulfil the entry requirements and supports them fully to enable them to fulfil their ambitions. Mathematics classrooms are named after local mathematicians of note, including a female mathematician, to inspire students. Teachers offer positive role models for females and students of minority ethnic heritage. Teachers refer to mathematics development from diverse cultures, for example noting the contribution of Asian and Arabic cultures.

Social sciences

16-19 study programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the increasing number of students who stay to complete their courses successfully. Data show that an increasing proportion of students make good progress compared with their starting points at GCSE, except in psychology where most students do not make the progress expected of them.
- In most lessons teachers have high expectations for students and support them fully to develop high-level thinking skills. In geography, students successfully link theory with their practical work, for example, in applying standard deviation to explain river flow. In an AS-sociology lesson exploring functions of the family, students confidently explained norms and values demonstrating a good understanding of the topic. In government and politics, students

discussed American politics and the Bill of Rights and demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the issues.

- Many teachers make good use of questioning techniques to develop students' understanding, draw on prior learning and extend their knowledge further. For example, in psychology, students impressively discussed cultural and personal values, prompted through good directed questioning. In sociology, good use was made of a short test that students used successfully to develop their understanding of aspects of belief in society. In economics, effective questioning enabled students to explore and deepen their understanding of cost, revenue and profit.
- Teachers make good use of information and learning technology and provide stimulating material to develop learning both in and out of the classroom. In one psychology lesson, the teacher used the opening scene from 'Natural Born Killers' to capture and engage students' attention. Students subsequently explored abnormality, reflecting upon their own perspectives, listening to their peers and finally adjusting their own opinions.
- In the best lessons teachers use information about students' attainment to plan activities that enable students to make good progress. For example, in psychology, the well-considered seating plans placing students of different abilities together resulted in effective peer-assessment and good progress being made.
- In lessons that require improvement, teachers do not plan sufficiently to meet the different abilities of students and do not consider students' targets when setting work to help them achieve as well as they can. As a result many students are passive and do not make good use of their time. In these lessons, students use learning resources uncritically, teachers make too few checks on learning and progress is slow.
- Teachers have a clear focus on specialist vocabulary and an expectation that students develop and use it. However, there is insufficient planning for the development of students' written English and mathematical skills. Marking of written work is not consistent across subjects and teachers do not always correct students' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.
- Most teachers set challenging targets for their students and these are monitored closely to ensure swift intervention if students are at risk of falling behind. Most students are clear about their targets and how they might achieve or exceed them. In a few cases, targets are insufficiently stretching and focused only on passing the subject.
- Many teachers in social sciences promote equality and diversity adequately. For example, in one lesson, government and politics' students discussed the value of objections from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community to mass surveillance by the USA and UK. However, in a few lessons teachers missed opportunities to raise awareness of equality and understanding of diversity.

English

16-19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. This is reflected in the proportion of students who achieve high grades of A*, A or B at AS and A level that has been significantly above the national average for the past three years. In lessons, students make good or better progress. The achievement of A* to C grades for the small number of students who take GCSE English is low.
- Teachers have very high expectations of their students. As soon as they begin their courses, AS students use specialist vocabulary to analyse the themes and grammatical structure of the texts they are studying. In AS, students showed great perception in their discussions on the symbolism, the characterisation, the dialogue, narrative voice and atmosphere in the opening chapters of 'The Great Gatsby'. Teachers sustain and develop this approach throughout the A-level courses.
- All teachers set tasks to challenge students and extend their understanding. Students in A-level English literature applied a striking Marxist critique to a reading of Robert Browning's poem 'My

