



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College

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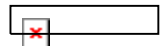
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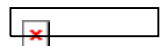
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Basic information about the college

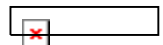


Name of college:	Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form
Principal:	Geoff Higgins
Address of college:	Darnton Road Ashton-under-Lyne OL6 9RL
Telephone number:	0161 330 2330
Fax number:	0161 339 1772
Chair of governors:	Keith Trelfa
Unique reference number:	130518
Name of reporting inspector:	Patrick Geraghty HMI
Dates of inspection:	6-10 December 2004

Part A: Summary

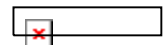


Information about the college



Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College was established in 1980 following the re-organisation of secondary education in the borough of Tameside. Tameside is a metropolitan borough with a population of about 220,000 situated some seven miles east of Manchester. The 2001 census shows that 3.5% of the residents aged 16 or over were in full-time education, which is below the figure for England and Wales. Some 35% of the population had no qualifications, compared with 29% nationally. Only 11.4% of the population are qualified to degree level, compared to 19.8% nationally. Some 94.6% of Tameside's population are of white ethnic origin, 4% Asian, 0.3% Black or Black British and 0.4% Chinese or other ethnic groups. Much of the employment in the area is for low skill and low wage occupations. The college mission focuses on providing a high-quality academic and vocational curriculum. It seeks to widen participation in education through a responsive approach to local needs encapsulated in the phrase used by the college to describe its mission; 'adding value to learning and lives'. In October 2004, the college had 1,681 students aged 16 to 18. The majority of these students, 79%, are recruited directly from 18 Tameside high schools with a further 11% having progressed to a higher level from within the college. The average general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) points score of students entering level 3 courses at the college has been 5.7 for the last three years. In 2003/04, the college enrolled 1,655 part-time students aged 19 or over. Most follow information and communications technology (ICT) and basic skills courses offered on three evenings and Saturday mornings. The college draws 16% of its students from minority ethnic groups.

How effective is the college?



The inspection graded the quality of provision in six curriculum areas. Inspectors judged teaching, learning and attainment to be outstanding in two areas, good in three and satisfactory in one. The college's main strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- outstanding provision in health and social care, and humanities

- much skilful teaching

- good range of subjects for students aged 16 to 18 at advanced-subsidary level (AS level) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level)

- an expanding range of vocational courses

- expanding adult programmes that are responsive to local needs

- effective support for students

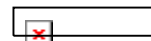
- welcoming and inclusive environment
- students' commitment to and enthusiasm for college life
- strong promotion of social inclusion
- good teamwork
- well-conceived accommodation strategy
- access to and use of very good resources to support learning.

What should be improved

- pass rates and higher grade passes on some level 3 courses
- achievement in advanced level mathematics
- rigour in some aspects of quality assurance
- ineffective evaluation of staff development for bringing about improvements in teaching and learning.

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

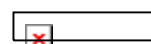
Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



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	Satisfactory. Pass and retention rates are high on some courses, but there is low achievement in advanced level mathematics. There is low achievement of higher grades on many courses. Accommodation for science and technology courses is of a high standard and there is effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) to enhance learning. Self-assessment is insufficiently rigorous, but subject-based support for students is strong.
Business and information and communications technology	Good. There are high retention and pass rates for general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate business and in GCE A-level ICT. There is effective development of learning and examination skills and good learning resources in ICT. Some lessons offer insufficient challenge to students and there is little use of ILT in business. Students' work is of a high standard.
Health and social care	Outstanding. There are outstanding pass and retention rates. Very good teaching and resources promote effective learning. Highly effective partnerships enhance students' experience. Support for students is very good. Leadership and management of the area are outstanding.
Humanities	Outstanding. There are outstanding pass and retention rates on GCE A-level courses and exceptional pass and retention rates over three years at AS level in religious studies. Some students' oral communication skills are underdeveloped. Well-prepared lessons incorporate a variety of learning activities to challenge all students. The leadership and management of the curriculum are outstanding.
Psychology and sociology	Good. There are high pass rates on GCE A-level courses, but the pass rate in AS-level psychology is low and declining. Students at GCE A level attain better results than those predicted. Effective teaching and learning are well supported by outstanding resources and good curriculum management. Students are well supported.
English	Good. There are high pass and retention rates in GCE A-level English language and much outstanding teaching and learning within the area. There were low pass rates in GCSE English in 2004 and low student achievement of higher grades on advanced level courses. Effective planning and very good teamwork are complemented by good learning resources and accommodation.

