

## Aquinas College

### CONTENTS

---

#### [Basic information about the college](#)

#### [Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

[Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[How well is the college led and managed?](#)

[To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?](#)

[How well are students and trainees guided and supported?](#)

[Students' view of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

#### [Part B: The college as a whole](#)

[Summary of grades awarded to teaching, learning and attainment by inspectors](#)

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of education and training](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

#### [Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[Science](#)

[Mathematics](#)

[Business](#)

[Information and communications technology](#)

[Visual arts and media](#)

[Performing arts](#)

[Humanities](#)

[Social sciences](#)

[English and modern foreign languages](#)

#### [Part D: College data](#)

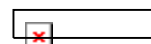
[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age](#)

[Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age](#)

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection](#)

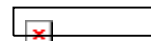
#### **Basic information about the college**



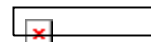
---

Name of college:	Aquinas College
Type of college:	Sixth form college
Principal:	Dr Ambrose Smith
Address of college:	Nangreave Road Stockport Cheshire SK2 6TH
Telephone number:	0161 483 3237
Fax number:	0161 487 4072
Chair of governors:	Councillor Tom McGee
Unique reference number:	130514
Name of reporting inspector:	Jan Bennett HMI
Date(s) of inspection:	24 November - 5 December 2003 24 November - 5 December 2003 24 November - 5 December 2003

#### **Part A: Summary**



## Information about the college

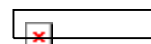


Aquinas College is a Catholic sixth form college situated on a compact site a mile to the south of Stockport town centre. It was established in 1980 following a reorganisation of post-16 Catholic education in the area. Stockport is in Greater Manchester and has a population of 284,500, of whom 4.3% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The area is relatively prosperous and the unemployment rate is low, but there are pockets of high deprivation in the borough. During the academic year 2002/03, 90% of enrolments at the college were by full-time students aged 16 to 18. The curriculum mainly consists of subjects at General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and GCE Advanced level (GCE A level). Vocational courses are offered in business, information and communications technology (ICT) leisure and recreation and leisure and tourism. A small number of students with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled each year and there is growing provision for part-time adult students.

The college has four partner Catholic high schools. Three are in Stockport and one is in Buxton. The college attracts students from a wide area and is over-subscribed. The college accepts all applicants from its partner schools, other Catholic schools, and brothers and sisters of past or present students. Remaining places are allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis. All places are allocated irrespective of ability provided that the students meet the minimum entry requirements of the course. Aquinas College strives to be a Catholic college for the whole community, with Christ at the very heart of its philosophy. This is expressed in its commitment to the Gospel values of freedom, justice and love. The college aims to value each member of its community, and to recognise the dignity and unique nature of each individual.

Two weeks before the inspection, an arson attack at the college seriously damaged the humanities teaching block. Many teaching resources were lost and the earth sciences, history and extended education studies departments were housed in temporary buildings, on the college car park, at the time of the inspection.

## How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the provision to be outstanding in three curriculum areas and good in the other six curriculum areas. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

### ***Key strengths***

- high retention rates
  
- high pass rates
  
- high standards of students' work

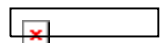
- good and excellent teaching
- careful monitoring of students' progress
- good enrichment programme
- excellent subject and pastoral support for students
- excellent leadership and curriculum management
- high levels of trust and mutual respect
- strong strategic direction from the Governors
- good value for money.

***What should be improved***

- some inadequate accommodation
- key skills achievement.

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

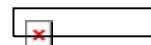
**Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas**



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

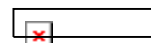
Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science	<b>Good</b> Pass rates are excellent at GCE A-level and are good on GCE AS courses. Teaching is good, with much care taken over the support and development of students' scientific skills, knowledge and understanding. An excellent team spirit and caring atmosphere supports students well in their studies.
Mathematics	<b>Outstanding</b> Retention and pass rates are very good on GCE AS and A-level courses. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are comprehensive and thorough. The support given to students is excellent. The department is well led and managed and there are effective systems in place to address any weaknesses.
Business	<b>Good</b> Retention rates are either above or around national averages. Pass rates are high on many courses. Teaching is mainly good, but there is some ineffective learning in a number of lessons. Students are very well supported. Accommodation is good for GCE AS and A-level courses but it is inadequate for vocational courses.
Information and communications technology	<b>Good</b> Retention and pass rates are very high on all advanced level courses. There is much good teaching, particularly in practical sessions, but some lessons lack challenge and inspiration. The accommodation used by full-time students is cramped and restricts the opportunities for discussion and group work. Courses are effectively managed and students are well supported.
Visual arts and media	<b>Outstanding</b> Achievement is very good on all courses and the standard of the work produced by students is extremely high. Teaching and learning are excellent. The wide range of extra-curricular workshops and the high quality resources effectively enhance learning. Students are very well supported.
Performing arts	<b>Good</b> There is much good teaching and very good achievement, especially on performance studies, drama and music courses. There is a very good subject enrichment programme and students are very well supported. There is some poor accommodation for performance studies and dance.
Humanities	<b>Good</b> The pass rates are high at GCE A level. Teaching is very good and the students respond well to the stimulating and challenging learning opportunities offered. Support for students is very good and they are given much extra help from teachers outside of lessons. On GCE AS courses, too few students achieve high grades.
Social sciences	<b>Outstanding</b> Achievement is excellent and there is very good progression to HE. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Academic and pastoral support are well structured and accessible. Staff are very enthusiastic and there are strong and effective leadership and management.
English and modern foreign languages	<b>Good</b> There are high retention and pass rates on most advanced level courses. There is a lot of good and very good teaching and learning. The range of courses that is offered is very comprehensive. There is too much unsuitable accommodation.

### How well is the college led and managed?



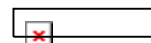
Leadership and management are outstanding. Achievement is good and progression rates are high. Managers ensure that the Catholic ethos is maintained and the college's mission is implemented. Excellent leadership is central to sustaining the culture of tolerance, support and success. There is a high standard of governance and the relationship between managers and governors is good. Equality of opportunity is embedded in the college's culture and practices, and the college has responded well to the latest equal opportunities legislation. Staff are fully involved in quality assurance and the self-assessment process effectively identifies most weaknesses, which are then addressed. The college self-assessment report, however, is lacking in evidence and critical evaluation. Staff development opportunities are good and staff appraisal is effective. The management information system is very effective and reliable. Curriculum management is very good and is excellent in some areas. Communication throughout the college is good. The college is financially sound and provides value for money.

### To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



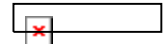
The college's response to social and educational inclusion is good. It maintains a non-selective admissions policy and it meets the obligations inherent in its foundation to provide for all students from the Catholic community. Its reputation as a successful college brings many more applications than there are places, but the college has not raised its entry requirements in order to select only high achievers. All students are treated equally and the facilities and services are available to all. The equal opportunities working group, consisting of staff and student members, promotes awareness through displays in the foyer, tutorial activities and assemblies. Teachers ensure that equality of opportunity is respected within their subject area. The analysis of achievement data by gender and ethnicity is well established, though further analysis based on the achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has yet to be completed. Equality of opportunity is intrinsic in the college's mission and there are many instances of students showing good awareness of issues surrounding social justice. Inspectors note the spirit of trust and respect with which students and staff conduct themselves. The college is committed to a strategic development that addresses the social issues of the area and has moved from its niche market to play a broader part in local provision.

### How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students at the college receive excellent support and guidance. The induction process is thorough. There is an initial assessment of all students' learning needs and any necessary support is put in place quickly. Monitoring and support structures are well planned, systematic and coherent. Personal tutors and subject teachers track and review students' progress very effectively and are quick to address any issues. The quality of the personal and academic support given to students is outstanding. Very good careers education and advice helps students to progress to appropriate courses in FE and HE, or to employment.

## **Students' view of the college**



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

### ***What students like about the college***

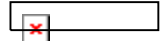
- very good subject support from teachers
  
- good relationships between staff and students
  
- friendly atmosphere
  
- wide range of extra-curricular activities
  
- good library facilities
  
- drop-in information technology (IT) centre
  
- prompt return of marked work.

### ***What they feel could be improved***

- cramped corridors
  
- overcrowding in the canteen at busy times
  
- lack of social facilities

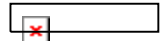
- o large groups in small rooms.

### Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the LSC. The LSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post inspection action plan within the stipulated two months. The LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

### Part B: The college as a whole



### Summary of grades awarded to teaching, learning and attainment by inspectors

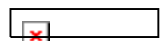


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	81	18	1
19+ and WBL*	78	22	0
Learning 16-18	79	19	2
19+ and WBL*	89	11	0

*Key: Inspectors grade three aspects of lessons: teaching, learning and attainment. The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).*

\* work-based learning

### Achievement and standards





and 2001/02 were provided by the LSC. Data provided by the college were used for 2002/03. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C give more details about achievement and standards on particular courses.

### **16 to 18 year olds**

2. As tables 1 and 2 in Part D illustrate, 90% of the enrolments at the college are by students aged 16 to 18, around 1,570 of whom are studying at advanced level. The remaining students, approximately 60, either follow a vocational pathway at intermediate level or are on the course for students with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

3. During the period from 2000 to 2003, retention rates compared favourably with national averages. The retention rates on GCE AS and A-level courses were around the national average and rising slightly. Particularly high retention rates were recorded in social sciences and visual arts and media. The retention rate on General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses improved over the three years and was slightly above the national average in 2002/03. There was a significant improvement in the retention rates on vocational courses, which was well above the national average in 2002/03. Retention rates on the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) business course have been exceptionally high for the last three years.

4. The data on achievement prepared by the college show that high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses have been maintained in 2003. Aquinas College has been in the top 20 colleges in the national league tables every year since the league tables were established. In 2003, the overall pass rate at GCE A level was 96%, excluding general studies, and 51% of students achieved a grade A or B, compared with 46% nationally. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points per entry rose from 76.0 in 2002 to 80.3 in 2003. At GCE AS and A level, pass rates are uniformly high for all the subjects in social sciences and visual arts and media and they are also high for chemistry, further mathematics, law, ICT and on the combined English literature and language courses. Achievement on GCSE courses is variable. The proportion of students obtaining a grade A\* to C in mathematics has been around the national average for the last three years, for English, the proportion has risen and was above the national average in 2003, however, very few students obtain a grade C or above for GCSE science.