Last Duchess' and applied the same approach when analysing a Shakespeare Sonnet. In an A-level English language lesson students carefully and accurately analysed the grammatical patterns that underpinned children's acquisition of language, discussing thoughtfully the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a passion for their subject which generates an enthusiastic response from the students. Well-chosen resources, including detailed course handbooks, are professionally presented and used productively by students to embed, develop and check the knowledge and skills they need to achieve high grades in their examinations.
- Information and learning technology is used creatively in lessons to engage students' interest and provoke discussion. Students use the VLE and the department's 'twitter' account extensively to share and celebrate high-quality creative and academic writing, ensuring that learning continues outside the classroom. Students' homework and other activities are completed to a high standard.
- A well-considered induction programme ensures that students begin their academic work quickly and confidently and settle into the wider life of the college. Teachers focus strongly on helping students to develop good and very disciplined study skills. Attendance and punctuality are excellent and students always arrive prepared and keen to learn. The study skills of the small number of GCSE students, however, are underdeveloped. The college recognises that current entry requirements for GCSE English are inappropriate and are working to remedy this.
- Students receive very good academic and pastoral support. Students who need additional help are identified early in their programmes. Those in receipt of support achieve as well as their peers. Support for adults taking English courses in the evening, including GCSE English, is insufficient.
- Students' work is very carefully assessed. Homework is set regularly and feedback is prompt. Teachers' written comments provide clear guidance for improvement. In lessons, teachers use good questioning techniques to check and extend students' learning. Students are ably supported when they work in groups. Some teachers, however, do not ensure that feedback from group work can be heard and noted by all the students.
- Equality and diversity are promoted adequately in lessons. Teachers and students select texts and topics for study which generate a thoughtful and sensitive discussion of the position and needs of marginalised groups.

Business

16-19 study programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and reflect the outcomes for students. Success rates are high on most courses. Data show that students on advanced-vocational courses make better than expected progress given their starting points. Most students on academic courses do better than predicted, but a significant minority do not achieve as well as they can. Students are well supported to achieve their career plan whether it is in higher education or apprenticeships.
- In the best lessons students develop good research skills and subject knowledge which they apply to businesses. Following a visit to a well-known coffee shop, one student developed a detailed business plan for a coffee shop called 'Full of Beans'. Students at all levels confidently explain key concepts. For example, in one lesson, while analysing income statements for national and international businesses, they confidently discussed price differentiation and the pros and cons of paying one-off dividends to shareholders.
- In less effective lessons students' dependence on the teacher leads to them making slow progress. Teachers know their students well but they do not always ask questions to develop higher-level thinking skills or give the more-able students tasks which challenge them sufficiently to make good or better progress.
- In many lessons teachers make good use of information and learning technology to demonstrate key business concepts, such as the effect on the breakeven point when fixed or variable costs

change. The college's VLE holds extensive resources including quizzes, video clips, and links to topical television programmes, including one covering changes in shopping habits. Students enjoy using the department's 'twitter' area and a business blog to highlight and share current business-related topics.

- Assessment is good. Homework is set regularly and is marked promptly, including electronically where students have used this facility. The majority of teachers provide detailed and constructive written feedback and correct spelling and grammatical errors. In a few cases, written feedback is insufficiently detailed and fails to inform students how they can improve their work.
- The college's electronic system for tracking progress is used systematically by staff, students and parents. Targets are set, but many are often insufficiently precise to measure whether they have been achieved or not. Targets are not reviewed or updated regularly in all cases.
- Support for students is good. Students value the support they receive, especially the additional workshops which focus on examination techniques and key topics. Students who need additional help are assessed thoroughly before they arrive at college and support is in place quickly.
- The department has effective links with an extensive range of businesses and these are used well to link theory to practice and engage students' interests. For example, an enterprise day developed team-working and leadership skills successfully and provided a realistic opportunity to conduct market research, and to produce financial information and business plans.
- The development of English and mathematics is adequate. Students calculate ratios and handle data without calculators. Subject terminology is developed appropriately and teachers focus on the development of students' writing skills.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Occasionally, teachers promote equality and raise awareness of diversity in lessons. However, most teachers do not routinely plan to include the exploration of these themes and do not take full advantage of the naturally occurring opportunities that arise during lessons to stimulate discussion or challenge stereotypes.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The Principal and the governing body promote an ambitious vision for the college, informed by its commitment to Gospel values, which seeks to raise the aspirations and improve the life chances of students. The new management structure encourages collaborative working across all college functions and gives staff a clear understanding of their responsibilities. All staff feel their contribution is valued equally. Since the last inspection the college has successfully raised students' achievements and strengthened its capacity to tackle areas for improvement. The expanded quality improvement team has launched several developments including a more rigorous model to assure the quality of teaching and learning to enable more to become outstanding.
- Governors bring a good range of expertise to their work and are well informed about the college's academic and financial performance. They offer good support to leaders as well as challenging and questioning appropriately in areas such as the development of new accommodation and an effective admissions policy. They understand fully the college's mission and its wider role in the local community. Through appropriate training they are able to contribute to strategic planning and ensuring the college manages its finances efficiently.
- Managers monitor staff performance effectively through online appraisals, support and training or, when appropriate, capability procedures. Those staff with many roles receive feedback from several managers, which provides a more comprehensive profile of their performance. Most management actions to tackle issues are effective and there is particularly strong online monitoring of students' progress.
- The college encourages staff to share good practice. Staff training is plentiful and a significant proportion focuses on improving teachers' skills in the classroom. Mentors support a small