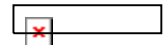
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. Governors and senior managers have set a clear strategic direction through the mission statement and supporting corporate objectives. The college has

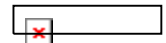
play a key leadership role in setting standards, motivating staff and establishing good teamwork. Students' performance in relation to prior attainment has improved significantly over a three-year period and students' retention rates have been above national averages at all levels for the last two years. Quality assurance is systematic and often effective. However, pass rates in some areas of the college continue to be below national averages. Quality processes have failed to identify the reasons for the underperformance or to put in place appropriate actions to raise standards. Appraisal is thorough and staff development is well managed. There is good communication. The reputation of the college in the community is high. The college provides good value for money and regularly meets its funding targets. It has exceeded its growth targets for student numbers.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



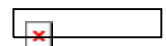
The college's response to education and social inclusion is outstanding. Meeting the needs of the local community is a high priority. Some 90% of students enrolled at the college come from the local area. Senior and other managers are active and successful members of partnerships designed to widen participation. These include regeneration partnerships and 14 to 19 strategy groups. There is a wide range of provision for students aged 16 to 18 which is reviewed constantly to ensure that it meets the needs of partner schools and the community. The number of adult students enrolling has grown significantly. Much of the adult provision meets the need of groups who would not otherwise participate in further education (FE). Increasing numbers of students achieve their qualifications and standards of teaching overall are high and well matched to the needs of students. Equality and diversity practices are excellent. The proportion of minority ethnic students enrolled significantly exceeds the proportion in the local population. The college is fulfilling its commitments under the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA).

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support for students is very good. The college works hard to place students on the right course, guide them well and support their progress into further study or employment. Effective links with secondary schools ensure that students and their parents are fully informed about their options. Induction is effective and students know their rights and responsibilities. All students are given an initial assessment during induction, but there is no systematic diagnostic test used across the college. However, the college provides very effective support for many students, including those who are gifted and talented and those with specific learning needs. Tutorial support is good. Tutors are enthusiastic and generous with their time and students appreciate this. Communication between teachers and tutors is generally good, but good practice is not always shared and the college does not have a plan for the professional development of tutors. Counselling and financial support are well promoted and used. Careers guidance is very good. College and connexions staff work closely to ensure that students receive impartial advice throughout their programme. The college fulfils appropriately its responsibilities relating to child protection.

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

- support given by teachers

- welcoming and friendly atmosphere

- careers advice

- guidance and support

- range of courses

- high quality of teaching

- ILT facilities

- academic support sessions

- new buildings and improved facilities.

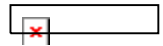
What they feel could be improved

- more private study areas

- prices in canteen

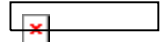
- student social space
- insufficient car parking space.

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



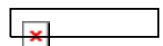
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	83	16	1
19+ and WBL*	80	20	0
Learning 16-18	82	18	0
19+ and WBL*	80	20	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. Pass rates at levels 1 and 2 for students aged 16 to 18 are above national averages. However, for the 16 to 18 cohort at level 3 achievement has been just below the national average for the last four years. Retention rates have been above the national averages for all levels and cohorts for the last two years. The percentage of students on advanced level courses achieving higher grades than those predicted shows a year-on-year improvement. The Advanced level performance systems (Alps) placed the college in the top 30% of sixth form colleges in 2004 for GCE A-level value added scores.

16 to 18 year olds

2. Some 86% of full-time students aged 16 to 18 follow advanced level courses, with 10% on intermediate and 4% on foundation courses. At level 1, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 demonstrates year-on-year improvement to 94% in 2003, some 22% above the national average. Level 2 courses in 2003 were 9% above the national average, with a pass rate of 95%. Level 2 pass rates continued to rise in 2004. The majority of full-time students study level 3 subjects. Pass rates were below national averages from 2001 to 2003. In 2002, pass rates were 3% below national averages and in 2003 there was a marginal rise to 2% below the national average.