5. National value added systems, which compare students' results at GCE A level with their performance at GCSE, show that, overall, students are achieving the grades that might be expected. They also show a significant improvement in performance in recent years. In 2000, eight subjects (accounting for 41.5% of examination entries) under-performed, whereas in 2003 only four subjects (accounting for just 5.3% of examination entries) under-performed. There is also a significant increase in the proportion of students who achieve higher grades than expected. Value added scores for individual GCE A-level subjects show that students on GCE A-level chemistry, communication studies and psychology courses consistently achieve higher grades than predicted on the basis of their GCSE performance. Students of dance, English literature and religious studies tend to achieve below their expected grades.

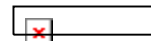
6. A high proportion of students are successful in gaining places in HE. Some 85% of advanced level students progressed to HE last year, and 11 students gained places at either Oxford or Cambridge universities. A further 6% are taking a gap year before going to university. There is good progression from intermediate level courses. Around 75% progressed to a higher level course at the college and a further 17% found employment or progressed to a higher level course elsewhere.

7. The quality of students' work is very good across the college. Levels of students' attainment are high. Attainment was judged good or better in 74% of lessons, satisfactory in 25% and less than satisfactory in 1%. This profile is significantly better than the average for all sixth form colleges inspected in 2002/03. The highest levels of attainment are in mathematics, visual arts and media, social sciences and ICT. Mathematics students are very competent in the use of graphical calculators and they have very good problem solving skills. They use mathematical language with confidence, have very good communication skills and are not afraid to put forward solutions and ideas for discussion. The work produced by students in visual arts is of a very high standard. Students develop their own personal style and their work shows remarkable sensitivity and skill. The

quality of the discussion and debate observed in communication studies and media lessons is exceptionally high. Students in the social sciences have well-developed skills in critical analysis and demonstrate a maturity and confidence beyond that expected at this stage. Practical work in ICT is of an exceptionally high standard.

8. Attendance during the inspection was high, averaging 89%. It was highest in ICT, at 92%, and lowest in performing arts, at 82%.

### Quality of education and training



9. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 141 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 81% and only one lesson was unsatisfactory. In all areas of learning, the teaching is good and students learn effectively. In science, mathematics, performing arts, humanities and social sciences, teaching was very good or excellent in more than 45% of the lessons observed. In visual arts and media, the proportion of very good and excellent teaching was nearly 80%. These areas of learning account for over 60% of the students enrolled at the college. More than 20% of the lessons observed in science, visual arts and media, and performing arts were excellent. The quality of the teaching at levels 2 and 3 is similar. The quality of the teaching of adults is very similar to that of students aged 16 to 18.

10. Lessons are well planned, with clear aims that are communicated to students. Most have good introductions followed by effective summaries at the end of lessons. Relationships between the students and between students and their teachers are excellent. Teachers are knowledgeable and many have enormous enthusiasm for their subject that encourages students to learn. There is much effective questioning, which challenges students and stimulates valuable in-depth discussions. In the best lessons, the contributions from students are utilised and valued, and efforts are praised. There is much encouragement to participate and most students do so. Many different types of teaching aids are used effectively to maintain students' interest. The paper-based resources such as handout materials are very good; high-quality gapped handouts are used extensively to promote learning. In a number of subject areas, learning technologies are used extensively and to good effect. For example, data projectors, including powerpoint presentations, are used very well by some teachers. The managed learning environment is developing well but some areas, such as ICT, are not using it sufficiently in lessons. Key skills delivery is well integrated into the curriculum areas. In a small number of lessons in science, mathematics, business and ICT, not all students were kept full involved.

11. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects and nearly all have a teaching qualification. Many staff have substantial teaching experience and some are examiners. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and they have a strong commitment to supporting their students. Newly qualified teachers receive a high level of support from their more experienced colleagues. In most areas where it is needed, there is good technician support. Arrangements for staff development are good. Training needs related to the priorities of the college, the department or the individual are identified through the appraisal process. The college works effectively with other similar colleges to organise professional development and to share good practice.

12. Since the last inspection, the college has made some significant improvements to its accommodation. A building project for a new sports hall, classrooms and tennis courts has been completed, as has another project to improve facilities for art and design and create a new IT drop-in centre and additional classrooms. The college has opened a centre for adults, delivering basic skills and ICT courses in Brinnington: an area of Stockport with a high level of deprivation. A very pleasant learning environment has been created by the imaginative adaptation of part of a church. Some of the classrooms in use at the main site are inadequate. Heating and ventilation are insufficient in some rooms. A few rooms are not large enough for the size of the groups being taught. In its self-assessment report, the college has identified that insufficient teaching and social accommodation is

a weakness. Several small social areas have been created, but there is great pressure on the available seating in the refectory at peak times. Timetabling arrangements have mitigated this problem to some extent.

13. Students make good use of the IT drop-in centre. It contains 76 computers. The overall ratio of computers to students is good, and staff also have good access to computers. Students make good use of the internet. Staff in some areas are developing a managed learning environment. Some teaching rooms have computers linked to projection facilities, and these are used to enhance teaching and learning. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively to enhance the teaching of science. The learning resources centre is an attractive and well-managed facility which supports learning well. The staff are well qualified and they maintain productive links with the curriculum areas. There is an appropriate range of resources for most areas. The opening hours have been extended in response to students' needs.

14. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress is thorough and effective. Course teams have developed good assessment practices that are tailored to the needs of the subject and the students. Homework is set regularly and work is returned promptly with detailed comments to aid improvement. The college sets a target of eight days for the return of marked work and surveys have shown that 98% is returned within eight days and around 90% is returned within five days. Some course teams, including law, psychology and art encourage students to assess each others' work and to suggest improvements. The history team are using a very effective subject specific self-evaluation form which encourages students to analyse their own performance and address any weaknesses. Good use is made of the assessments available on the college intranet. Very detailed assessment records are kept by subject teams, which are used to track individual students' progress and to inform course planning. External verifiers' reports show that examination board requirements are being met and internal moderation is carried out effectively.

15. During induction, students' learning support needs are carefully assessed and their preferred learning styles are determined. Full-time students are set target grades based on their GCSE performance. Progress against targets is monitored carefully by both tutors and subject teachers in one-to-one progress interviews and subject reviews. These form the basis of reports that are sent out to parents, who speak very highly of the detailed knowledge that staff have about individual students. The progress of part-time adult students is also carefully monitored and reviewed. The college management information system plays a pivotal role in the monitoring and reporting process. Teachers, tutors and managers have on-line access to a comprehensive range of useful reports on attendance, preferred learning styles, target grades and other information. The management information system team also issues timely reports on attendance, for example, that enable managers and teachers to identify and address any problems quickly.

16. The majority of the college's provision is at advanced level. There is a very good range of GCE courses for students aged 16 to 18. The college offers 46 GCE AS subjects and a narrower range of AVCE and intermediate level courses. Skilful timetabling enables students to pursue any combination of GCE AS subjects. A wide choice is available for students wishing to combine AVCE and GCE AS subjects. In the lower sixth form, for example, of 108 students on an AVCE course, all but 5 are combining their vocational course with other qualifications such as a GCE AS or A level. Since the last inspection, the college has significantly increased its provision for adults and it has expanded its provision at intermediate level. IT courses are particularly popular. A programme of vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels, known as employment awareness, enables students to take additional qualifications leading to employment or HE. For example, the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) paralegal course is popular amongst students aged 16 to 18. Links with local legal firms have assisted this development. There is also discrete provision for students with moderate learning difficulties. Currently, 17 students are enrolled.

17. Students have good opportunities for enrichment. There is a well-planned and extensive range of enrichment courses, known as complementary studies. Although a number of students have difficulty in accessing some enrichment courses because of timetable clashes, overall the take up is good. At the time of inspection, more than 600 students were enrolled for 42 different activities. In addition to team sports, there is significant interest in activities such as rock climbing, snowboarding and playing in an orchestra. The college's well-developed international links also provide

opportunities for enrichment. Nearly 200 students are involved in a project with St. Xavier's College in Mumbai which involves work to support two charities in India. Complementary studies form part of a programme of core studies undertaken by all full-time students. These also comprise a study of ethics, key skills, and general studies, as well as attendance at tutorials and assemblies. In addition to core studies, a significant majority of students undertake one week's work experience during their lower sixth year. A wide variety of placements were undertaken last year, including a week spent with a forensic psychologist at a secure prison and a fortnight spent with a member of parliament (MP) in Westminster.

18. Partnership arrangements are productive. Links with Catholic 11 to 16 schools are strong. College staff visit these schools to speak to all Year 10 and Year 11 pupils about opportunities at the college and to conduct initial interviews. The head teachers and the college principal meet regularly. In a few instances, school staff do some teaching at the college. The college is making arrangements with the neighbouring general FE college to satisfy the needs of students who want to benefit from the core studies programme at Aquinas College whilst attending a vocational course at the general FE college. As part of its 14 to 19 strategy, the college runs courses for gifted and talented students aged 14 to 16. For example, students from one high school attend the college to undertake the ILEX paralegal course.

19. The college fulfils its legal obligations in relation to religious education and collective worship. The college has made a strong commitment to the preservation of the Catholic ethos in the arrangements for chaplaincy and spiritual development. Two diocesan priests work with the full-time lay chaplain, who is also a trained counsellor. Together they provide twice-weekly masses, morning prayers and liturgy to mark special occasions, when provision is made for the whole college to attend. Events throughout the week are well attended by staff and students. A small chapel has been created in the busiest part of the college. It is a focus point for the groups of students who conduct their own prayer meetings and plan the many charity events that the college supports. Tutor group attendance at assemblies is a particularly important part of the core curriculum. Any teacher who has a particular interest may volunteer to deliver an assembly. The rich variety of topics provides students with a deep awareness of current issues and strengthens the bond between teachers and students. Effective use is made of visiting speakers.

20. The provision of general religious education is delivered through the ethics course, which is validated by the Diocese Education Service of Shrewsbury. All students are expected to attend for one lesson each week. In 2003, the retention rate on the course was 96%, though the pass rate of 76% was below college expectations and has prompted a review of the framework for delivery. The quality of teaching on the course is good or better. Teachers achieve a good rapport with the students, leading discussions, inviting opinions and encouraging them towards positive Christian values. There is also provision for students who wish to study theology as an examination subject, as well as an access to HE course for adults.

