

Sir John Deane's College

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Sir John Deane's College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Andrew Jones
Address of college:	Monarch Drive Northwich Cheshire CW9 8AF
Telephone number:	01606 460 11
Fax number:	01606 471 70
Chair of governors:	L Allen
Unique reference number:	130626
Name of reporting inspector:	Bev Barlow HMI
Dates of inspection:	26-30 April 2004

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

located on a single site adjacent to the River Weaver, half a mile from the centre of Northwich in the Vale Royal district of Cheshire. Sir John Deane's College is the only sixth form college in Cheshire. In the local area, there are eight 11 to 18 schools and two large further education (FE) colleges. A concordat exists between Sir John Deane's College and Mid Cheshire College. The proportion of students achieving five or more grades A* to C in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations in the Vale Royal Borough is around 7% above the national average.

The college mainly provides advanced level courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18. The majority of students follow advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) and general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) course, and around 37 subjects are offered. Around 10% of students study a single award advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) alongside their AS level and GCE A levels. GCSE English and mathematics are offered as resits for the small number of students who have not achieved a grade C or above at school. A wide range of enrichment activities is available to students.

The college is heavily oversubscribed. The college has steadily increased in size over recent years, from 1,080 students in 1999 to 1,146 students at the time of inspection. The college has five partner high schools. Students from these schools are guaranteed a place, if they meet the entry requirements. Approximately half the college's annual intake is from these schools. In the last academic year, 56% of the students were female and 44% were male. The college has a very small number of students from minority ethnic groups; this reflects the population in the local area.

In 1998, the college introduced part-time adult courses. The provision has increased in size in the last few years, in 2002/03 around 1,600 part-time adult students enrolled on courses at the college. The most popular are short courses in information technology (IT) and conversational foreign languages.

The mission of the college is 'learning to achieve'. The college aims to achieve this through excellent educational provision, focusing primarily on academic achievement but also on developing the skills and enthusiasm needed for successful lifelong learning. It is committed to working with local partners to meet the needs of the wider community.

How effective is the college?

Inspectors judged the quality of provision to be outstanding in five of the six curriculum areas inspected, and it is good in the remaining area. Overall retention and pass rates are very high and significantly above the national averages for sixth form colleges. Leadership and management, and support for students are outstanding.

The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- clear and determined focus on improving students' achievements
- outstanding curriculum provision
- very high retention and pass rates
- a high proportion of very good teaching and learning
- impressive standard of students' work
- rigorous assessment and detailed feedback on students' work
- outstanding support for students
- very good enrichment programme
- very good communications and teamwork throughout the college.

What should be improved

- use of IT in lessons
- some cramped accommodation.

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 and mathematics	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates are very high on most science and mathematics courses. There is much lively and effective teaching. Students receive very good support. Subject teams work well together with a strong focus on students' learning and achievements. There are a few unsatisfactory aspects of the accommodation.
Business studies and economics	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates are outstanding, although the number of students achieving grades A or B declined in AS-level economics in 2003. Very good teaching in business is supported by high-quality learning materials. Students are highly motivated, they produce work of a high standard and demonstrate very good evaluation and presentation skills. Teachers work well together as a team, rigorously monitor students' progress and provide outstanding academic support.
Visual and performing arts and media	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates are outstanding and many students achieve grades A or B in AS-level and GCE A-level examinations. Challenging teaching and highly effective learning lead to a very high standard of student work. Assessment practices are thorough and students' progress is closely monitored. Students benefit from very good support and a wide range of extra curricular opportunities. The IT resources in art and design are currently underdeveloped.
Humanities	Outstanding. Pass rates and the proportion of students achieving grades A or B are very high on most courses. Much of the teaching is very good and is enhanced by exciting enrichment activities. There is insufficient use of IT in classroom teaching. Students enjoy their studies, contribute well in lessons and produce outstanding work. Students benefit from very good support and detailed feedback on how to improve their work. Leadership and management are very good.
Psychology, sociology and health and social care	Good. Pass rates are high. However, students' performance in AS-level sociology is below that expected from their GCSE results. Teaching is well managed with detailed schemes of work, high quality learning resources and detailed feedback on written work to support students independent learning. Some teaching fails to motivate

	students and the use of IT in classroom teaching is underdeveloped. Leadership and management at subject level are good.
English and modern foreign languages	Outstanding. Retention and pass rates are very high and there is much good teaching. Students produce work of a very high standard and are well supported by excellent learning resources and good subject support. Leadership and management are outstanding.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are outstanding. There is a clear strategic direction that puts students first, and is fully supported by all staff. Retention and pass rates are well above the national averages for sixth form colleges in most subjects. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and cover all aspects of the college's work. Self-assessment is accurate, identified weaknesses are acted upon promptly and have led to further improvements in students' achievements. Curriculum management is very effective. There is a great emphasis through effective team working on promoting a self-critical culture. Governance is strong. Governors are fully involved in strategic planning and closely monitor the college's very good performance. The college is strongly committed to equality and diversity which is promoted effectively throughout the college. The college's financial health is good and it provides very good value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. It promotes equality of opportunity well. Students value the welcoming and friendly atmosphere. The college is oversubscribed for full-time students aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses. The provision for adults has grown considerably and, in conjunction with the local college of FE, meets the needs of the local community. The college has made good progress in response to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), the Disability Discrimination Act and the Race Relations (amendment) Act. Policies and procedures have been updated and extensive training provided for staff. Progress in implementing the plans is closely monitored by the equal opportunities committee. Retention and pass rates are monitored by gender and ethnicity. Additional support for students with specific learning difficulties is good. Despite significant improvements to the college's site, it is very difficult to convert some of the older buildings, and some areas remain inaccessible to wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility. Currently, appropriate room changes are arranged, and all students are able to study their first choice courses. Further improvements are planned for summer 2004 to ensure that the requirements of SENDA are fully met.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Students receive outstanding guidance and support. Impartial pre-enrolment advice and guidance helps students make well-informed choices. Induction is informative, second-year students act as

the college before the end of their course. Initial assessments clearly identify individual learning needs and there is very good take-up of additional learning support. Students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties receive very good support. Students have easy access to individual support from subject teachers and personal tutors. A well-structured tutorial programme covers a wide range of appropriate topics. However, there is some variation in the quality of the delivery of the group tutorials. Good liaison between the counsellor, senior and personal tutors, learning support and central guidance staff ensures that students experiencing problems are fully supported. Guidance on progression to higher education (HE) or employment is outstanding. Support for part-time adult students is integrated into their course and generally meets their needs.

Students' views 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

- friendly and helpful staff
- being treated as adults
- good teaching
- high levels of individual support
- range of clubs and activities
- library facilities
- help in applying to university
- student involvement in college.