3. A number of subjects record high pass rates. In the humanities, geography and history pass rates at GCE A level were 100% in 2003 and 2004. In law and religious studies pass rates were 99% and 97%, respectively. Some 68% of students in GCE A-level religious studies achieved grades A or B. The pass rate in GCE A-level psychology was 96% and GCE A-level sociology was 100% for 2002 and 2003 and 98% for 2004. GNVQ intermediate business and advanced level ICT have recorded 100% pass rates in both 2003 and 2004. In health and social care, pass rates are high. For example, the national diploma in early years shows a 100% pass rate over the last three years, for the diploma in care and education pass rates were 100% in 2003 and 2004 and students on the GNVQ in intermediate health and social care achieved a 100% pass rate in 2004. Pass rates for GCE A-level design and technology have been 100% over a three-year period.

4. Some subjects continue to have pass rates below national averages. The majority of advanced level mathematics courses are significantly below national averages. AS-level biology has been below the national average for three years and was 27% below the national average in 2003, although there was a rise in 2004 to 5% below the national average. AS-level psychology pass rates have declined over a three-year period to significantly below national averages.

5. Over four years, students at the college have increasingly achieved higher grades than those predicted from their prior attainment. The college is now placed in the top 30% of colleges nationally for the achievement of students in relation to prior attainment. Students on level 3 courses have achieved particularly well against the grades predicted for them over the last three years. However, in a minority of subjects, students perform less well than predicted, and in particular in biology, mathematics and English literature.

6. The college's retention rate for 2004 was 92%. On level 1 courses, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 have been above national averages for the last three years. For level 2 courses, retention rates rose above the national average in 2003. On level 3 courses, retention rates have been at national averages for the last three years. The college's attendance rate for 2004 was 91% and overall attendance during the inspection was 89%. The highest attendance was in science and mathematics at 91% and the lowest in English at 86%.

Adult learners

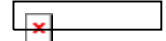
7. At the time of the inspection, many courses for adults had concluded the term's programme and consequently inspectors were only able to observe a limited number of sessions.

8. Achievement at level 1 was significantly below the national average. However, numbers are low, with 52 starters in 2002. On level 2 courses, the pass rates of the declining cohort of students have consistently been below the national average. Pass rates at level 3 for the last three years have

been significantly above national averages. In 2003, pass rates were 11% above national averages for adult students.

9. The retention rate for students at level 1 is significantly above the national average, and was some 18% higher than the national average in 2003. At level 2, the retention rate was just at the national average, but had declined by 15% over the previous year. Retention rates for level 3 courses were above the national averages in both 2003 and 2004.

Quality of education and training



10. Teaching and learning were graded by inspectors in 89 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 83% of these, satisfactory in 16% and less than satisfactory in 1%. Teaching was very good or excellent in 49% of lessons. The highest proportion of good teaching was in humanities, health and social care, psychology and sociology and English. In humanities, 92% of lessons were good or better and in English 69% of lessons were graded as very good or excellent. Learning was good or better in 82% of lessons observed, and satisfactory in 18%. There was no less than satisfactory learning. Attainment was graded as 72% good or better and 28% satisfactory.

11. The better lessons are characterised by skilful teaching, are well planned and focus on active student involvement. Resources are effectively integrated with lessons to stimulate and enrich teaching and learning. Good use is made of students' experience. In the humanities, teachers demonstrate good presentation skills and ask well-considered and apt questions which encourage the use of critical appraisal and intellectual reasoning by students. In health and social care, well-crafted, highly creative learning materials enrich learning. In these lessons, students bring enthusiasm, inquisitiveness, enjoyment and a sense of ambition to learning. Students demonstrate excellent use of subject terminology. There is an appropriate focus on the development of examination skills. The better lessons also have an emphasis on students taking responsibility for extending their studies outside the classroom.

12. The weaker lessons are characterised by slow progress and insufficient demands being made on students. In some, there is insufficient attention given to the development of oral communication skills. In these lessons, students are not challenged to evaluate and develop their ideas. Strategies to meet the needs of all students and enable individuals to fulfil their potential are underdeveloped in schemes of work and lesson plans. The more able students are not provided with additional tasks. Insufficient use is made by teachers of the existing knowledge and experience of students.

13. The college currently employs 153 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 97 are teachers. All teaching staff have a nationally recognised teaching qualification and 81% are full-time staff. Staff are well qualified, with a significant number having assessor awards and vocational experience. Many are examiners for awarding bodies. There is good technical support. Arrangements to support new teachers are effective. New teachers receive mentoring support from experienced practitioners. Staff development needs are identified through appraisal and the outcomes of the self-assessment process. Training is linked to the college's three-year development plan. The college has recognised the need for further development in the use of ILT to support teaching and learning.