21. Students receive outstanding support and guidance. Pre-entry information for potential students is clear and students are given an individual interview prior to starting their course. Liaison with partner schools is effective, particularly where students have been identified as having special needs. The induction process is very thorough, and information about course content and assessment methods is clearly explained.

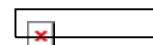
22. Each student is allocated to the care of a group tutor who, in almost all cases, teaches that student. Students meet their tutors every day and they have a regular one-to-one progress interview. As well as providing support with any problems encountered on a daily basis, the tutor is responsible for delivering the tutorial programme of personal, social and vocational development. The programme is put together by the tutorial team, regularly reviewed and takes account of students' opinions. Students recognise the important contribution made by tutors and praise the tutorial system as an outstanding strength of the college.

23. There is an initial assessment of learning needs for all students, after which support arrangements are put in place quickly to help students settle into their course. The learning support teachers are well qualified and experienced, and they respond very effectively to referrals from subject teachers and requests from students. The tracking of students' progress and the

communication with subject teachers is very thorough. The accommodation for learning support is inadequate and does not offer the levels of privacy that some students require. Subject teachers provide highly valued course-specific support. This is through formal and informal systems including workshops, individual tutorials and extra lessons.

24. Careers guidance is very good. In response to a weakness identified in the last inspection, the college has strengthened the provision by appointing a co-ordinator to oversee careers and progression and a qualified careers advisor. There is a well-planned programme of activities to guide those students who are seeking employment or a place at university. Intermediate level students receive very good advice about progression routes available at the college, employment opportunities and the courses offered at other colleges. Students with moderate learning difficulties on the extended education course have their own careers guidance programme, which effectively supports them through the transition period between college and employment. A careers advisor, based at the Brinnington Centre, provides good formal and informal advice to the adult students.

## Leadership and management



25. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college is consistently amongst the top colleges in the country in the national league tables. There have been substantial increases over the last four years in the proportion of GCE A-level students achieving grades equal to or higher than predicted on the basis of their GCSE performance. Retention and pass rates for most of these students are consistently above national averages. The majority of this cohort is expected to complete key skills qualifications at level 3 but, whilst there is substantial key skills development and high pass rates in the tests, achievements of the full qualification for all three main key skills are poor. Retention and pass rates on full-time vocational courses at intermediate level are around national averages. The college has addressed the issue of low pass rates on part-time courses for adult students and these have improved in 2002/03.

26. Aquinas College is the only Catholic sixth form college in the diocese of Shrewsbury, under whose trusteeship the college operates. Since its foundation in 1980, the college has become the first choice for post-16 education for Catholic students from partner high schools. The college has the full support of the trustees, who are satisfied that the college makes a very significant contribution to Catholic education in the area, and is developing increasingly more appropriate progression routes to accommodate the needs of Catholic pupils. The admissions policy gives priority to Catholic students, regardless of their academic ability, and every effort is made to provide them with courses of study that meet their needs.

27. Senior managers ensure the implementation of the mission to bring high-quality education in an atmosphere of freedom, justice and love, and each individual is valued as a full member of the college community. In the academic year 2003/04, 51% of students are Catholic. The maintenance of the Catholic ethos has been successfully achieved by the consistent emphasis on the values behind the mission statement and through the chaplaincy, tutorial activities and the core curriculum, as well as through the college's service to the local community. There is effective monitoring of the curriculum areas to ensure that all students are offered a positive experience of education in a Christian environment. Teachers are aware of their role in sustaining the values of the mission. In July 2003, all staff took part in a day of reflection on the mission and ethos of the college.

28. There is a very strong positive atmosphere in the college, which reflects an embedded culture of equality, tolerance, respect, support and success. Excellent leadership is central to sustaining this culture. Students thrive both academically and socially, leading to the college being greatly over-subscribed. This presents a major strategic challenge which is regularly discussed. There is strong determination to maintain a non-selective strategy for full-time applicants aged 16 to 18. This position was confirmed, along with the mission, at recent meetings involving governors and all staff. The college's strategy is set out clearly in documents required by the main funding body.

29. Collaborative working is an effective element of the college strategy. A range of partnerships is supporting widening participation, for both students aged 16 to 18 and adults. The college has worked with a local community group to establish a popular and much-praised outreach centre in a deprived area of the borough. This initiative is part of a strategy to expand adult and community provision. However, college governors and managers have given insufficient attention to the relative underperformance on some of these part-time programmes.

30. There is a high standard of governance. Governors are appropriately involved in determining the character, mission and strategy of the college. They are representative of the college's stakeholders and have a wide range of relevant experience. Governors are kept well informed through training activities, contacts with the college and reports by the principal. Liaison between governors and college managers is good. Governors meet students and staff regularly and many attend college functions.

31. Equality of opportunity is embedded in the college culture and its practices. All the college's policies and procedures spring from the Christian view that each individual is a unique creation to be appreciated and nurtured. There is an effective and very proactive equal opportunities group, which is increasing its focus on diversity. It has led the review and update of the equal opportunities policy; the process involved staff, students and governors. Equality of opportunity issues form part of the tutorial programme and are included in a range of curriculum activities. There is also a wide range of initiatives to increase the cultural and ethnic diversity of the college. The proportion of students from a minority ethnic background reflects that in the local community. A recent staff development event engaged all staff in a critical review of the impact of equal opportunity practices, with appropriate follow-up action. Students' achievements at GCE AS and A level are analysed by gender and ethnicity. Analysis of performance by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and some underperformance by male full-time students, is beginning to be addressed.

32. The college's response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) is good. All required policies were published by due dates. Substantial staff training has taken place, which has also involved governors. Students have a high level of awareness of these issues and this is reinforced by tutorial activities and a student focus group. An audit of access has been carried out, leading to improved ramp access, some new building and relocation of some teaching areas. Further improvements to access are constrained by the design of the 1950's main building and the need to retain several temporary classrooms. Students with restricted mobility can be accommodated on all courses.

33. The self-assessment process, which is a core component of the quality assurance system, is rigorous and comprehensive at course level. Staff are fully involved in the process and course teams take effective steps to address any poor performance. The college self-assessment report, however, contains insufficient evidence and critical analysis. Students' views are sought through a range of questionnaires and on-course feedback. Parents' and employer views have not been sought comprehensively.

34. The teacher observation programme is not fully effective. The grades awarded by inspectors, although good and well above comparable college averages, are significantly lower than those resulting from college observations. Follow-up actions are clearly identified in some areas, but this is not systematic or comprehensive for all areas. Sharing of good practice within and between curriculum areas has been reinforced through dedicated staff training. In the best-managed areas, a combination of mentoring, peer and manager observations, and shared teaching resources is being used to ensure consistently good teaching. This support is particularly helpful for new teachers. Staff development opportunities are good and appraisal is effective. The staff appraisal system is being revised to place greater emphasis on performance management.

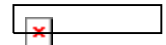
35. The management information system is very good and reliable. It effectively informs corporate and curriculum decision making. Staff have very good on-line access to data, which is used to monitor student and subject performance. The data are well used in curriculum areas to identify issues and actions for improvement. Reports from national value added systems are used to set and monitor examination grade targets. A strategy for embedding the use of a managed learning environment within teaching and learning is being supported by a team of information and learning

technology (ILT) champions. Impact on individual curriculum areas is variable.

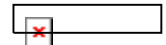
36. The management of the curriculum is very good and in some areas is excellent. There is strong leadership at course and curriculum area levels. The consensus management culture supports effective teamworking. Communication throughout the college is good. Staff are very positive about college management and have good access to managers at all levels. Staff morale is high and the staff opinion survey carried out by the Learning and Skills Development Agency shows very high levels of staff satisfaction.

37. The financial health of the college is very good and it is in financial health category A. The college's financial position is monitored closely by managers and governors. Consideration is being given to more extensive use of cost-revenue analyses to inform resource decisions. The college regularly achieves budget surpluses, which have been used to support new building projects required to meet consistent growth in admissions. Reserves available to commit to future capital projects and to rectify accommodation deficiencies identified by inspectors are insufficient. Risk and disaster management systems are effective. The college's actions to replace the teaching rooms lost in the recent fire were swift and ensured no disruption to teaching. The college provides value for money. Students achieve well, the standard of teaching and learning is very good, there is an extensive enrichment programme, class sizes are above average and there is efficient utilisation of the available space.

### Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



#### Science



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

#### **Strengths**

- excellent achievement at GCE A level
  
- very good use of ILT and other teaching aids
  
- effective additional subject support in and out of lessons
  
- well-managed provision.

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor pass rates on the GCSE science course
  
- teaching in some areas that is too teacher dominated.

**Scope of provision**

38. The science departments are successful in attracting large numbers of students. There are 377 students on GCE AS courses and 191 on GCE A-level courses. There is a wide range of provision, with GCE AS and A-level courses in biology, chemistry, geology, environmental science and physics. A small number of students are enrolled on a GCSE science course.

**Achievement and standards**

39. Retention rates are high on all science subjects and some are outstanding. All science courses have retention rates that are better than the national averages for sixth form colleges. Pass rates on all the GCE A-level courses are very good. The proportion of students who consistently gain the higher grades in chemistry is outstanding. Some 73% of the students achieved high grades in 2003, which is approximately 20 percentage points above the national average. The pass rate on GCE AS courses is more variable. On both chemistry and geology courses, the pass rates are well above the national averages, whilst on biology and physics courses, the pass rates have fallen over the last three years and are now below the national averages. Students generally achieve grades in line with those predicted on the basis of their entry qualifications. The exceptions are: GCE AS and A-level chemistry, where they do better than predicted and GCE AS biology where they do not achieve as well as expected.

40. Students in the better lessons contribute knowledgeably and with confidence. Their written work is of a high standard and their practical skills are well developed. They manipulate technical equipment well and enjoy the activities. There have been several notable successes in the past few years. A number of biology and chemistry students have received Nuffield Foundation bursaries and have spent much of their summer break working with research scientists. In 2002, two students received commendations from the Institute of Physics for their coursework. Students attend well and arrive punctually, except first thing in the morning, when lateness affects the start of some lessons.