What they feel could be improved

- price and variety of canteen food
- social areas for students
- number of private study rooms with computers
- general studies course
- group tutorials
- car parking.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. 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 local LSC. The local 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 and learning 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	80	18	2
19+ and WBL*	67	33	0
Learning 16-18	82	17	1
19+ and WBL*	67	33	0

Key: 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

1. Students' achievements are outstanding. The vast majority of students are full time and aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses. Apart from four AVCE, single award courses, level 3 students study AS-level and GCE A-level subjects. Most students who start their course complete them successfully.

16 to 18 year olds

2. Standards are outstanding for students aged 16 to 18. Overall pass and retention rates are consistently very high. The retention rate on AS-level and GCE A-level courses was 96% in 2002 and 95% in 2003. In 2003, the advanced level pass rate was 8% above the national average for sixth form colleges. Pass rates of 100% were achieved in 13 AS-level and 25 GCE A-level subjects. Over 40% of students entered for GCE A-level examinations and 38% of students entered for AS-level examinations achieved grades A or B. All students who started an AVCE course achieved their qualification and the proportion of students achieving a high grade was very good in health and social care, and travel and tourism. Department for Education and Skills (DfES) performance tables for 2003 show that the average point score for each student at advanced level was 354.1 and the average point score for each exam entry was 80.8. Both these figures are significantly above the national averages for all schools and colleges. Students' overall performance places the college amongst the top sixth form colleges in the country.

3. The college attracts well-qualified students. In 2003, the average entry score, based upon GCSE passes, was 6.14 (where A*=8, A=7, B=6 and so on). Data which compares students' results at GCE A level with their previous GCSE achievements show that, overall, students do much better than might be expected. Around one third of students achieve a grade higher than that predicted by their GCSE result. The vast majority of other students achieve results broadly in line with expectations on entry. The pass rates and proportion of students achieving high grades is particularly impressive in chemistry, electronics, business studies, information and communications technology (ICT), computing, art and design, music, media studies, theatre studies, history, psychology, French and German. On a minority of courses, mainly with small student numbers, for example, GCE A-level

dance and environmental science and AVCE business, students are underachieving despite the high pass rates.

4. The proportion of students gaining high grades on the GCSE mathematics course is very good and in English it is outstanding. Over the last three years, all students who have started the GCSE English course have successfully achieved a grade C.

5. Students extend their skills and knowledge through participation in a wide range of enrichment activities. Many students take part in competitive and recreational sports, music and drama productions, community service and work experience. In many subjects, students are encouraged to extend their knowledge and compete in national competitions. All students complete AS-level and GCE A-level general studies and over 90% of students are successful in achieving this qualification. A student council meets regularly and actively contributes to college life, for example, making presentations to prospective students at open evenings and organising social events. Almost all students come to the college with the intention of securing a place at university. Approximately 90% are successful. Students are well prepared for HE and develop good independent study skills while at the college.

6. The quality of students' work is very good. Inspectors judged that the standard of students' work is good or better in 79% of lessons and satisfactory in all other lessons. Teachers have high expectations of students. Standards are particularly high in visual and performing arts and media. Practical work is outstanding in art and design. Students are encouraged to be innovative, experiment with a wide range of media and produce very creative portfolios. Students' performance work in drama, performance studies and music is lively and professional. Productions include a wide variety of styles and incorporate social issues, for example, bullying. In modern foreign language lessons, students' use of the target language, to answer and ask questions during discussions, is very impressive.

7. Students are confident and well motivated; they enjoy their learning and produce some outstanding written work. In many lessons, students demonstrate very good evaluation and presentation skills. Business studies and health and social care students use extensive research skills and produce excellent coursework. In science and mathematics, students use technical language well and solve complex problems. English students have a very good understanding of specialist linguistic terminology. The level of debate in some humanities lessons is outstanding, students demonstrate their ability to explore a wide range of opinions and come to a conclusion based on well-informed decisions.

8. The college introduced part-time courses for adults in 1998. The provision has grown considerably in the last few years and there were around 1,600 enrolments in 2002. The most popular accredited courses are in IT, including computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and European computer driving licence (ECDL). Overall retention rates are high, at 92%, and the pass rates of 82% are slightly above the national average for sixth form colleges. The majority of adults follow a wide range of non-accredited lifestyle and leisure courses.

Quality of education and training

9. There is much very good and some outstanding teaching and learning. Inspectors observed and graded 91 lessons and 9 group tutorials. In 79% of the lessons, the teaching is good or better, and in 46% it is either very good or outstanding. It is satisfactory in 19% and less than satisfactory in the remaining 2%. In performing arts, media studies and business studies, most teaching is excellent or very good. Students' learning is good or better in 81% of lessons. Teaching and learning are good or better in all practical lessons. These figures are much higher than the average for sixth form colleges inspected in 2002/03.

10. All lessons have clear objectives which are shared with students. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject. Many lessons are lively and challenging, and teachers respond to the needs of students. In most lessons, a good range of teaching methods are used to stimulate interest and check on learning. Students participate well in group work, debates and discussions. Teachers make very good use of questioning techniques to ensure that students understand the work and can articulate their responses. However, in a small minority of lessons, the teacher dominates the feedback from group work and the more able students are not given the opportunity to fully develop their answers.

11. In all the lessons observed during the inspection, students were preparing for their final examinations or completing coursework for submission to the awarding body. Learning materials are of a very high quality. In English and modern foreign languages, students complete collaborative research work during the lessons and at home. The teacher collates the results into comprehensive revision books that are valued highly by the students. In some subjects, for example, science, mathematics, business studies and geography, information and learning technology (ILT) is used effectively to support learning. Students have good access to revision materials on the intranet.

12. Students' attendance at lessons is very good. An average attendance of 89% was observed during the inspection. Students in science, mathematics and business studies had the best attendance at over 90%.

13. Teachers are academically well qualified and have a teaching qualification. Many use their experience as external examiners to develop their own subject areas. The college supports staff well, they all feel that they are valued and contribute to the developments of the college. Professional development is very good and is clearly linked to the college's priorities. New staff receive a thorough induction. A mentoring system provides good support to new teachers and others lacking in confidence. Whole college training days are used effectively to share good practice and update staff. Administrative and technical support staff are highly valued and carry out their duties effectively. Technical support is sufficient in most areas, for example, the close working relationships established in science ensures that technicians contribute fully to the running of the laboratories.

14. The accommodation has developed over many years, leading to a set of buildings that are discrete and not well linked together. The accommodation is well maintained, clean and welcoming. In most departments, rooms are grouped into distinct specialist subject areas. Classrooms, study areas and adjacent corridors have a clear subject identity with good wall displays of students' work. Teaching rooms in physical education and performance studies are spread across the site. This leads to considerable difficulty for staff and students, although a good accommodation strategy is in place that should address many of these issues. Some rooms are too small for the numbers of students using them. For example, the size of science classrooms limits the delivery of the subject because they are sometimes cramped and do not have sufficient facilities for demonstration purposes. Similarly, a room in art and design used to present material using powerpoint was much too small to accommodate the students.