14. The college offers a welcoming, well-maintained and safe environment. A major building project commenced in 2001 and is on schedule for completion by September 2005. In June 2002, phase 1 was completed providing excellent accommodation and resources for science, and design and technology. Phase 2, completed in 2003, provided a new, well-equipped canteen, excellent facilities for teaching ICT and a drop-in information technology (IT) learning resource centre. The final phase will house student support services and facilities for the performing arts and media. The recently refurbished student centre has a café area and offers an attractive environment for students to relax. Good sports facilities including a well-equipped fitness centre and outdoor areas are well used by students and members of the community. Accommodation at outreach centres for adult provision is

generally good. On completion of the present accommodation strategy in 2005, the college will be fully compliant with disability discrimination legislation.

15. Teaching and learning resources are excellent. Most subjects are taught in dedicated subject rooms which provide good learning environments. Good displays of students' work and information relevant to the curriculum enhances the ambiance of these areas. The library has a good range of books and other resources including periodicals and Internet-linked computers. Library staff are responsive to the needs of students and teachers. The college has made significant investment in modern ICT equipment and virtual learning environment developments which are being increasingly used to extend learning outside the classroom. These facilities are well used in many areas of the curriculum and in particular health and social care, psychology and sociology. The college has a student to computer ratio of 1:3.

16. The college has a clearly structured assessment policy. On enrolment, students are given a computerised initial assessment which identifies individual learning styles. However, only students on vocational programmes and some adult students are given a dedicated assessment for literacy and numeracy and there are no diagnostic tests used across the college. Details of students' learning styles are entered into the class register and teachers use this information effectively to guide planning and assessment. All students have an individual learning plan which is used to monitor their progress. In many curriculum areas, monitoring of progress is good. In some areas of learning, formative assessment is not appropriate for the range of ability within the group and some students are given tasks which are too demanding for them.

17. Teachers in most curriculum areas use feedback sheets which give clear information about what is required for sustained improvement. In the best examples, these are annotated and give individuals useful guidance. When work is assessed well, assessment is fair and teachers' comments are clear and related to awarding body requirements. In these cases, students receive useful and detailed feedback which helps them to improve. In some areas, grading criteria are not clearly identified, feedback is limited and spelling and grammatical errors are not corrected. Assessment practice is not always consistent between teams and good practice is not always shared.

18. The college offers an extensive range of courses designed to meet the needs of school leavers from the local community. A wide range of level 3 AS-level and GCE A-level subjects, and advanced vocational qualifications are offered. Provision at entry level, level 1 and level 2 has been extended to reflect the needs of local students wishing to study at the college. The range of courses available provides good opportunities for progression to the next level of study or to employment. The curriculum is regularly reviewed in consultation with students and key stakeholders to ensure that it meets the needs of the community. For example, a forensic science course was recently introduced in response to requests from local schools. An increasing number of adults follow part-time courses in IT, basic skills, modern foreign languages and crafts at the main college and in community venues.

19. Students benefit from an appropriate range of enrichment activities in most curriculum areas. Geography students have fieldwork visits to London and Formby. History and politics students visit Parliament and the Holocaust centre in Nottingham. An enrichment day for all students takes place in March of each year. A whole college programme of additional activities includes sport, dance, driving test theory and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The college acknowledges that too few students currently take part in enrichment activities.

20. Senior managers and other staff are active and successful members of partnerships designed to widen participation in education and training. There are strong and effective curriculum links with feeder high schools to develop vocational provision for students aged 14 to 16 and to ease transition into college life. Links with the local community and regeneration partnerships to increase part-time adult provision and to widen participation are very effective. The college provides courses for adults in 20 outreach centres including schools, church halls, and on the premises of employers. For example, health and safety, and management training was provided as part of a customised package for a local employer and IT training has been provided for employees of a local hospital.

21. The arrangements for key skills are clearly set out as part of the student entitlement policy. All students have the opportunity to develop skills in IT and communications courses at an appropriate level. Communication skills, application of number and use of IT are developed through vocational courses at level 2 and are integrated with individual subjects at advanced level with additional IT workshops for all students. Students are guided and supported in completing portfolios for submission for accreditation through the tutorial programme. Assignments in history, politics, psychology and sociology clearly indicate the key skills to be developed. However, this practice is not consistent across the college and opportunities to develop and assess key skills are limited in other areas. The college does not place sufficient emphasis on the acquisition of key skills qualifications, particularly at level 3. In 2003, 246 achieved level 3 key skills qualifications, 63 in IT and 183 in communications, and in 2004 there were no successes in key skills at level 3.