**A sample of retention and pass rates in science, 2001 to 2003**

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE science	2	No. of starts	15	22	38
		% retention	80	77	87
		% pass rate	42	24	33
GCE AS geology	3	No. of starts	18	19	19
		% retention	83	100	100
		% pass rate	93	84	95
GCE AS physics	3	No. of starts	70	85	75
		% retention	86	88	92
		% pass rate	93	84	78
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	146**	109	112



		% retention	75	100	97
		% pass rate	92	95	97
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	91**	56	77
		% retention	74	96	97
		% pass rate	99	94	93
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	87**	40	52
		% retention	75	100	98
		% pass rate	98	93	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

**\*\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course**

### **Quality of education and training**

42. Teaching and learning are good. Relationships between staff and students and between the students themselves are exemplary. There is a highly supportive environment, which stimulates and encourages students to work hard. Many of the lessons are delivered with good humour and students take considerable enjoyment in learning. Lessons are generally well planned with an effective introduction and a good summary at the end. The better teachers explain things clearly. They are very knowledgeable and deliver lessons with enormous enthusiasm. Students' interests are maintained in a wide variety of ways and modern teaching aids including data projectors and interactive whiteboards are used effectively. Much practical work is undertaken. This is particularly noteworthy in chemistry where students undertake extensive projects and much of the work is completed outside the normal timetable. In the outstanding lessons, students participate fully and are engaged for the entire lesson. There is much stimulating discussion. The help given to students during lessons is outstanding. They are given plenty of encouragement and are helped to review any areas they find difficult or have missed through absence.

43. There are a number of lessons in which the teacher talks for long periods of time and fails to provide challenging activities for the students. There is also some group work where students are allowed to drift from the tasks set. Questioning in some lessons is insufficiently challenging, particularly for those students for whom the work is relatively straightforward.

44. Students learn effectively in the majority of lessons. Homework is set very regularly and it is generally handed in on time. It is marked very thoroughly and ways to improve the work are clearly identified and explained. There is frequent reference to relevant information available to students on the internet and intranet. These are valued by students and used well in many cases.

45. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Much professional development is undertaken both in-house and on external courses. The technical staff support practical lessons very well and are highly valued by teachers and students. All laboratories have a supply of IT equipment used as both teaching aids and for student use. Students have good access to computing equipment, which they use well. There are sufficient consumable resources. There is a very good library with plenty of modern science textbooks, periodicals and scientific software. There is some overcrowding during practical lessons. The laboratories are often too full to allow the teacher to support all the students appropriately. Many of the laboratories are in need of refurbishment. Technical staff work under very difficult circumstances as there are insufficient storage facilities and too little work space.

46. There are good guidance notes on assessment and record keeping is exemplary. Any absences are followed up quickly. Minimum target grades are set at the beginning of courses and they are reviewed and amended where necessary as courses progress. Homework, tests and other assessments are compared to the target grades. This is used to stimulate students' interest and to maintain a good working ethos. Parents and students are kept well informed of the progress being

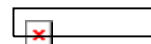
made. There is an extensive enrichment programme some of which leads to additional accreditation. Key skills delivery is well integrated into science programmes but many students do not complete their portfolios of evidence sufficiently thoroughly to meet the necessary criteria and achieve the full award.

47. There is good advice and guidance on entry to courses. The help given to students both in and outside of lessons is excellent. Teachers give very freely of their time. In addition there are a number of sessions where students can drop-in and receive help with scientific problems. The pastoral support is very good; tutorials are well attended and help students with many life issues. Equality and diversity are celebrated and students treat each other in a polite and friendly way.

### ***Leadership and management***

48. Leadership and management are very good. The heads of each department work well together and there is a sensible sharing of responsibilities. There are regular meetings for the entire science staff as well as separate individual departmental meetings. Effective informal communication helps with the smooth running of the courses. There is a close collaboration between the teams and an excellent team spirit. Quality assurance forms an integral part of team meetings. All staff are involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report. The final document is of limited use, but the process and the action plans that are derived from it are valued and used well. Technical support staff produce a separate self-assessment report. Questionnaires to ascertain students' views are used extensively and have led to improvements in the delivery of courses. All staff are appraised and value the experience. The ethos of the institution ensures that all students and staff are treated fairly and given appropriate support.

### **Mathematics**



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**.

#### ***Strengths***

- very good pass rates for GCE, AS and A-level mathematics and further mathematics
  
- excellent teaching and learning
  
- wide range of courses to meet students' needs
  
- outstanding assessment and monitoring of students' progress
  
- excellent support for students

- o strong curriculum management.

**Weaknesses**

- o no significant weaknesses.

**Scope of provision**

50. There is a wide range of courses, which has been broadened over the last three years in response to students' needs. Some 360 students are studying at advanced level. GCE AS and A-level courses are offered in mathematics, further mathematics and statistics, with different combinations of modules being available. A GCE AS course in the use of mathematics has been introduced as an alternative to GCE AS mathematics. It offers the opportunity for students to achieve a free standing mathematics qualification if they do not achieve the full award. A large number of students, around 160, retake GCSE mathematics, either in November or over a full year, depending on their previous result. The majority retake at intermediate level but they can take higher or foundation level. All students who have not achieved a grade C at GCSE have the opportunity to achieve key skills application of number at level 2. GCSE mathematics is also offered to adults in the evening and there are 15 students on the course.

**Achievement and standards**

51. Retention rates are good on advanced level courses. Retention and pass rates on GCSE courses are improving and were above the national average in 2003. Pass rates on GCE A-level mathematics are very good. The pass rate has improved in GCE AS level pure mathematics over the last three years and was eight percentage points above the national average for sixth form colleges in 2003. Students are performing slightly better than predicted from their GCSE results. Pass rates for GCE A-level further mathematics are excellent, averaging close to 100% over three years, and the percentage of passes at the higher grades is well above the national average. In 2003, however, students on GCE A-level further mathematics did not perform as well as predicted on the basis of their entry qualifications.

52. Students are attentive in lessons and are committed to their studies. Their work is of a high standard. Solutions are well presented, reflecting the good practice of teachers. Students effectively develop the use of appropriate mathematical language and teachers place a strong emphasis on this. In advanced level lessons, students are competent in the use of graphical calculators. There is good progression to HE and almost all the further mathematics students each year go on to do mathematics or related degrees.

**A sample of retention and pass rates in mathematics, 2001 to 2003**

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE mathematics *	2	No. of starts	118	140	115
		% retention	75	80	87
		% pass rate	38	40	41
GCE AS mathematics (pure)	3	No. of starts	195	164	127
		% retention	87	87	91

		% pass rate	62	77	79
GCE A2 mathematics	3	No. of starts	108**	108	105
		% retention	74	97	96
		% pass rate	88	96	91
GCE AS further mathematics	3	No. of starts	19	***	23
		% retention	100	***	91
		% pass rate	100	***	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* pass rate at grades A\* to C

\*\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course

\*\*\* data not available

### **Quality of education and training**

54. Teaching and learning are excellent. Staff demonstrate very good subject knowledge and have very productive working relationships with their students. Students particularly enjoy the problem solving aspect of mathematics and gain a real sense of achievement as their skills improve. Lessons are well structured with clear aims. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to contribute and effort is praised. In most lessons teachers' skilful questioning challenges and stimulates students. For example, in a lesson on regression lines, the teacher was able to take the class through the theory with all the mathematics being derived from students' contributions. Effective use of an intranet link to a mathematics website produced an interactive animated illustration which helped to clarify the concept of 'least squares' and enhanced understanding of the topic. In GCSE lessons, students are well motivated. In one lesson, the language of algebra was effectively taught using a practical activity. Students worked in groups to match up algebraic expressions with their descriptions in words, producing a poster which was put up on the wall. They worked very productively and there were some impressive discussions between students. By the end of the lesson, students were competent at a difficult and challenging topic. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not check students' learning sufficiently and fail to ensure that all students are fully involved.

55. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are outstanding. Regular homework is set on all courses and is marked and returned promptly. All homework is graded on an A to E scale, so students know how they are performing. Teachers monitor students' progress carefully. Grades are recorded on individual progress sheets which are kept on file by teachers and by students so that they can see trends. Constructive feedback is given in written or verbal form to individuals and whole groups. There are regular subject reviews and targets are set for improvement.

56. Support for individual students is excellent. Each student who wishes to study mathematics is interviewed at enrolment by the head of department to ensure they choose the most appropriate course. Thorough diagnostic testing is carried out at the start of the course, individual student needs are identified and workshop support is offered. All students can attend workshops during and at the end of the day. Teachers also provide considerable informal support outside lessons. Very effective extra support is given to students who are applying to Oxford and Cambridge universities.

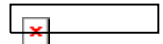
57. Mathematics teaching takes place in a suite of adjacent rooms. They contain colourful displays that create a stimulating and pleasant environment. One room has a fixed computer and data projector, with access to the internet. However, to use computer facilities in other classrooms, teachers have to take a laptop and portable projector with them and set these up at the start of each lesson. This inhibits the use of the equipment, particularly when there is no break between lessons. Insufficient use is made of new technologies in teaching and learning. Two rooms containing suites of computers are cramped and unsuitable for group activities. Graphical calculators, available in class sets, are used extensively. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced and have regular

access to appropriate staff development.

### ***Leadership and management***

58. Leadership and management are very good. Courses are well organised and teachers work well as a team. There are regular meetings and action points are recorded and monitored. Self-assessment is thorough, with a detailed action plan to address weaknesses. Progress against the plan is well monitored. Data on students' achievements are thoroughly analysed and effective action is taken when necessary. For example, a change of policy to enter GCE AS students for a statistics module in January had a positive effect and improved achievement in 2003. Teachers clearly understand the problems of transition from GCSE to advanced level mathematics and a teacher from one of the feeder schools works in the department for half a day each week. The department is committed to equal opportunities, as is evident from supportive teacher-student relationships and the nature of teaching and learning resources. There is, however, a lack of subject-specific support for the teacher of the adult evening class.

### **Business**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level business studies and law, GCE A-level accounting and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate business courses
  
- high retention rate on GCE AS business and GCE AS law courses
  
- well-developed resources to support teaching and learning
  
- good accommodation for GCE AS and A-level courses
  
- effective support for students.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- ineffective learning in a minority of lessons

- o unsuitable accommodation for vocational courses.