15. Specialist resources are good. There are well-used and up-to-date language laboratories with good use made of language assistants. Students on performance study courses are well served. For example, the main hall is used for major performance work, there is a well-appointed drama studio with lighting rack and retractable seating and a dance studio with sprung floor and mirrors. In addition, there are good editing facilities for students on media studies and music technology courses. There is an excellent leisure facility with a swimming pool, facilities for rowing on an adjacent river, all weather pitches for football and cricket and extensive playing fields. These are well used by full-time students during the day and by the community at other times. A sports dome is old and past its best, but is still serviceable.

16. The library is well managed. Library staff liaise well with heads of department to maintain, in most areas, a wide range of relevant learning resources. There are sufficient individual study spaces for students in the library and in a separate work area. The library is open from 08:30 to 4:30; this meets the needs of the full-time students, but not the part-time adult students. To overcome this problem, a temporary library facility, run by the adult education staff, is set up each evening that courses are running. The ratio of students to computers is satisfactory, although access to them at

peak periods is sometimes difficult. A number of curriculum areas have insufficient access to computers. This limits the variety of teaching and learning methods using ILT in many areas. Most subjects have a good range of learning resources and revision material on the college's intranet.

17. Well-developed college assessment policies are rigorously implemented across all subjects. Following comprehensive consultation with staff and students, the college has recently introduced a very effective, good practice guide to assessment and progress review. Homework is set on a regular basis and work is accurately marked and returned promptly. Teachers provide detailed and constructive written feedback that clearly indicates what students need to do to improve their performance. This is often reinforced by verbal feedback. In visual and performing arts, particularly good use is made of peer assessment which provides one-to-one feedback that is personalised and focused. In social sciences and health and social care, there is good use of student self-assessment procedures to inform learning.

18. There are very good systems to monitor students' progress. The recording, tracking and monitoring of students' progress are very thorough and used to encourage them to achieve high grades. All students are set minimum performance standards based on their GCSE results. They have a formal review, twice a year, with their subject teachers and personal tutor. Students self-assess their performance before discussing it with staff. Students are very clear about how they are performing and what they can do to improve. Attendance and punctuality are monitored meticulously and poor attendance is acted upon promptly. Parents and guardians are kept well informed about the progress of students. Verification and moderation procedures are very thorough. External moderators' reports are consistently positive about the quality of students' work.

19. A concordat has been agreed with the local FE college. This clearly states the curriculum focus of the two colleges and the strategic development of a learning zone. The college provides a wide range of academic advanced level subjects to meet the needs of full-time students aged 16 to 18. There are no part-time courses for this age group. At GCE A level, there are 37 subjects and AVCE single awards in business, IT, travel and tourism, and health and social care. Most full-time students take four AS-level subjects in their first year of study augmented by the study of one key skill and an enrichment activity. In addition, all students take AS-level and GCE A-level general studies. The admissions policy gives priority to pupils from the five partner high schools. Students from these schools are guaranteed a place, if they meet the entry requirements of two grade Bs and four grade Cs at GCSE. In September 2003, 47% of new students were from the partner schools. The remaining places are allocated according to the date the college receives their application form. The entry requirement requires these students to have at least four grade Bs and two grade Cs at GCSE. Level 2 provision is limited to GCSE mathematics and English for those students who have not achieved a grade C at school. These courses are taken by a very small number of students. Adult education classes are offered in computing, Internet usage and digital imaging. In addition, there is a range of lifestyle and leisure classes including foreign languages, counselling and introductory lessons in a variety of leisure subjects. The adult education provision has grown considerably over the last few years and now includes one-day courses, usually on a Saturday. These are popular courses in such subjects as aromatherapy, flower arranging and silk painting.

20. Students benefit from a wide variety of enrichment activities. These include leisure activities such as a very wide range of sports, language classes and community service programmes. All students in their first year of full-time courses are required to undertake an enrichment activity in their first term of study. This is carefully registered and monitored. Many students continue to make use of the extensive facilities and participate in activities throughout their time at the college. The college has good community links. Students run workshops on bullying and drug awareness at local primary schools. Work experience is available to all students, although take up is relatively low. Some students are required to pay for risk assessment checks for work experience placements. Many subjects widen the experience of their students through the use of local and national competitions, external speakers, trips and visits to relevant commercial or industrial venues. The student council meets regularly, organises social events, raises money for charity and provides students with direct access to senior managers.

21. Key skills teaching is managed effectively and widely promoted to full-time students. All students complete at least one key skill. Wherever possible, they are integrated into the students' course of

study. Many students achieve their key skills qualification by proxy, as a consequence of studying a relevant course, for example, AS-level mathematics or IT. All students who are not studying a full-time IT course have a separate weekly IT lesson. These lessons develop students' IT skills to either level 2 or 3, depending on their prior experience. Students speak highly of the support they receive in sitting the external tests and in completing their portfolios of evidence. Retention rates are high in all the key skills and pass rates are much higher than the national averages.

22. Support for students is outstanding. Prospective students receive very good information about the college and its courses. There are very close and effective links with the five partner high schools. A combination of presentations in schools, open evenings, taster sessions and formal interviews help all students make well-informed choices. The induction process and an informative student handbook help students to quickly settle into college. Second-year students are effective mentors. Initial assessments identify clearly additional learning needs. Subject teachers can refer students for specific support and students can request extra help during their course. There is very good take-up of additional learning support. Students receive thorough diagnostic testing. Those with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties are dealt with sensitively and given much help. Additional learning support staff provide training for all teachers working with students who have specific learning needs. College analysis of the impact of additional learning support shows improvements in retention and pass rates. A full-time college counsellor provides high-quality confidential guidance.

23. Personal tutors meet their groups each week and there is a well-structured tutorial programme. A combination of individual reviews, tutor group and year group activities provide good support on both academic progress and pastoral issues. Some variation exists in the quality of delivery of group tutorials, which are not formally observed as part of the college's quality assurance processes. Communications between subject teachers, senior and personal tutors and central guidance staff are highly effective in identifying students who are experiencing difficulties and ensuring they are fully supported. Teachers give very good subject support to individual students. Those AS-level students who are struggling with aspects of their course, are paired with GCE A-level student mentors, for extra help. Tutorial support for part-time adult students is integrated into their course and generally meets their needs. They have access to very helpful, high-quality information, advice and guidance.

24. Students receive excellent guidance on progression to HE or employment. The college hosts the Cheshire HE and careers fair for all post-16 students. An excellent range of resources and well-qualified staff are available in the careers library. A wide range of relevant workshops on university applications, writing a curriculum vitae, interview techniques and gap years further support students in their choices after college.