22. Support for students is very good. The senior management team includes a director of admissions and liaison and an assistant principal for student services who are responsible for the recruitment of students and their continuing support. They work closely with teachers, pastoral tutors, careers and connexions staff, the college counsellor and an additional support team to ensure that students are placed on the right course, are properly guided and supported and that they progress to employment or further study.

23. The college has very effective links with local secondary schools. A combination of taster sessions, interviews, open evenings and presentations and schools' career evenings enables pupils to make well-informed choices. The college invites new students to an open evening in July and keeps in close contact with parents. Senior staff and careers staff are available on GCSE results day to ensure students receive appropriate and immediate advice and guidance. Promotional materials are well designed and welcoming. The college has a brochure for adult students that also promotes guidance and support services.

24. Enrolment is well organised. A well-planned induction programme is effective and helps students to settle into college life and their studies. Students receive helpful information about college policies and procedures and are asked to make declarations about their additional support and health needs. Students' rights and responsibilities are made clear, including those relating to equality of opportunity. Staff and students evaluate induction and the college has made a number of changes to the programme as a result of this feedback. Students on vocational programmes and most adult students take a basic skills test.

25. The college effectively targets support to meet the needs of a wide range of students. Students who are identified as being 'at risk' are carefully monitored. Students are referred for additional learning support (ALS) as a result of their school records or their initial assessment or because of limited progress on their course. Some ask for support. ALS staff are well qualified and experienced. They carry out diagnostic tests using external expertise when necessary. ALS staff agree clear plans with students and share these and the reports of students' progress with tutors and teachers. In 2003/04, 194 students were referred and 110 received significant support. Some 90% of students receiving ALS achieved their qualification compared to a college average of 88%. Some 98% of students receiving ALS were retained compared to a college average of 91%. The college provides particularly effective integrated support for the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills in entry and foundation level programmes. Many students from these programmes progress very well.

26. The college has a qualified student counsellor who supports young people, adult students and staff. The service is well advertised with 120 referrals in 2003/04. Some 49% of students receive the educational maintenance allowance and the college also effectively supports students with financial difficulties through learning support and hardship funding. These funds are also used to fund a weekend crèche which is free to adult students.

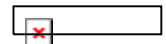
27. The college has a very well-structured and detailed tutorial programme which gives students very effective pastoral support and helps them to complete general studies and key skills qualifications. Specialist tutors have a caseload of approximately 100 students and work with them individually and in groups. Tutors are very enthusiastic about their role and give their time generously to support their students. Students appreciate the individual support they receive. Tutors

are very well supported by the management information system which enables them to monitor students' attendance and performance effectively. Communication between tutors and teachers is generally good and is supported by meetings which identify concerns and provide opportunities to share good practice. However, much good practice is not shared and the college does not have an overarching development plan for tutors.

28. Careers guidance is very good. The college has two dedicated careers staff and a very well-resourced careers library. Connexions staff work closely with college staff and provide good careers and progression support for all students. Students build a personal profile and are encouraged to access impartial advice and guidance throughout their course. Careers staff organise a stimulating annual event for students where they have a choice of over 100 workshops run by visiting speakers and facilitators.

29. The college fulfils its responsibilities in terms of child protection. The college has an agreed policy and procedure and a member of staff is responsible for its management and monitoring. All staff are trained to recognise and report potential problems.

Leadership and management



30. Leadership and management are good. Most weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been fully addressed. Governors and senior managers have set a clear strategic direction through the mission statement and supporting corporate objectives. Governors, managers and staff understand the strategic planning processes and there is much involvement of staff at different levels in determining and communicating strategic priorities. The college has taken into account the local political, social and economic environment in determining its future direction and anticipating the needs of its students. The college has been committed to growth and has exceeded its targets for enrolment for students 16 to 18, and has increased enrolments for adult students.