### **Scope of provision**

60. There are over 700 enrolments on business and law courses. The provision comprises GCE AS and A-level courses in accounting, business studies and law. In addition, there are vocational courses in business at intermediate and advanced levels and an intermediate level course in legal studies. As a result of significant growth in recent years, the largest subject area is law, with 338 students. Enrolments for GCE A-level business and accounting are 205 and 85 respectively. There are currently 24 students on GNVQ intermediate and 73 students on AVCE. The AVCE course is flexibly arranged to enable students to enrol for single or double awards and some students undertake an intensive one-year double award course. The number of students taking the vocational legal studies course is small. Most of the provision is for students aged 16 to 18, however, there are some adults taking courses in business administration or to prepare for employment as legal secretaries.

### **Achievement and standards**

61. Retention rates are broadly in line with national averages, although in some cases they are high, for example, on GCE AS business studies and law courses. Pass rates are high on many courses and are well above the national average for similar colleges. For example, there are high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level business studies and law and GCE A-level accounting. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course have improved markedly over the last three years and are now outstanding. Overall, the grades achieved by students are in line with the predictions made on the basis of their GCSE results at entry. On many courses, the percentage of students achieving high grades exceeds the national average.

62. The standard of students' work is generally appropriate to their level of study. Students gaining vocational skills in relation to legal secretarial work demonstrate very high levels of attainment. Law students have good recall of case law. Vocational business students make good use of IT to find and present business information. Attendance rates at the lessons observed were high. Progression to subject-related HE courses or employment is very good.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in business, 2001 to 2003**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	31	35	23
		% retention	84	86	83
		% pass rate	54	83	95
GCE AS accounting	3	No. of starts	27	40	56
		% retention	89	85	86
		% pass rate	75	94	73
GCE AS business	3	No. of starts	105	131	108
		% retention	94	89	94
		% pass rate	88	87	93
GCE AS law	3	No. of starts	161	171	199
		% retention	93	89	93

		% pass rate	84	90	87
AVCE business (two years)	3	No. of starts	25	32	25
		% retention	96	88	88
		% pass rate	92	86	82
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	74*	71	71
		% retention	88	97	93
		% pass rate	92	96	100
GCE A-level law	3	No. of starts	135*	106	121
		% retention	79	98	94
		% pass rate	86	97	95

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course

### **Quality of education and training**

64. Most teaching is good and inspectors found no unsatisfactory teaching. Carefully planned lessons relate to clear schemes of work. Lesson plans include references to key skills and to provision for students of differing abilities. The extent to which lessons take account of these factors varies. In the better lessons, teachers make skilful use of questions to ensure that students understand. Law teachers make good use of powerpoint presentations in lessons. For example, teaching about the functions of the European Court of Justice was enlivened by the use of photographs within the presentation. Teaching and learning are well supported by good resources, many of which are produced by college staff. For GCE AS and A-level business studies and accounting courses, there is a comprehensive set of learning materials, which is well presented and up to date. On law courses, staff are developing an imaginative managed learning environment, which is proving increasingly popular with students. Vocational business students have good access to a comprehensive range of paper-based and IT resources. AVCE students are adept at conducting quick searches for relevant information on the Internet and adapting the output to suit their needs. In some lessons, there is unsatisfactory learning by a minority of students. These students make poor use of their time and distract others. The start of some lessons is affected by poor punctuality. Learning is enriched by educational visits. For example, law students visit European institutions in Brussels.

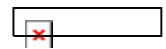
65. There is good accommodation for teaching GCE AS and A-level business, accounting and law. Well-appointed rooms in modern buildings provide an attractive learning environment. Rooms are spacious enough to accommodate the large groups in this curriculum area. There are relevant and imaginative wall displays and good access to most resources. By contrast, the accommodation for vocational business courses is unsatisfactory. Lessons take place in rooms which are too small for some of the groups. Access to IT is good, but the equipment takes up most of the available desk space. Students resort to placing the keyboard on their lap whilst looking at a screen which is too high, and the chairs are unsuitable. Some students sit with their back to the teacher. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. They maintain effective links with the staff of the learning resource centre and students make good use of the library facilities.

66. Academic and pastoral support for students are good. There is effective tutorial support and the progress of each student is carefully monitored. Targets for improvement are set and regularly reviewed. Parents are kept well informed. Additional support is provided for vocational business students both inside and outside of lessons. Additional workshops are provided for students who need additional academic support. There are particularly effective arrangements for careers and HE advice. Students' homework and assignments are carefully marked and returned promptly.

### ***Leadership and management***

67. Leadership and management are good. The three heads of department responsible for business studies and accounting, law and vocational business provide effective leadership of the provision. Very good informal communications ensure that any issues affecting students are quickly addressed. Managers monitor attendance and punctuality carefully. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. Lesson observations are well established but they significantly overestimate the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision but a few of the identified strengths represent no more than normal practice. Teachers take any opportunities afforded by the syllabus to explore issues relating to equality of opportunity, for example, those in employment law. Most lessons are easily accessible to wheelchair users.

### **Information and communications technology**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- very high pass rates on all level 3 courses
  
- high retention rates on level 3 courses
  
- effective development of students' practical skills
  
- good subject support for students.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- insufficient challenge and inspiration in a minority of lessons
  
- poor accommodation which inhibits learning on full-time programmes.
  
- Scope of provision



IT. There is no level 2 provision for full-time learners. A number of ICT courses are offered to part-time learners during the day and evenings at the main college site and at the Brinnington community centre. These include new computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), the European computer driving licence (ECDL) and introductory courses. Some ICT courses are offered to local 11 to 16 schools under the increased flexibility programme. Approximately 285 students are enrolled on full-time courses and 382 on part-time courses. Work experience opportunities to support full-time students on the AVCE course are still developing.

### ***Achievement and standards***

70. Over the last three years, pass rates on all advanced level courses have been consistently above national averages for sixth form colleges. Pass rates on the GCE A-level ICT course are excellent, and rose to 100% in 2003. A large proportion of students on GCE A-level computing and ICT courses achieve high grades. Over the past three years, students on GCE AS and A-level courses have obtained higher grades than were predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Retention rates on all full-time courses are high, and all courses at or above national averages. Retention rates for students on part-time courses are also high. Pass rates on the ECDL course for adult learners are below average. A minority of students fail to complete all the modules. The college recognises this and has taken steps to address the issues; there has been an improvement in 2002/03. There are high rates of progression from all full-time courses to employment and to computing-related courses in HE.

71. Achievement in practical lessons is good; some individual students' projects are outstanding. For example, a student on the GCE A-level computing course is implementing an electronic theatre booking system which demonstrates an exceptional level of design skills, including a set of price rules for different performances and a highly efficient booking mechanism. Opportunities to develop key skills are signposted in schemes of work and key skills are assessed in assignments and presentations. A high percentage of students have completed portfolios in the current year.

### ***A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2001 to 2003***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Using ICT	1	No. of starts	***	37	48
		% retention	***	43	77
		% pass rate	***	50	68
CLAIT	1	No. of starts	107	59	38
		% retention	75	80	79
		% pass rate	70	57	67
ECDL	2	No. of starts	86	133	122
		% retention	94	81	81
		% pass rate	62	50	57**
GCE AS computing	3	No. of starts	93	91	85
		% retention	86	85	86
		% pass rate	91	88	85
GCE AS ICT	3	No. of starts	93	91	69
		% retention	86	85	86
		% pass rate	91	88	85
GCE A-level	3	No. of starts	61*	46	53

computing		% retention	79	98	96
		% pass rate	94	93	90
GCE A-level ICT	3	No. of starts	63*	41	37
		% retention	75	90	97
		% pass rate	96	97	100
AVCE ICT (one year)	3	No. of starts	****	57	33
		% retention	****	72	94
		% pass rate	****	88	84

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course

\*\* expected to rise 64% pending final audit

\*\*\* course did not run

\*\*\*\* fewer than 15 starters enrolled

### **Quality of education and training**

73. 1. Teaching is at least satisfactory and is often good or very good. In the most effective lessons, there is a good, clear introduction and the teacher uses a range of varied activities to engage the students. In a very successful lesson on manipulating data in a linked-list structure, the teacher skilfully managed a very productive question and answer session which elicited the main concepts. An effective group activity was then introduced using plastic cards and pointers to manipulate lists. The teacher also made excellent use of technical terminology which was clearly explained. Presentations are well-prepared and targeted questions are used to ensure that all students are fully involved. In practical lessons, teachers make good use of a library of examples. Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing basic software and programming techniques; this gives students a good basis for developing more advanced techniques later in the course. Students receive effective individual support when undertaking practical work. High quality, well-designed workbooks are used to support learning. Students develop a varied range of projects; many are both excellent and innovative. For example, one student was developing a system to monitor deep-sea diving records.

74. 2. In the minority of less effective lessons, teachers do not inspire and encourage all students to participate. Students are not encouraged to work collaboratively in groups and some students do not engage in discussion with the teacher, or with each other. The college's managed learning environment is under-used as a learning resource. The college has recently installed overhead data projectors into most computer rooms and teachers are beginning to use these to vary the style of teaching.

75. 3. Staff are well qualified and experienced, and all tutors delivering the adult and community programme are qualified teachers. The printed learning materials and workbooks are good, and those available in drop-in centres successfully meet the needs of a diverse range of learners. Some rooms at the main site are cramped, which limits the opportunity for effective class discussion and group work. There is very little desktop space for students' files or workbooks and during practical sessions it is not easy for teachers to work alongside individuals. Drop-in centres are well appointed and provide good access for students with restricted mobility. ICT systems are supported by a reliable and robust network infrastructure. Students have access to a range of computer applications and programming languages. Internet access is very good, although there is some un-productive use by students during lessons.

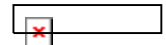
76. Setting and marking of assignments are good. Assignments are promptly returned to students with appropriate supportive comments, which identify areas for improvement. The use of poor English, spelling mistakes and inappropriate technical terminology are usually corrected. Assignments and tests are vocationally relevant, are of an appropriate standard and are consistently

used by all teachers. Assignments are comprehensive and clearly state the assessment criteria. Students are given clear targets and know what is expected of them. Progress against targets is discussed at regular progress reviews. Full-time students are given effective guidance and support in selecting the most appropriate computing or ICT course. A particular strength of the curriculum area is the high level of informal subject support provided to students out of lessons. Adult students value the approachable tutors and the flexibility of the drop-in centres. The progress of students on community programmes is effectively tracked using individual progress logs, which are completed by students at the end of each session. Specific learning support needs of individual students are identified and met effectively.