Leadership and management

25. Leadership and management are outstanding. There is a clear strategic direction that puts students and their achievements first. Examination results are excellent. There is a high proportion of very good teaching. The support that teachers give to their students is excellent. Staff at all levels are totally committed to the college's values and aims.

26. Leaders and managers have a clear vision of the direction of the college. All teams are clearly focused on the needs of students and improving their performance. They ensure that students receive very good support in a wide variety of ways. Communications are excellent. Senior management operate an open-door policy and staff value the accessibility of senior managers. All staff are consulted on key college policies. A weekly briefing, daily bulletin and staff intranet ensure that staff are kept fully informed. Teams meet regularly, but the minutes of some of these meetings have poorly recorded action points.

27. Teaching and learning are excellent. The grades awarded to teaching and learning observations are significantly above the national average. This high standard has been maintained since the previous inspection. Punctuality and attendance are very good. The college has a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. A working group researches and disseminates best practice.

28. Planning and review processes are well organised, thorough and effective. Senior managers set demanding targets for student retention and pass rate data. All heads of department meet with senior managers annually to evaluate the performance of their courses and agree targets. Arrangements for reviewing performance in the college are well understood. Whilst these reviews are rigorous, target setting within the plans is not always specific or measurable. Senior managers meet monthly to review targets. Information from these meetings is presented to governors.

29. Quality assurance arrangements cover all aspects of the college's work. Teachers and support staff understand the system and are fully involved. Teams evaluate their performance against agreed quality statements. Course reviews are integrated into the self-assessment process. Self-assessment is thorough and self-critical, although the college does not emphasise its significant strengths. The integration of the self-assessment report and operating plan can lead to a lack of clarity. The lesson observation process is underdeveloped and does not include the observation of tutorials.

30. Leadership and management are good or better in all of the curriculum areas inspected. Subject teams work well together and there is a strong emphasis on promoting a self-critical culture for both staff and students. Heads of department receive a good range of timely and accurate management information to make judgements on the quality of their courses and set targets. The range includes students' achievements which are benchmarked against similar colleges, students' views and lesson observation grades. Detailed thoughtful analysis of this data gives teams an agenda for action. The college is introducing a new integrated management information system, which will include electronic monitoring of student attendance.

31. Governance is strong. Governors are enthusiastic and committed to the college's mission and ethos. Governors' skills are appropriate to the needs of the college and they are well informed about current developments in FE. Governors are fully involved in strategic planning and closely monitor the college's very good performance. They receive regular financial statements and the minutes of the senior management team meetings. The corporation is reviewing the presentation of performance data. Governors agree an annual operating statement to monitor their own performance.

32. There is a wide range of effective staff development opportunities. All teaching and support staff have an annual review, during which their training needs are identified. The staff development plan defines whole-college staff training needs. An innovative appraisal scheme has been introduced and well received by staff. The scheme defines roles and competencies, celebrates strengths, identifies areas for development and informs an action plan. Newly appointed staff are supported through a good induction programme. Three teachers act as mentors to support all newly qualified and established staff.

33. There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity. The promotion of equal opportunities in the college is good. There is a range of policies and implementation plans that meet the requirements of SENDA and the Race Relations (amendment) Act. The equal opportunities committee monitors the progress made with the action plans. The college analyses student retention and pass rates by gender and race. Audits to evaluate the perception of students on equality and harassment issues are carried out by the committee. The college has a student focus group called 'Sticks n Stones' which has investigated equality issues. During the inspection, an example of poor handouts for visually impaired students was identified.

34. Financial management is strong and the college's financial health is good. Senior managers carefully monitor the college's financial position. Heads of department have a clear understanding of how their budgets are set and closely monitor expenditure. Student retention and pass rates are very high. The college gives very good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Science and mathematics

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- very high retention rates
- much lively and effective teaching
- very good student support
- good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- low levels of achievement on AS-level physics and environmental science courses in 2003
- a few unsatisfactory aspects of accommodation.

Scope of provision

35. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in biology, chemistry, electronics, environmental science, further mathematics, human biology, mathematics and physics. There are approximately 600 enrolments on AS-level courses and 400 on GCE A-level courses. Approximately 22 students are studying GCSE mathematics. All students are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

36. There are high retention rates on the majority of courses. On the GCSE mathematics course, the retention rate has been maintained at a high level for the last three years. On most GCE A-level courses, the retention rates are above national averages. Retention rates are significantly above national averages on most AS-level courses. Progression rates to HE are high and many students progress to science and mathematics related courses.

37. The standards achieved by students on many courses are high and some are outstanding. There are high pass rates on most courses. In 2003, on AS-level courses in biology, chemistry and mathematics, the pass rates and proportions of students gaining high grades were significantly above national averages. On AS-level and GCE A-level electronics and AS-level further mathematics courses in 2003, all students who took the examination passed and a high proportion gained high grades. Pass rates on all other GCE A-level courses are at or above national averages. On most advanced level courses, students achieve at least the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE scores. In 2003, on the GCE A-level chemistry course, students achieved significantly above the grades predicted for them. The proportion of students gaining grades A* to C on the GCSE mathematics course, although declining, was significantly above the national average in 2003. On AS-level courses in environmental science and physics, the pass rate and proportion of students achieving high grades was below the national average in 2003 and generally students did not achieve the grade predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE scores.

38. Students attain well in lessons. They show confidence, use technical terminology appropriately and have good communication skills. Their coursework shows well-developed research skills. Many students produce reports of high quality. There are some outstanding achievements in enrichment activities such as the Biology Olympiad, where one student gained a gold medal in 2003, and in the National Mathematics Challenge, Young Analyst and Engineering Education schemes.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	35	26	35
		% retention	94	96	94
		% pass rate	85	80	64
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	129	111	102
		% retention	97	99	97
		% pass rate	95	95	97
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	134	89	132
		% retention	92	99	98
		% pass rate	93	97	95
AS-level biology	3	No. of starts	171	173	110
		% retention	95	95	96
		% pass rate	85	79	98
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	103	87	109
		% retention	93	97	94
		% pass rate	91	90	95
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	65	76	63
		% retention	88	99	97
		% pass rate	93	91	75

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

Quality of education and training

39. Teaching and learning are very good. A high proportion of teaching and learning is good or better. Some is outstanding. There is much lively, effective teaching. Teachers plan their lessons well and make good use of high-quality learning resources. In a GCSE mathematics lesson, there was excellent use of flash cards and other visual aids in a revision session on indices. The teacher skilfully and sensitively involved all students in the discussion and further activities. At the end of the lesson, all students were able to recall the rules of combination. Good use was made of powerpoint presentations to show the stages of complex systems in electronics and biology. Students benefit from good revision aids when preparing for examinations. The intranet and other IT-based materials for biology and physics are very well developed and used effectively by students. Where teaching is less effective, there is lack of challenge for some students, usually associated with ineffective use of questioning.