number of underperforming teachers which results in many improving their practice. Newly appointed staff receive particularly good support. Enterprising use is made of enthusiastic newly qualified teachers to disseminate fresh approaches to other staff.

- The annual formal observation of teachers is not sufficiently rigorous and does not result in a fully accurate profile of the overall quality of teaching, especially in the proportion identified as outstanding. Not all action plans from teacher observations contain sufficiently precise targets for improvement. Not all teachers are implementing improvement strategies thoroughly.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and broadly accurate. As part of the quality cycle, emerging judgements are validated through curriculum and quality-review meetings, involving the Principal and senior managers. Good account is taken of students' views to inform assessment. Not all curriculum action plans use data sufficiently to inform precise targets for improvement. The implementation of the college's quality improvement plan is monitored closely, but some key areas for improvement are not given sufficient attention.
- The curriculum is reviewed regularly to ensure that the needs of the students and the local community are being met. Prospective students receive comprehensive guidance and are placed on the correct programme. The college offers a broad range of academic courses and is gradually increasing its range of vocational programmes across all subject areas such as performing arts and law. Good collaboration by the college with local high schools ensures good progression opportunities for Year 11 pupils. Curriculum management is effective.
- As part of its core values the college very successfully fosters a culture of respect and this informs students' behaviour and working relationships with their peers and staff. The college has some success in promoting students' tolerance and the appreciation of diversity. Students' awareness of wider equality themes, such as homophobic bullying, are developed through assemblies and group tutorials, many of which are led by students. Not all teachers sufficiently take up opportunities to extend students' knowledge of equality issues through the curriculum.
- The monitoring of the performance of different groups of students is underdeveloped. The equality working group identified that male students were underperforming by comparison with females and produced guidance for teachers on how to address this. Gaps have now narrowed although these proposals were not implemented. The outcomes for the small but significant cohort of students from different minority ethnic backgrounds are not systematically analysed.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of students, including in the appointment of staff. All staff and governors receive appropriate training, including training on e-safety. Arrangements for monitoring health and safety are rigorous and analytical reports are effectively used to review practice. Students see the college as safe and any raised concerns are reported to governors.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Aquinas College

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	16-19 study programmes	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for students	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Mathematics and statistics	2
Social Sciences	2
English	1
Business	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Sixth form college							
Age range of students	16-18							
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1,909							
	Part-time: 625							
Principal/CEO	Mr Danny Pearson							
Date of previous inspection	October 2008							
Website address	www.aquinas.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of students (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	16	N/A	26	1	1,862	4	N/A	N/A
Part-time	13	471	12	90	13	26	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community students	330							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency/Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N/A 							

Contextual information

Aquinas College is a Roman Catholic sixth-form college situated in Stockport in south Manchester, under the trusteeship of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury. It is one of the largest Catholic sixth-form colleges in the country. The majority of 16 to 19-year-olds take advanced-level courses. There is a small provision at intermediate level and an entry-level Pathways programme for students with moderate to severe learning difficulties. As part of its commitment to the community, the college offers 'Another Chance' by means of part-time evening courses in leisure, business and academic studies.

Stockport is one of the most diverse areas in England. Overall it is an area of prosperity, with low unemployment but there are pockets of high deprivation. The college's admissions policy gives priority to Catholic students and to siblings of existing or past students, with the remaining places allocated to any student for whom an appropriate course is available. The college has been regularly oversubscribed.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Josephine Nowacki HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Assistant Principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on students' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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