### ***Leadership and management***

80. Leadership and management are good. There are clear lines of responsibility. Teams meet regularly to discuss curriculum issues and students' progress. There has been an increasing focus on widening participation and a number of courses have been introduced that are successfully attracting students who are traditionally under-represented in FE. The community programme for adults is effectively co-ordinated, and identified weaknesses in achievement on part-time courses have been addressed. All staff are appraised on an annual basis. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process and departmental planning. Achievement data are carefully analysed. Departmental self-assessment reports contain limited evidence to support secure judgments.

### **Visual arts and media**



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**.

### ***Strengths***

- very high achievement
  
- excellent teaching and learning
  
- wide range of extra-curricular workshops which enhance learning
  
- very good facilities used well to enrich teaching and learning
  
- good support and careers advice for students
  
- excellent planning which enables staff to overcome some problems with accommodation.

## **Weaknesses**

- there are no significant weaknesses.

## **Scope of provision**

82. The visual arts and media area has 739 enrolments. There are four subjects available at GCE AS and A-level. On GCE AS and A-level media studies courses, there are 165 and 88 students, respectively. Approximately 90 students study on the GCE AS communication studies course and a further 26 study the subject at GCE A level. On the GCE AS and A-level design and technology there are 96 and 42 students respectively. Approximately 140 students study on the GCE AS art and design course and a further 87 study at GCE A level.

## **Achievement and standards**

83. Achievement on all courses is excellent. Retention rates compare very favourably with the national averages for sixth form colleges. The pass rate on the GCE A-level art and design course has been very high for the past three years and the proportion of high grades has also been well above the national average for sixth form colleges for the last two years. Pass rates on the GCE A-level communication studies course have been consistently high and the proportion of students who have achieved a high grade has been 20 percentage points above the national average for sixth form colleges for the last three years. The pass rates on courses in design and technology have been around the national average for sixth form colleges for the past two years. GCE AS media studies was introduced in 2001/02, and the pass rates have been around the national average, with a significantly large proportion of students obtaining high grades. Students achieve either in line with or above the grade that has been predicted based on their GCSE performance. Results in GCE AS and A-level communication studies have been much higher than those predicted for the last three years.

84. There is very good progression to HE from the media and communication studies courses and media students, in particular, progress to related courses. Approximately 85% of art and design students progress to foundation courses.

85. The standard of students' work is very good across the provision and projects are challenging and well organised. Students use the individual learning plans to monitor their progress. Art and design students have access to a series of extra-curricular workshops, including ceramics and textiles, that broaden and enhance their learning. Students benefit from the emphasis placed on drawing skills throughout the courses and on the wide use of different media. Independent learning is encouraged and students respond very well, developing individual projects that display their strengths. Students' work in art and design is excellent. One student has produced a very imaginative and exciting sketchbook, themed around Alice in Wonderland which contains reference to other artists and high-quality work in a range of media. Design technology students have created an impressive and ambitious range of projects such as furniture and large-scale ceramics.

## **A sample of retention and pass rates in visual arts and media, 2001 to 2003**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
GCE AS media studies	3	No. of starts	**	96	142
		% retention	**	86	92
		% pass rate	**	90	93

GCE AS design and technology	3	No. of starts	64	77	68
		% retention	92	94	91
		% pass rate	88	88	82
GCE AS communication studies	3	No. of starts	136	104	50
		% retention	86	88	94
		% pass rate	93	93	96
GCE AS art and design (2003) GCE AS art studies /fine arts (2001 and 2002)	3	No. of starts	82	90	115
		% retention	91	93	92
		% pass rate	100	96	99
GCE A-level design and technology	3	No. of starts	66*	42	48
		% retention	70	100	94
		% pass rate	***	90	91
GCE A-level communication studies	3	No. of starts	95*	71	65
		% retention	96	94	97
		% pass rate	96	99	100
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	104*	70	55
		% retention	72	99	95
		% pass rate	100	99	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course

\*\* course did not run

\*\*\* data unreliable

### **Quality of education and training**

87. Teaching and learning are excellent. Lessons are well planned and managed and the students are responsive and hardworking. A very effective design technology practical lesson focused on the destructive testing of concrete blocks and the design of test rigs. The teacher used well-chosen examples, enthusiastic delivery and skilful questioning to motivate and challenge the students. Thorough preparation and good workshop management ensured they were able to work at a fast pace and the waiting time for equipment was kept to a minimum. All the students worked hard. The more able students produced some excellent designs and the weaker students were delighted to find solutions to some of the IT problems. A number of the best lessons are characterised by an energetic and charismatic approach to teaching that fosters a sense of a shared adventure in the students. In a very dynamic communications studies lesson on regional accents, well-chosen video clips were used to good effect to generate a very lively and productive debate. A wide range of learning materials was used, and the teacher skilfully and successfully utilised the students' enthusiasm and experience to develop their learning. In a very successful art lesson, questionnaires, ILT, group questioning and one-to-one work were all used very effectively to help the students to develop their sketchbook work. The students responded well. They shared relevant information from their other courses and showed a high level of sensitivity and analytical skill. The ethos of the college allows the students to challenge preconceptions in a safe and supportive environment. In media studies lessons, teaching is dynamic and uses a wide range of teaching methods, and students discuss issues intelligently and sensitively. Key skills are embedded in the course delivery and are recorded in lesson plans and emphasised to the students during lessons.

88. Art and design lessons are taught in a converted gymnasium, which has the advantage of being light and airy. The disadvantage is that the area is a thoroughfare for students going to the IT drop-in centre. Acoustics throughout the department are a problem and there is no sound-proofing in the media studies classrooms. Studios and workshops are very well-equipped and students have good access to computing facilities. The resources for communication studies and media resources are very good. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and some have previous industrial experience. Subject knowledge amongst the staff is profound and the teams have a strong sense of teaching as a vocation. Teachers work closely with the library staff and are actively involved in choosing resources. The media team have worked with the library staff to build up a very wide range of contemporary films.

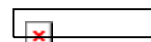
89. Thorough assessment and internal verification procedures are in place. Feedback is provided on all assessment activities in verbal and written form across all areas. Particularly good examples of written feedback are seen on media and communication studies, where there is good analysis and clear advice on how to improve. Students' progress is well documented, and individual targets are set for students on all the courses.

### ***Leadership and management***

90. Management at course level is very good. The excellent planning of teaching and learning throughout the curriculum area allows the staff to overcome the problems created by the difficulties with accommodation. The course teams are small and staff meet informally on a daily basis. Formal meetings take place each half term and actions are recorded and monitored. Staff feel ownership of the self-assessment report and contribute to it directly during team meetings and annual planning meetings. Target setting for growth and achievement is integrated into the annual review and all staff are involved in setting these targets. The curriculum area actively promotes equality of opportunity. The art department actively promotes the understanding of women artists and gender bias in the art world. Displays within the department highlight the work of women and minority artists. The media and communications department engage in instructive debate about prejudice in media representations. Students with restricted mobility have access to all the specialist facilities.

91. Staff consider that management is supportive at all levels and that their ambitions are recognised and nurtured.

### **Performing arts**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- much good teaching
  
- very good achievement on performance studies, theatre studies and music
  
- very good enrichment programme

- good support for students
- well-managed music area.

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient technical support
- poor accommodation for performing arts.

### **Scope of provision**

93. There are 355 enrolments on performing arts and music courses, all by full-time students aged 16 to 18. GCE AS and A-level courses are offered in music, performance studies, theatre studies, dance and music technology. There are over 200 enrolments on GCE AS courses and over 100 on GCE A-level courses. The most popular subject is performance studies, with around 130 enrolments on GCE AS and A-level courses. Additionally, students of music can take Associated Board grade examinations in performance and theory.

### **Achievement and standards**

94. Retention rates compare favourably with national averages. Pass rates for performing arts, theatre studies and music are very high and is generally above the national averages for sixth form colleges. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades is also greater than the national average. Pass rates on GCE AS and A-level dance courses are generally below national averages. In two out of the last three years, students have obtained higher grades than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results, for both performance studies and music. Dance students, however, generally attain lower grades than predicted.

95. Students' practical work is imaginative and experimental. Students on the GCE AS performing arts course effectively portrayed the agony of *Guernica* through movement, using their voices as instruments. A GCE A-level music group analysed *Acis and Galatea* and *Belshazzar's Feast* with remarkable confidence. The music section is renowned for the excellence of their continental concert tours. There has been very close collaboration between the three art forms in a variety of shows, notably *Cabaret*, performed with verve and energy in Brechtian style.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in performing arts, 2001 to 2003**

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCE AS performing arts	3	No. of starts	70	102	73
		% retention	89	83	79
		% pass rate	94	96	98
GCE AS dance	3	No. of starts	22	17	30

		% retention	95	76	70
		% pass rate	81	85	81
GCE AS music performance	3	No. of starts	**	40	40
		% retention	**	95	93
		% pass rate	**	89	97
GCE A-level performance studies	3	No. of starts	66*	41	56
		% retention	74	98	96
		% pass rate	98	100	100
GCE A-level music	3	No. of starts	24*	18	26
		% retention	83	100	100
		% pass rate	95	100	92

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course

\*\* data unavailable

### **Quality of education and training**

97. There is much good teaching and learning in performing arts and music. In the best lessons, teachers are enthusiastic and have a very good knowledge of their subject. They give clear explanations, use a wide range of teaching styles and activities and they ensure that students remain focused. The schemes of work are thorough and comprehensive and lesson plans are clear, and well structured. In a very successful theatre studies lesson, the teacher used a wide variety of activities that captured and maintained the students' interest. The activities had been cleverly planned so that one led naturally to the next. In a lesson where students were analysing musical extracts, in preparation for the examination, a circle game was very effectively used to reinforce learning. Although there was much laughter and friendly rivalry, the answers were nevertheless taken very seriously. They were carefully noted and the teacher highlighted important points. The majority of staff on the performing arts and music teams are highly qualified and have very good subject knowledge. Imaginative and challenging practice is underpinned by well planned and delivered theory. In a very productive performing arts lesson, the teacher set clear objectives and tight deadlines. The students worked experimentally and rejected what was not effective. They used and understood dramatic terminology and showed remarkable maturity in their co-operation and communication. Key skills are not integrated into teaching and learning, despite being identified on lesson plans.