40. Students are well motivated and apply themselves well in lessons. In a physics lesson on sub-atomic particles, students worked enthusiastically on quarks using data cards created by the teacher. Group work in a chemistry lesson on equilibrium generated a useful discussion in which students made thoughtful contributions and were able to revise key concepts efficiently. Students' mathematical skills are well developed. Attendance rates are high. Most students make very good

progress.

41. Most resources are of a good standard. Teachers and technicians are well qualified. Laboratories are well equipped and maintained. Students make good use of the study areas and computers. The library is well stocked, and has journals and multiple copies of popular books. A minority of rooms are equipped with data projectors. The departments make efficient use of the laboratories, but a high proportion of chemistry and biology lessons take place in rooms with limited facilities for practical demonstrations. These rooms are too small for the large classes, this restricts the learning activities and they become too warm.

42. Assessment of students' learning is very thorough and used effectively for tracking their progress and identifying learning needs. Initial testing enables teachers to set appropriate targets. Homework is set regularly and marked rigorously. Common assessments give valuable information about the progress of students against their targets and of the relative performance of teaching groups. Formal reviews, which occur twice each year, are helpful to students, but their targets are sometimes not clearly defined.

43. Students receive very good guidance and support. Students benefit from a wide range of systems for providing help with their studies. Teachers are readily available outside lessons and give good individual help when required. Workshops in specific topics are provided at key times of year, including many during the time when students are preparing for examinations. A peer mentoring system provides effective help from students in their second year to those in their first year.

Leadership and management

44. Leadership and management are good. There is rigorous analysis of students' achievements in the self-assessment report. Appropriate actions have been taken to address weaknesses. Team meetings are regular and are a useful forum for teachers and technicians. Teams work well together with a strong focus on improving students' achievement and developing the quality of teaching and learning. There are good curriculum links with partner schools. Staff are aware of the college's equality and diversity policies and use them in their evaluations of performance. Teachers and technicians have good access to training opportunities. Not all intended outcomes of actions in operating statements and action points from team meetings are clearly defined, making monitoring of progress on key tasks less effective.

Business studies and economics

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

Strengths

- excellent retention and pass rates
- very good teaching in business
- students' very good evaluation and presentation skills
- very good teaching materials to support learning
- rigorous assessment and feedback
- outstanding support for students.

Weaknesses

- a minority of students do not achieve their predicted grades
- insufficient variety in some lessons.

Scope of provision

45. AS-level and GCE A-level business and economics and the AVCE single award in business is delivered to full-time students aged 16 to 18. Some 250 students are studying business studies with approximately 50 on economics courses. A small number of students, around 20, are enrolled on the AVCE single award business course.

Achievement and standards

46. Pass and retention rates are high. The AS-level business studies pass rate has increased by 12% over the last three years and was 13% above the national average in 2003. Pass rates on GCE A-level economics and AVCE business courses have been consistently 100% for the last three years. The high grades achieved by AS-level and GCE A-level business students increased by 26% and 14%, respectively, last year. The proportion of students achieving high grades on AS-level economics and AVCE business courses are below the national average and some students in these subjects did not achieve their predicted grades.

47. Students are highly motivated and develop very good communication and presentation skills. The majority have the confidence to analyse complex information, present their findings to the class and respond to questioning. Students work effectively in pairs or groups to share ideas, and evaluate their own work and that of the group. In all lessons, students develop very good techniques and time management skills for tackling examination questions. In an AVCE business class, students made excellent use of IT in their assignment work on producing a marketing plan for a car manufacturer. The majority of students progress to university. The attendance in the lessons observed was excellent.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business studies and economics, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level business	3	No. of starts	165	162	144
		% retention	92	97	94
		% pass rate	85	87	99
AS-level economics	3	No. of starts	31	26	28
		% retention	90	92	96
		% pass rate	96	92	93
AVCE business double award	3	No. of starts	15	17	6
		% retention	93	76	83
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	125	104	96
		% retention	98	95	99
		% pass rate	96	100	99
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	15	22	15
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

48. In the best lessons in business, planning is thorough and there are a variety of teaching methods

used to keep all students focused on the topic. In these lessons, the expectations teachers have of the students are high. Teachers make good use of probing and targeted questions to check and reinforce learning. There are many imaginative handouts and worksheets in business studies which enrich the learning experience. In planning for a business studies examination, the students were carefully guided, with the use of a mind map, to link theory from their other lessons and produce detailed answers on the specific businesses in the case study.

49. The dynamics between the different groups and the teacher is excellent. Very high quality, extra material is available for extension activities, some of which are on the college's intranet that the students access at home. In the small minority of less successful lessons, the variety of teaching methods is restricted, with a predominance of teacher-dominated activities. There is limited use of ILT in the classroom.

50. The standard of assessment is very high. Teachers set relevant homework on a regular and frequent basis. Work is marked promptly. Teachers give detailed and effective feedback which helps students to improve their performance. Students' progress is carefully recorded and tracked. Coursework is meticulously standardised and meets the demands of the awarding bodies.

51. Initial help and guidance are very thorough. There is very good academic and pastoral support for students. Regular reviews take place, at which standard assignments are used to inform teachers of students' progress. Students are involved fully in the review process through self-assessment and, if appropriate, the negotiation of additional work. Extra revision classes are well attended and one-to-one academic support tutorials arranged.

52. The curriculum meets the needs of the students. Visits to local businesses are used well by the students to complete project work. For example, AVCE business students visited a factory to investigate production methods. Students carefully analysed their findings and produced well written reports. AS-level and GCE A-level business studies students visited the 'Blue Skies - creating a more entrepreneurial Britain' event to look at enterprise.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management are good. Staff work very effectively together as a team. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process. Timely and accurate data on student performance, students' views and the results of lesson observations, inform the process. This has led to improvements in students' achievements. However, action plans do not always set clear and quantifiable targets. All teachers have been trained in equal opportunities and race relations. In one lesson, gender stereotyping was challenged when a student referred to 'housewives'. Communications are very good. Team meetings are effective in sharing good practice and teaching materials.

Visual and performing arts and media

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

Strengths

- outstanding pass and retention rates
- very good standard of students' work
- challenging teaching and highly effective learning
- excellent assessment practices
- very good support for students.

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped IT resources in art and design.

Scope of provision

54. The college offers a range of AS-level and GCE A-level subjects to full-time students aged 16 to 18. These include art and design, graphics, textiles, performance studies, media studies, drama and theatre studies, music technology, music and dance. There is a total of 829 students studying creative arts subjects. Approximately 470 students are enrolled on AS-level courses and 359 are completing GCE A-level subjects in the area. The subjects with the largest number of students are art and design, media studies and drama. The popularity of media studies and music courses has increased significantly over the last three years.