31. Governance of the college is very good. Governors are well informed about developments in post-16 education and the work of the college. Governors are drawn from the local community and their extensive skills are well deployed both at board and committee level. A standards and planning committee receives regular reports on students' performance. Performance data are analysed and interrogated and comparisons are made with national averages. College performance targets are set. The governors play a full and effective role in setting the strategic direction for the college, analysing and approving self-assessment and development plans and receiving key reports. Financial matters are monitored thoroughly. Regular training is available for governors. However, while governors are aware of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and SENDA they have yet to receive training on the implications of these legislative changes. Board membership does not reflect gender and ethnicity balances within the local community.

32. Managers are highly committed and play a key leadership role in setting standards, motivating staff and establishing good teamwork. They collaborate professionally to provide a good learning environment which places much emphasis on a culture of mutual respect and trust. Staff and students feel listened to and trusted. Thorough planning, clear strategic aims and a supportive working framework ensure that programmes are relevant, well taught and meet students' needs. Communications across the college are very good. Senior managers have very good and effective communications with staff. Effective use is made of a range of media which includes good use of the Internet, news sheets, mail shots, surveys and short bulletins on local radio. There is also a full range of college and curriculum team meetings, focus groups and principal's meetings which ensure that all members of the college are kept well informed.

33. Standards achieved by many college students are rising. Participation has widened significantly since 2002. Students' performance in relation to prior attainment has improved substantially over the period and retention rates have been above national averages at all levels for the last two years.

However, pass rates have been consistently just below the national averages at both level 3 for students aged 16 to 18 and at level 2 for adult students. On a majority of advanced mathematics courses, results continue to be significantly below national averages. This was a weakness noted at the last inspection.

34. Quality improvement is given a high priority. At its most effective, it is promoted through an inclusive self-assessment process. This process benefits from the involvement of external consultants and partner colleges. Governors, senior staff, teaching and support service managers as well as teaching staff contribute fully and critically to self-assessment. Improvement targets are established, well monitored for progress and contribute significantly to improved services for students. For example, improved learning support for students, the development of highly effective strategies to promote and embed equality of opportunity across the college and the accommodation strategy have all evolved as a direct result of self-assessment. The 2004 self-assessment report overstates the quality of management and teaching. Sometimes the quality processes are not effective and their implementation lacks consistency and precision. The underlying reasons for weaknesses are not always identified. Targets and action plans are less systematic and do not lead to improvements. For example, the college has not successfully addressed pass rates below the national averages at level 3 and particularly within a minority of advanced level subjects. Evaluation of the success of improvements put in place is not always accurate.

35. Appraisal is thorough and staff development is well managed. Appraisal is carried out systematically by immediate line managers for all staff. Teaching observation is a key element of appraisal for teachers. All staff are observed annually and agree a training plan which must be completed within a set time frame. Staff development is good. It is centrally managed by the college's vice-principal. All training is linked directly to specific development needs that emerge from planning, self-assessment and appraisal. Key priorities are confirmed in the college's development plan. All training matches the college's training priorities.

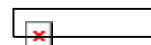
36. The promotion and embedding of equality practices across the college is exemplary. A new co-ordinator has worked effectively to promote and embed equality of opportunity across the college. A recently redrafted college policy statement provides excellent guidance on the college's expectations. A comprehensive training programme has been completed. Staff are aware of the issues and are successfully promoting good practice. Managers receive support from the college co-ordinator to clarify expectations with staff and support implementation. Equality issues are dealt with sensitively both within the curriculum and in the day-to-day life of the college.

37. The reputation of the college within the community is very high. The college has worked with a variety of local organisations to establish a learning partnership for Tameside which includes schools, colleges, the local authority, the health authority, employers and voluntary groups. The partnership provides a range of educational opportunities for people of all ages in over 20 centres across the area. The college in general and the principal in particular play a significant role within the partnership. The college is seen to be enthusiastic and creative, trusted by all partners, reliable in its ability to deliver its targets and highly supportive of others. Parents are encouraged to play a full and active role in the college. A range of meetings with teachers, regular reports on student progress and an open-door contact policy are welcomed.

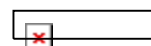
38. The management of information and data are good. Governors, managers and teaching staff are provided with detailed and accurate reports which inform the setting and monitoring of targets. Access to the management information systems is good for staff. Students' attendance is carefully monitored.