98. Performing arts and dance are based in a modern building that was once a Sunday school. It is shared with a ladies' circle and a crèche. This accommodation is inadequate and lessons are affected by noise from adjacent rooms. In a significant minority of the lessons observed, learning was impeded by the unsuitable accommodation. Practical dance lessons take place in a hall where the floor is poorly sprung and there are no mirrors. Accommodation for music students is satisfactory. Instrumental tuition is available on a one-to-one basis and takes place in an attractive free-standing building at the edge of the grounds. Music technology accommodation and equipment has been updated. Music technology students share a computer room in the main college with foreign language students, but the facility is not fully utilised. There is a lack of technician support.

99. Assessment and monitoring are well managed. Assignments are challenging and are assessed through rehearsal and performance as well as course work. Assessments are undertaken regularly and students are provided with well-structured and detailed feedback. Students understand what is required to gain good grades in their assignments. Written work is carefully marked, with clear recommendations for improvement. Practical work is always assessed by at least two tutors. Progress is carefully monitored and assessment informs the planning of assignments. Students are



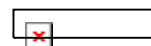
fully involved in the review process, identifying in advance their own strengths and weaknesses and helping create their own individual learning programme. Support for students is very good. Learning needs are diagnosed early and appropriate support and help arranged. Students in financial difficulties are helped with the cost of visits or tours.

100. There is a good programme of productions and concerts, both at the college and in the community, giving plenty of opportunity for live performance. Additionally, major European concert and dance tours give students the experience of different venues and audiences plus an experience of other cultures. Trips to local and national theatres are regularly arranged and visiting performance companies and guest speakers are important elements of the course.

### ***Leadership and management***

101. Leadership and management are good. Record keeping is thorough, resources are well managed and there is a good team spirit. Music and performing arts are managed separately but the two managers collaborate closely, sometimes sharing accommodation and major productions. Regular team meetings are held separately, and any relevant information is given to the other manager. Self-assessment reports lack detail and any actions lack intermediate review points and therefore often have over-long completion dates. Both teams are supportive of equality of opportunity and sensitively explore key issues in their teaching.

## **Humanities**



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

### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates on GCE A-level programmes
- effective use of stimulating and supportive teaching strategies
- good response by students to challenging learning opportunities
- very good support for students.

### ***Weaknesses***

- poor achievement of high grades on most GCE AS courses in 2002/03.

### ***Scope of provision***

103. GCE AS and A-level courses are offered in archaeology, classical civilisation, economics, geography, history, philosophy and religious studies. There is no provision at level 2. Evening provision is limited to an access to HE theology class. There are 176 enrolments on GCE A-level and 278 on GCE AS courses by full-time students aged 16 to 18. Seven students are enrolled on the access to HE theology course. All students in their first year at the college attend key skills classes. Approximately 4% of students mix their GCE A-levels with an AVCE programme.

### ***Achievement and standards***

104. Retention rates are satisfactory at both GCE AS and A level in most subjects, but have been below national averages for the last two years on GCE AS archaeology courses. Retention rates for geography at GCE A level are excellent, with 100% of students completing the course in each of the last two years. Pass rates on GCE AS courses are satisfactory in economics, geography, history and religious studies courses, but pass rates for archaeology have been below the national average in two of the last three years. Students on the GCE AS religious studies course gained a large proportion of high grades in 2002/03, and the proportion of high grades obtained in economics was in line with national averages. In all other subjects, however, the proportion of students achieving a high grade was small. The proportion of students gaining higher grades at GCE A level has been consistently good for geography and economics. All students who completed GCE A-level courses in philosophy, classical civilisation or economics passed in 2003. Students' achievements are generally in line with those expected from their GCSE results but last year achievements were lower than expected for GCE AS philosophy and history and also for GCE A-level religious studies.

105. The written and oral work produced is generally around the level expected, although some groups of students are performing at a high level. Students in a GCE AS philosophy lesson were able to use terms such as omnipotent and omniscient with fluency and showed an understanding of complex philosophical and theological arguments.

### ***A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2001 to 2003***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
GCE AS economics	3	No. of starts	34	55	34
		% retention	100	95	91
		% pass rate	94	88	84
GCE AS geography	3	No. of starts	103	69	77
		% retention	90	88	95
		% pass rate	90	90	88
GCE AS religious studies	3	No. of starts	**	30	15
		% retention	**	80	87
		% pass rate	**	96	92
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	35*	26	36
		% retention	80	96	97
		% pass rate	93	96	100
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	90*	59	35
		% retention	72	100	100
		% pass rate	86	100	91
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	64*	42	45
		% retention	70	98	98

		% pass rate	93	95	97
--	--	-------------	----	----	----

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different to present GCE A2 course

\*\* data not available

### **Quality of education and training**

107. Teaching is well planned and most lessons observed are good or better. Lessons have a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. Teachers consider the different learning styles of the students and in the best lessons they ensure that their teaching meets the needs of students of differing abilities. In a classical civilisation lesson, more straightforward, descriptive tasks, such as outlining the accusation Patroclus made against Achilles, were tackled by groups with lower predicted grades, while others tackled more challenging tasks, such as analysing Homer's use of simile. A full-class debriefing ensured that key points were effectively shared. Teaching strategies are successful in creating and maintaining involvement throughout most lessons. In one history lesson, excellent use was made of role play, with students acting as counsellors to Mary Tudor on various aspects of her duties as monarch. In many lessons there is effective use of questioning to check existing knowledge and stimulate thinking. Small group work is well managed, with clear instructions, well structured activities and effective summaries. There is effective support for homework tasks, which reinforce and extend learning. Use of ICT in lesson is limited; although a powerpoint presentation was used successfully in a philosophy lesson to enable students to focus on the understanding of the complexity of theories explaining why God cannot abolish evil. In other lessons, handouts refer students to Internet sites. Teachers make effective use of high- quality text and video materials. In a geography lesson, a video was used very effectively to enhance students' appreciation of the nature and economic importance of geysers and fumaroles. The video was well supported with introductory questions to focus attention and followed by well-structured tasks and a full-group summary discussion.

108. Staff are well qualified in their subject areas, many with postgraduate qualifications and experience as examiners. Part-time staff are well supported, ensuring a consistency of approach. The learning resource centre is well stocked and students have good access to IT facilities. Subject areas have their own rooms that contain specialist resources, though some are small or awkwardly shaped for the size of the group. In some classrooms, the effectiveness of the overhead projector is reduced by the absence of an appropriate screen. The accommodation problems are largely a result of the fire which destroyed the humanities teaching block.

109. There is regular and effective assessment of students' work in all subjects. Assignment work is usually returned quickly, with constructive written and verbal feedback which indicates ways that the work could be improved. Some work is corrected for spelling, grammar and punctuation, but this is not standard practice. Students have clear target grades and progress is assessed against these targets. Individual learning plans are drawn up in each subject area and the best of these have clear targets and review dates but some are less developed. Students are able to produce key skills evidence from their subject coursework and this is clearly signposted, although they often fail to compile the full portfolio for final assessment.

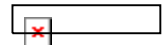
110. Support for students is very good. Students feel valued and speak very highly of the support provided by subject teachers, who make themselves available outside class hours and during breaks.

### **Leadership and management**

111. Leadership and management are good. There are four heads of department and each manages one or more subject areas. Staff are enthusiastic. The remarkable speed with which temporary classrooms were converted into base rooms, each with a subject identity, is testament to the effective team spirit in the area. There is much informal communication, which is supported by regular college briefings and team meetings that are held each term. All staff are involved in a

systematic assessment of the curriculum area, identifying strengths and weaknesses resulting in satisfactory action plans, which are monitored half-way through the academic year. There is a regular cycle of lesson observations which, together with appraisal and self-assessment identifies staff development needs. Staff development is well supported. In addition to tutorial and assembly sessions, equality of opportunity is promoted through teaching. For example: the module 'women in Athens and Rome' encourages classical civilisation students to examine the way in which women are treated; racism is discussed by history students looking at Nazi Germany; and the geography department produced a display showing the costs and benefits of an ageing population during the college's equal opportunities week.

## **Social sciences**



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1 )**.

### ***Strengths***

- excellent achievement
  
- very good teaching
  
- consistent growth in all subjects and very high numbers in psychology
  
- excellent progression to HE in all subjects
  
- effective monitoring of attendance, punctuality and progression
  
- excellent teaching and learning materials
  
- very good leadership and management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- no significant weaknesses.

### **Scope of provision**

113. GCE AS and A-level courses are offered in psychology, sociology and government and politics. An access to HE qualification is also offered to part-time adult students. Social sciences is one of the largest curriculum areas in the college and there are approximately 820 enrolments in the area. There is very high enrolment on GCE AS and A-level psychology courses; 368 and 260, respectively. Over 150 students are studying GCE AS sociology and around 70 are studying on the GCE A-level course. There are around 70 students on government and politics courses and 27 students are on the access to HE course.

### **Achievement and standards**

114. Retention rates on GCE AS and A-level courses are around or often higher than national averages. Achievement is consistently better than the national average for GCE AS and A-level government and politics. Excellent retention and pass rates on sociology and psychology courses are maintained with high numbers of students.

115. In 2002/03, retention and pass rates were above the national average in all subject areas. The proportion of high grades achieved on GCE AS and A-level courses compares very favourably with national averages.