Achievement and standards

55. Achievement and standards are outstanding. On the majority of courses, pass and retention rates have been maintained well above the national averages for sixth form colleges. Over the last three years, the pass rates have been at, or very close to 100%, in almost every subject. Students perform much better than predictions based on their GCSE qualifications. This is significant as some very academically able students enrol with limited experience of creative subjects. Pass rates in art and design courses are outstanding. The proportion of students achieving high grades is exceptional. In art and design, at both AS level and GCE A level, approximately 90% of students achieved grades A or B in 2003. Over the last three years, in drama, media studies and performance studies, around 50% of students achieved a grade A or B.

56. The students' artwork on display is vibrant and accomplished. High standards and rigorous monitoring do not constrain imagination and development. Examiners have commended the students' work over many years. In 2003, performing arts students won the regional media 'Rose Bowl' award for their production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. GCE A-level students gave a moving and sensitive performance on issues around child abuse, which was exciting and meticulously rehearsed. The written and practical work of media studies students is of a very high standard, often innovative and original, but based on soundly taught techniques and research skills. Attendance was very good during the inspection.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level art and design	3	No. of starts	94	100	86
		% retention	89	99	99
		% pass rate	99	100	99
AS-level drama	3	No. of starts	51	44	58
		% retention	92	100	97
		% pass rate	96	100	98
AS-level media	3	No. of starts	91	118	132
		% retention	91	98	98
		% pass rate	100	100	99
AS-level music	3	No. of starts	24	51	73
		% retention	92	98	93
		% pass rate	100	100	99
GCE A-level art and	3	No. of starts	83	74	82

design		% retention	99	100	98
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level performance studies	3	No. of starts	40	41	37
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

57. Teaching and learning are highly effective. Lessons include a wide range of interactive tasks that develop students' creative skills to a very high standard. Good working relationships between staff and students create a productive and stimulating working environment. The GCE A-level programme starts in the summer immediately following the completion of AS-level courses. This allows teachers to develop students' underpinning knowledge and skills in preparation for the following year. Teachers provide students with innovative and imaginative learning activities that they respond to well. For example, students completed extensive primary research on the use of new technology, to create outstanding visual displays. Students are highly motivated and support each other in their learning. For example, in performance studies 'buddy groups' are used to give individual feedback to enhance and improve performance work. GCE A-level music students provide music for the sound recording students. Teachers skilfully use incisive questioning; this leads to improvements in the quality of students' work and maintains their motivation to do very well.

58. Students use their music technology log books and dance journals effectively to reflect on their learning. The best sketchbooks are vibrant and imaginative showing how the work of major artists has been taken as a starting point for developing the students' work.

59. Lessons provide diverse opportunities for students to understand and contribute to the learning process. In an outstanding music lesson, audio-visual material, practical performance and quiz questions, brought the subject alive and made it accessible to students of differing skills and abilities.

60. Resources are generally very good, although there is some tension between expanding enrolments and the available space. The majority of accommodation and equipment is fit for purpose with air-conditioned editing suites, well-appointed dance and drama studios and a specialist art block. However, IT facilities in art and design are limited. Access to the wide range of visual material, now available on CD ROM, is restricted. The specialist IT room is too small for the size of classes. This affects the quality of the delivery of, for example, powerpoint presentations for contextual studies. Staff are well qualified. The staff development programme has supported teachers in the development of interactive learning resources for the college intranet.

61. Students' progress is rigorously monitored. Formal and informal reviews are a feature of all courses. Target setting is effective and students have clear goals and priorities. Marking of student work is detailed and constructive. Students are given comprehensive written and verbal feedback from teachers and from their peers. They are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

62. There is excellent progression from AS level to GCE A level in all subjects. Progression to HE is outstanding, over 95% of GCE A-level students progress to relevant and often prestigious courses. All subjects offer a wide range of trips, visits and work experience. For example, one student worked with Vivienne Westwood and there is an annual placement at Mersey TV.

63. Support for students is comprehensive and highly valued by the students. Additional learning support is course related and relevant to student need. Teachers make themselves available to students outside at lessons and students appreciate their approachability and flexibility.

Leadership and management

64. Leadership and management are good. Managers set and expect high standards. They take prompt action to deal with any issues. Self-assessment is thorough and self-critical. Data on students' achievements are analysed rigorously. However, development plans do not always set clear milestones and measurable targets. Feedback from students has been used effectively to make changes to course delivery. The recently introduced appraisal system clearly identifies staff development needs. Communications are very good and staff feel well supported. Teamwork is excellent and there is much sharing of good practice. Opportunities for promoting equality and diversity issues exist in the teaching of most subjects. However, targets are not set, for example, on improving gender imbalances in some subjects.

Humanities

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

Strengths

- very high pass rates
- outstanding quality of student work
- stimulating teaching that inspires and motivates students
- thorough assessment and feedback of students' work
- good curriculum enrichment that encourages students to enjoy their studies
- very good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT in classroom teaching.

Scope of provision

65. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in geography, history, government and politics, religious studies and general studies. At the time of the inspection, excluding general studies, there were 356 enrolments on these courses. All enrolments are of full-time students aged 16 to 18. All students take AS-level general studies in the first year of their advanced level course and most study GCE A level in the second year. The most popular courses are history with 167 students and geography with 123 students. Government and politics has 45 students and 25 study religious studies.

Achievement and standards

66. Retention rates are very good and are above the national averages in all courses except AS-level government and politics in 2003. In 2002 and 2003, 100% pass rates were achieved in GCE A-level geography, history, government and politics and religious studies. The proportion of students achieving high grades is better than the national average in most courses. For example, in history, around 60% of GCE A-level and 50% of AS-level students achieved a grade A or B in 2003. Pass rates in general studies are very high. Many students achieve grades higher than those predicted from their GCSE results. Attendance is very good. However, attendance to general studies lessons is much lower than in other subjects.

67. The quality of students' work is outstanding. In many lessons, students demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are studying. Students' contributions in class are impressive. For example, students in a politics lesson discussed the intricacies of different electoral systems and skilfully applied their knowledge to voting patterns in recent elections. Students are encouraged to develop very good skills of analysis and evaluation. For example, geography students

carefully analysed the problems of mass migration from Rwanda. They effectively evaluated the issues surrounding the mass movement of people and the support of refugees.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level general studies	3	No. of starts	577	628	633
		% retention	94	96	95
		% pass rate	97	87	90
GCE A-level general studies	3	No. of starts	520	496	479
		% retention	97	95	91
		% pass rate	91	97	94
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	92	68	81
		% retention	98	97	99
		% pass rate	84	100	100
GCE A-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	24	24	16
		% retention	96	96	94
		% pass rate	96	100	100
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	114	94	101
		% retention	96	97	94
		% pass rate	94	100	99
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	68	76	62
		% retention	91	96	95
		% pass rate	77	99	100

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

Quality of education and training

68. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and inspire students to do well. Lessons have clear learning objectives that are effectively communicated to students. A wide range of interesting and lively activities are used to motivate students and promote learning. Many lessons include group work, presentations and sensitive discussions on the emotions related to the particular topic. For example, students in a religious studies lesson openly shared their views and explored different beliefs on life after death. In a very good GCE A-level history revision lesson, groups of students explored the role of the government in Tudor England to evaluate the issues facing Thomas Cromwell. The combination of group work and class discussion was very effective in involving all students and ensuring they were clear about the requirements of the examination.