116. The standard of the students' work is high, and well above that which is expected. In government and politics, students are able to use specialist terminology accurately and they handle very complex concepts with remarkable confidence. Psychology students are able to relate their learning to contemporary issues and the standard of their written work is excellent. In sociology, students are able to link theory and practice. In group discussions, they communicate very effectively and display wide subject knowledge.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in social sciences, 2001 to 2003**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	260	299	338
		% retention	87	90	94
		% pass rate	96	90	94
GCE AS sociology	3	No. of starts	114	109	110
		% retention	89	91	95
		% pass rate	90	84	95
GCE AS government and politics	3	No. of starts	17	21	18
		% retention	94	100	100
		% pass rate	94	100	100
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	69*	67	61
		% retention	70	99	97
		% pass rate	94	98	98
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	211*	169	202
		% retention	75	96	98
		% pass rate	97	95	98
GCE A-level	3	No. of starts	**	15	18

government and politics	% retention	**	100	100
	% pass rate	**	100	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the GCE A-level was different from the present GCE A2 course

\*\* fewer than 15 starters enrolled

### **Quality of education and training**

118. There is much very good and excellent teaching. Lessons are very well planned, they have a clear and identified purpose and the teaching is supported by excellent learning materials. The materials include imaginative activities that are designed to meet the needs of students of all abilities. Students enjoy working with the material and use it effectively. They work at the level at which they feel most comfortable, but are constantly encouraged to work at higher levels. All teachers use the same material but deliver it in ways they feel are most appropriate for their groups. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are adept at relating concepts to the students' own experience, making the learning more relevant and interesting. In a very successful sociology lesson, students explored the role of the family and school in shaping identity. Students contributed, the level of discussion was high, and the links between anecdotal evidence and sociological theories and terminology were clearly established. Students are confident, mature learners and many are able to critically evaluate, to relate everyday life to conceptual theories and to identify and use contemporary issues in both their discussions and their written work. Students make good use of the extensive resource material, Internet facilities, textbooks and journals. However, they are reluctant to use books other than GCE A-level textbooks for their research.

119. Staff are well qualified and include a good balance of experienced and younger teachers. Several members of staff are currently taking higher degrees and seven are examiners for their subject. Students benefit from this accurate knowledge about the requirements of examining boards. Many rooms are inadequate for the size of groups, particularly in psychology. There is an inadequate stock of appropriate books in the library.

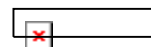
120. The setting, monitoring and assessment of students' work are excellent. Students recognise the importance of assessment and appreciate the regular opportunities to practice the skills they will need to pass examinations. Assessments are challenging and feedback is comprehensive, enabling students to make good progress. Both subject and personal tutors carefully monitor progress and students are offered additional support if they are experiencing difficulties. Additional academic support is available in all subjects outside the normal college hours. Initial assessments of students are used to determine preferred learning styles and to identify additional needs. Students with additional needs are supported and integrated successfully within lessons.

121. Students benefit from a wide range of additional activities. All students visit universities, visiting speakers are regularly invited and the college hosts conferences for GCE A-level psychology students. Government and politics students are able to experience work placements in a political environment which provide opportunities for them to improve their understanding of the subject.

### **Leadership and management**

122. Leadership within the department is excellent and is based on shared values, common objectives and mutual support. Staff work as a team to improve students' achievement. Resources are deployed efficiently and fairly and staff are very well supported. The department actively promotes equality of opportunity in its teaching. Both formal and informal communication is very effective. There are good professional development opportunities and any staff who have attended training events formally disseminate their findings to other members of the team. The department provides very good support for newly qualified teachers. An effective appraisal scheme operates where staff are set individual targets and also contribute to team targets. All staff are actively involved in the self-assessment process.

## English and modern foreign languages



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

### **Strengths**

- good retention and pass rates on most advanced level courses
  
- good achievement in class discussion and activities
  
- good and very good teaching
  
- comprehensive range of courses for English and modern foreign languages.

### **Weaknesses**

- too few students achieve high grades on French and English literature courses
  
- poor accommodation for modern foreign languages and some English classes.

### **Scope of provision**

124. The English department offers GCSE English as a one-year course and GCE AS and A-level courses in English language, combined English language and literature, and English literature. Recruitment to all these courses is good. The modern languages department offers GCE AS and A-level courses in French, German, Spanish and Italian and a GCE AS course in Japanese. One-year GCSE Spanish, Italian and Japanese courses are run for beginners. The college offers a number of evening classes, ranging from leisure courses in languages to GCSE. Numbers fluctuate slightly from year to year. At the time of the inspection, there were 621 English enrolments and 215 modern foreign language enrolments.

### **Achievement and standards**

125. In 2003, retention and pass rates on all the English and most modern foreign language courses met or exceeded national averages for sixth form colleges. In 2001 and 2002, the retention and pass rates on GCE AS and A-level English and modern foreign languages courses were close to the national averages with very few exceptions. The proportion of students who obtain a grade A\* to C in GCSE English has risen by over 20 percentage points in 2003.

126. The standard of discussion in many classes is high. Students on GCE A-level foreign language courses have a good grasp of grammar, but have a narrow range of vocabulary. Coursework essays for English literature show a high level of fluency and students make good use of literary criticism to support their own interpretations. Students on GCE A-level and AS English language and literature combined courses show a good grasp of themes and the different linguistic frameworks that underpin the subject. Moderators' reports for all subjects are positive in their evaluation of students' work and the way that teachers have assessed standards.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in English and modern foreign languages, 2001 to 2003***

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	96	99	75
		% retention	74	76	79
		% pass rate	27	35	59
GCE AS English language and literature	3	No. of starts	107	98	87
		% retention	93	91	93
		% pass rate	97	91	99
GCE AS English literature	3	No. of starts	93	68	110
		% retention	91	88	94
		% pass rate	96	90	96
GCE AS German	3	No. of starts	28	43	33
		% retention	93	95	88
		% pass rate	88	88	90
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	85*	40	55
		% retention	86	98	96
		% pass rate	84	97	96
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	62*	63	77
		% retention	89	97	99
		% pass rate	100	100	99
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	38*	21	23
		% retention	79	95	100
		% pass rate	80	100	87

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), College (2003)

\* in this year, the Advanced level was different to present A2 course

***Quality of education and training***

128. Teaching and learning are good or better in most lessons. Lessons are well planned and include a wide range of activities which encourage the students to become fully engaged with the task. All teachers demonstrate a thorough knowledge of their subject and they provide a supportive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable. In the best lessons, activities have been devised that will stretch and challenge the more able students and also enable the weaker students to learn effectively. Group activities are carefully planned to ensure that the weaker students are well supported and able to contribute. A wide and appropriate range of teaching techniques is used in



most lessons, and students make good progress. Planning for GCE AS French lessons has been revised in response to disappointing results in 2003. There are regular vocabulary tests and short exercises are used to focus on specific grammar points. In one effective lesson, students learnt new vocabulary and practised their use of grammar in a variety of activities, all under the general topic of food and entertaining in France. Most students work well in groups, supporting each other in developing ideas. Students are quick to settle to work and show enthusiasm for what they are doing. In a minority of lessons, teachers fail to meet the needs of the full ability range of the students, and in French lessons, in particular, they do not always take account of the needs of weaker students. In a small number of lessons, the planning is not thorough and outcomes are not clearly identified. Students in these lessons do not have an exact understanding of what they should know.

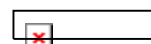
129. The monitoring and review system is very effective. Students' progress is monitored carefully and there is effective liaison with learning support. Students are fully involved in reviewing their progress against their target grades and find the process very helpful. Teachers know the students well and provide appropriate help when needed, both in and out of lessons.

130. The rooms used by foreign languages classes can be hot, stuffy and cramped. Noise from outside is intrusive and breaks students' concentration. In English lessons, some rooms are too small for the number of students in the class and teachers have difficulty circulating round all the students to monitor their progress and offer help. Learning resources are very good, especially the resource packs created in English and the high-quality handouts in modern foreign languages. In both English and modern foreign languages, there is a wide range of additional activities including drama, creative writing, theatre trips, foreign exchanges and work experience abroad that enhances learning.

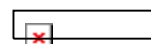
### ***Leadership and management***

131. Leadership and management are good. The heads of department delegate responsibilities to others in the team and all full-time staff have an area of responsibility. There is a strong sense of teamwork and teachers take a pride in their work. The self-assessment reviews were found to be accurate and action has been taken to address any weaknesses, but the quality assurance procedures require further development. There is insufficient monitoring of the performance of courses during the year to highlight potential underachievement. Teachers actively promote equal opportunities via their learning materials, in class discussions and in their teaching in general.

## **Part D: College data**



**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age**



<b>Level</b>	<b>16-18 %</b>	<b>19+ %</b>
<b>1</b>	0	14
<b>2</b>	4	14
<b>3</b>	60	11
<b>4/5</b>	0	0
<b>Other</b>	35	60

<b>Total*</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
---------------	------------	------------

Source: provided by the college in 2003

\*figures have been rounded up and may not total 100%.

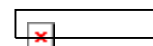
**Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age**

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>16-18 No.</b>	<b>19+ No.</b>	<b>Total Enrolments (%) *</b>
Science and mathematics	1,084	14	10
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	65	1	1
Engineering	116	0	1
Business administration, management and professional	389	52	4
Information and communications technology	523	2,280	7
Retailing, customer service and transportation	21	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	210	0	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	0	0	0
Visual and performing arts and media	672	7	6
Humanities	4,633	744	47
English, languages and communication	852	27	8
Foundation programmes	12	22	0
Unknown AoL	1,617	44	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,194</b>	<b>3,191</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Provided by the college in 2003

\* figures have been rounded and may not total 100%

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**



Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	38	*	*	215	144	116
	Retention rate (%)	76	*	*	86	74	70
	National Average (%)	79	*	*	71	70	72
	Pass rate (%)	7	*	*	41	66	52
	National Average (%)	70	*	*	67	70	75
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,286	339	445	94	127	150
	Retention rate (%)	86	74	80	85	87	76
	National Average (%)	80	80	81	71	72	71
	Pass rate (%)	76	78	70	46	66	68
	National Average (%)	80	85	84	70	68	71
3	Starters excluding transfers	3,006	5,484	5,139	53	33	44
	Retention rate (%)	80	83	90	79	70	77
	National Average (%)	75	80	89	63	64	69
	Pass rate (%)	78	89	88	21	30	82
	National Average (%)	85	86	88	65	67	75

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

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.
2. College rates for 1999/2000 to 2001/02: College ISR

\* fewer than 15 starters enrolled

**Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection**

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3(advanced)	84	15	1	124
Level 2 (intermediate)	59	41	0	17

Level 1 (foundation)	0	0	0	0
Other sessions	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>141</b>

Notes

---

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated. Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

Office for  
Standards  
in Education