69. Resources for humanities are good. Staff are well qualified and experienced in their subject. Learning materials are well written and many provide good extension work to challenge the more able students. A wide range of resources and revision materials is available on the college's intranet. Classrooms provide a stimulating learning environment and there are good displays of students' work. However, some of the rooms are too small for the size of group. In geography, audio-visual aids were used effectively to promote learning. In many classrooms, insufficient access to IT resources restricts the use of ILT in teaching. Good curriculum enrichment supports learning. Most subjects organise day trips, residential visits and conferences to supplement the work done in college and inspire students to undertake further study and research. Examples include a geography

field trip to Iceland and local areas of interest, religious studies visits to The British Museum and a mosque and a visit to the House of Commons for those studying government and politics.

70. Students receive very good academic support. Work is set regularly and returned quickly. Marking is meticulous and feedback gives students clear guidelines on ways to improve their work. Students are set demanding minimum performance standards at the start of their course. A very good review system is effective in monitoring individual students' progress. Students self-assess their own performance and are fully involved in producing an action plan to achieve their targets. Teachers provide very good individual support and extra revision sessions in the run up to examinations.

Leadership and management

71. There is very good subject leadership and management. Communications are excellent and all staff are involved in decision making. Teachers share teaching and learning materials and regularly discuss good practice. Teamwork is very effective in creating a self-critical culture. All staff contribute to the self-assessment process. Students' achievements are analysed very carefully and compared with national averages. Managers use the information, along with feedback from students, to identify areas for improvement. Actions taken have been successful in improving the quality of teaching and learning and in raising standards. In a minority of areas, the targets are not specific or measurable. Equality and diversity issues are successfully integrated into many subjects.

Psychology, sociology and health and social care

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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- well-managed teaching
- effective use of resources to support independent learning
- very good feedback to students
- good course management.

Weaknesses

- some teaching which fails to motivate students
- insufficient use of IT equipment in classroom teaching.

Scope of provision

72. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in psychology and sociology, and the AVCE single award in health and social care. At the time of inspection, 617 full-time students aged 16 to 18 were enrolled on these courses. In psychology, 224 students were studying AS level and 147 GCE A level. There were 65 students taking GCE A-level sociology and 94 studying AS level. There were 48 students on the AVCE health and social care single award.

Achievement and standards

73. Retention rates are high. In AS-level psychology and sociology and AVCE health and social care, retention rates are at least 10% above the national averages for sixth form colleges. The retention rates on GCE A-level psychology and sociology are around national averages. Pass rates are above national averages on all courses. All students completing GCE A-level sociology and

psychology and AVCE health and social care passed in 2003. Over the last three years, the proportion of students achieving high grades in GCE A-level sociology has increased. In 2003, almost two thirds of students achieved a grade A or B in GCE A-level sociology. The proportion of high grade passes declined in AS-level sociology and psychology in 2003. Many AS-level sociology students achieved one grade lower than that predicted by their GCSE results. Psychology students achieve grades broadly in line with those predicted by their GCSE results. Progression rates to HE are excellent.

74. The quality of students' work is high. On all courses, students complete comprehensive research from a wide range of sources. The majority of students demonstrate good analytical skills. They effectively link their research and theories to explain aspects of individual or social behaviour. For example, AS-level psychology students evaluated four different psychological theories to explain anorexia nervosa. Students presented well-structured arguments on the reliability and validity of both the research and theories associated with the condition. Students develop good independent learning skills. In all subjects, students work together to produce learning materials and powerpoint presentations, these are well used by students, in class and in the study centre.

A sample of retention and pass rates in psychology, sociology and health and social care, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AVCE health and social care two-year single award	3	No. of starts	*	30	17
		% retention	*	97	100
		% pass rate	*	100	100
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	131	176	193
		% retention	91	94	96
		% pass rate	94	95	95
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	111	109	105
		% retention	87	90	94
		% pass rate	96	97	95
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	79	84	135
		% retention	97	96	96
		% pass rate	97	100	100
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	44	60	69
		% retention	98	93	94
		% pass rate	100	98	100

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

75. Most teaching is good or better. Lessons are well planned and closely follow very detailed schemes of work. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide range of imaginative teaching strategies. These include revision games, group and pair work, debates and presentations. High-quality learning resources are highly effective in motivating students and consolidating learning. Some lessons are inspirational, for example, students were effectively engaged in a lively and enthusiastic debate on bystander behaviour. Interesting case studies, illustrating examples of accidents and acts of violence, were used to stimulate students' interest. The teachers' skilful questioning maintained

good pace and detailed discussion.

76. Most teachers are effective at developing students' skills of critical analysis and evaluation. Teachers encourage students to develop good powers of written and spoken argument. Staff have high expectations of students.

77. In a few, less effective lessons, teaching fails to motivate students. Direct questioning and other teaching methods are not used effectively to assess learning. Group work and whole class discussions are not managed effectively. Students spend too much time listening and become inattentive.

78. Staff are well qualified and many are examiners in their subject. New staff are well supported and have a mentor. The library has a very good stock of relevant texts and journals. Staff share resources and produce a wide range of high-quality handouts, fact sheets, study guides and course handbooks. Students have access to a good and improving range of websites and online learning materials. Teaching accommodation is good. However, most classrooms lack sufficient IT equipment for ILT to be used effectively. This hinders the development of alternative teaching and learning techniques.

79. Good assessment practices are efficient and highly effective in supporting students. Assessment is carefully designed and consistently applied. Students are regularly set work that is marked promptly and thoroughly. All staff provide good and very detailed written feedback on how students could improve their performance. Staff make corrections to English and suggest ways in which ideas can be expressed more clearly. Individual student progress, in meeting their minimum performance standard, is very closely monitored. Verification and moderation procedures are very thorough and ensure that all staff work to a consistent standard of fairness and accuracy.

80. There is very good academic and personal support. Tutors provide sensitive personal and academic support that is highly regarded by students. The attendance and progress checking procedures enable staff to quickly identify and support students at risk of underachieving or withdrawing. Limited use is made of visits and visiting speakers to enrich the students' experiences on the course.

Leadership and management

81. Course management is good. Self-assessment and action planning fully involves all staff. There are frequent and regular meetings where staff analyse data and information on students' progress and achievement. The completion of action points is closely monitored. Course reviews and feedback from students are used to inform course planning. For example, changes to teaching and learning resources and methods of assessment have been introduced. Staff work well as a team and share good practice and teaching materials. Equality and diversity issues are reviewed well in all subjects.

English and modern foreign languages

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

Strengths

- very high retention and pass rates
- outstanding quality of students' work
- much good teaching
- outstanding learning resources to support and motivate students

- o very good support for students
- o rigorous assessment and monitoring practices
- o outstanding leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- o no significant weaknesses.

Scope of provision

82. The college offers AS levels and GCE A levels in English language, English literature, French, Spanish and German to full-time students aged 16 to 18. GCSE English is offered as a resit course to a very small number of students who do not achieve a grade C at school. At the time of inspection, the college had 637 students taking GCE A-level courses in English or modern languages, 80% were studying an English course.

83. A variety of adult part-time lessons are offered in French, Spanish, German, Russian, Italian and Japanese in the evening. At the time of the inspection, the provision was focused on conversational languages at various levels leading to a college certificate of achievement. The adult languages department has grown considerably in recent years and clearly meets the needs of its students.

Achievement and standards

84. Retention and pass rates at AS level and GCE A level are outstanding. All subjects achieved 100% pass rates in 2003. The proportion of students achieving high grades is also well above national averages for all subjects except for GCE A-level English literature which fell below the average in 2003. All students who took GCSE English over the past three years have achieved at least a grade C. Students perform better than the predictions made for them based on their entry qualifications in all subjects except English literature. Students do particularly well on modern language courses. Retention rates on part-time adult courses were 72% in 2003 and had improved to 85% at the time of the inspection. All students successfully achieved the college certification.

85. The quality of students' written work is very high. GCE A-level English language students' creative writing and investigating language work is outstanding. Students are helped by their teachers to investigate the terminology and language used in an area of particular personal interest. Many students link this research with their other GCE A-level subjects or outside interests. For example, a visually impaired student produced materials on visual impairment which are now used by the college. Students' use of the target language in modern language lessons is impressive. A similar level of fluency is seen in English language lessons where students show expertise in handling complex linguistic vocabulary.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	157	152	170
		% retention	93	98	96
		% pass rate	99	97	100
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	112	112	101
		% retention	95	91	97
		% pass rate	98	100	100
AS-level French	3	No. of starts	66	67	50
		% retention	94	96	94
		% pass rate	100	98	100

AS-level Spanish	3	No. of starts	23	18	25
		% retention	87	100	96
		% pass rate	100	94	100
AS-level German	3	No. of starts	26	37	34
		% retention	96	95	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	58	113	118
		% retention	98	99	98
		% pass rate	96	100	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	64	83	75
		% retention	97	98	93
		% pass rate	97	100	100
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	35	48	41
		% retention	94	98	90
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

86. There is much good teaching. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject stimulates students' interest. The best lessons are energetic and creative. Teachers respond to the needs, experiences and learning styles of students. Group work is used effectively. Carefully sequenced activities build up students' confidence with new materials. Additional tasks are provided for the more able students. They respond with high levels of personal commitment. Students' learning is effectively reinforced through collaborative research work, completed in lessons and at home. Students e-mail their results to the teacher who collates a final document for the whole group. These additional materials are much appreciated by students.

87. In the small number of less successful lessons, students rely too heavily on teacher delivery. Students take little initiative in the learning process, although they are able to respond effectively to questions. In a couple of lessons, the feedback from group work was too long and unproductive for some students.

88. Resources are very good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Students are given excellent course booklets for both lesson preparation and revision. Modern language resource rooms are used well to develop students' listening, speaking and reading skills. Three foreign languages assistants provide very good support and enhance the curriculum. A wide range of extensive backup materials, including computer packages and internet access, are available for individual study and coursework. However, access to IT for English students is restricted by the size of the room and the small number of computers. Teaching areas have very good displays of work. There is a clear sense of pride in celebrating students' work on a wide variety of topics, for example, students' charts on emotional intensity in selected poems and leaflets on health and education in foreign languages.

89. Assessment is rigorous. The criteria used are effectively shared with students and constantly reinforced in lessons. Feedback on students' written work is thorough and helps them improve. Student progress is closely monitored. All major pieces of written work are assessed against individual students' minimum performance standard. Students are very clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

90. In English and modern foreign languages, there is an appropriate range of courses to meet the needs of students. Students participate in a wide range of enrichment activities which includes languages for non-linguists. Students are encouraged to enter local and national competitions, and many are successful. For example, five students have had their poems published and another student came second in a short story competition.

91. Support for students is very good. Students experiencing difficulties are given individual subject help. These extra lessons are supplemented with subject specific support materials developed by their teachers. There is good integration between the learning support staff and the English department. For example, there has been a range of lunchtime activities on improving study skills and essay writing. Students appreciate the high levels of support and accessibility of their teachers.

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management are outstanding. Heads of department are very supportive and encouraging to staff and students. There is an excellent team spirit. Departmental policy relating to curriculum delivery is meticulous and implemented by all staff. Teachers are highly responsive to change. Teachers regularly discuss teaching methods and share high quality materials. All staff are involved in self-assessment. Management information is used well to analyse students' achievements and plan improvements. Action plans from the self-assessment process are fully implemented. There is a clear focus on maintaining the very high standards.

Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	1	80
2	7	3
3	77	0
4/5	0	0
Other	15	17
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
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Science and mathematics	1,327	4	13
Land-based provision	42	139	2
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	198	1	2
Business administration, management and professional	302	0	3
Information and communication technology	1,087	716	18
Retailing, customer service and transportation	19	3	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	198	168	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	71	1
Health, social care and public services	49	25	1
Visual and performing arts and media	728	536	12
Humanities	2,041	19	19
English, languages and communication	728	254	10
Foundation programmes	0	0	0
Unknown AOL	1,215	376	15
Total	7,934	2,312	100

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
		1	Starters excluding transfers	0	0	7	4
	Retention rate %	*	*	71	100	80	78
	National average %	80	78	**	70	72	**
	Pass rate %	*	*	80	75	50	94
	National average %	66	71	**	70	75	**
2	Starters excluding transfers	72	36	48	0	2	3
	Retention rate %	93	97	96	*	100	100

	National average %	80	81	**	72	71	**
	Pass rate %	100	100	98	*	100	100
	National average %	85	84	**	68	71	**
3	Starters excluding transfers	5,206	5,121	5,285	29	9	5
	Retention rate %	89	96	95	79	89	100
	National average %	82	89	**	64	69	**
	Pass rate %	93	95	95	65	88	100
	National average %	86	88	**	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 general FE/tertiary colleges or 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.

** numbers too low to provide a valid calculation*

*** national averages 2003 not yet published*

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	79	19	2	86
Level 2 (intermediate)	100	0	0	2
Level 1 (foundation)	67	33	0	3
Totals	79	19	2	91