39. Financial management is excellent. This has enabled the college to radically improve its estate and ensure that teaching and learning are well resourced. The college has achieved category A financial status for five years. The college provides good value for money on the basis that students achieve more highly than expected and predicted from their prior attainment. Finances are managed effectively and there is outstanding work taking place in the community. It is the view of auditors that financial management is strong.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass rates on some courses
- high retention rates on GCE A-level courses
- effective use of good accommodation in science laboratories and technology workshops to enhance learning
- strong subject-specific support for students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level mathematics
- low proportion of higher grades on AS-level and GCE A-level courses
- ineffective actions to raise low pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level mathematics courses
- insufficient rigour in self-assessment.

Scope of provision

40. AS-level and GCE A-level courses are offered in biology, chemistry, design technology, geology, mathematics, further mathematics, and physics. An AS level in the use of mathematics is also delivered. GCSE courses are provided in science and mathematics and there are free standing mathematics units at levels 1 and 2. The Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificate in forensic science has been offered since September 2004. At the time of inspection, there were 473 students studying science, 124 studying design technology and 309 students taking mathematics.

Achievement and standards

41. There are high pass rates on some courses. On GCE A-level design technology, the pass rate has been 100% for the past three years. Pass rates are also high on GCSE mathematics and on the free standing mathematics qualifications. In 2004, 67% of students achieved grades A to C in GCSE mathematics, some 23% above the national average. On a number of courses, pass rates are low. For example, the pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level mathematics are well below national averages, with AS level recording a pass rate of 52%, some 24% below the national average. Pass rates on AS-level biology have been below the national average for the last three years. The proportion of students gaining higher grades is low on most AS-level and GCE A-level courses. Students' achievement compared to their GCSE grades shows that students perform less well than predicted in GCE A-level mathematics and biology.

42. The standard of students' work is satisfactory. Science students have developed good practical skills. They carry out experimental work carefully, with due regard to safety, and are able to explain their conclusions well. Work of a high standard is produced by design technology students.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	146	143	158
		% retention	88	85	79
		% pass rate	45	44	67
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	115	81	79
		% retention	88	90	84
		% pass rate	56	77	52
AS-level biology	3	No. of starts	108	107	139
		% retention	82	87	90
		% pass rate	79	54	76
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	68	57	101
		% retention	90	89	92
		% pass rate	84	84	82
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	61	62	49
		% retention	92	89	94
		% pass rate	86	76	83
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	33	52	36
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	94	88	97

GCE A-level design technology	3	No. of starts	33	34	52
		% retention	97	88	94
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	44	42	38
		% retention	100	98	97
		% pass rate	93	93	89

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

43. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. Lessons are well planned and a variety of teaching approaches are used. ILT is well used to enhance learning in science, technology and mathematics. In one GCE A-level biology lesson, an interactive whiteboard was used to give a clear display of an animation showing the stages of meiosis. In a GCE A-level geology lesson, a teacher-led discussion of geological structures was enhanced by use of a data projector to show a vivid image of the map. In a further mathematics lesson, students used the interactive whiteboard to sketch their ideas on the effects of transformations on graphical functions and joined in a mature discussion of each other's presentations.

44. The best lessons have a brisk and purposeful pace. Students are able to discuss and develop their ideas in detail. Workbooks are used extensively by students in the sciences and are of high quality. However, over-reliance on the use of workbooks sometimes means that more able students are not given an appropriate challenge. In the weaker lessons, and in particular in some advanced mathematics lessons, students' progress is limited through a lack of work tasks to cater for varying abilities and some students struggle to acquire the necessary skills. There is little positive formative assessment. Questions fail to prompt students to develop their ideas fully. Lessons are not planned to encourage students to play an active role. The layout of mathematics rooms inhibits collaborative work between groups of students. Key skills are highlighted in all teaching schemes and teachers emphasise to students the opportunity to gain level 3 key skills evidence for their portfolio. Few students, however, take the opportunity.

45. Science and technology teaching takes place in bright, modern laboratories providing an excellent learning environment. Laboratories are well equipped and ILT is extensively and well used to support learning in all subjects. Whilst subject intranet sites are at varying stages of development, all provide back-up material to support students' learning, including revision notes, powerpoint presentations, support exercises and past examination papers. Teaching staff and laboratory technicians are well qualified, are enthusiastic and willingly give of their time to support students.

46. Students are assessed regularly and receive constructive feedback on assignment work. Course teams keep detailed records of students' progress. Regular testing occurs and the science team prepare students well for external practical examinations.

47. A wide variety of courses are offered in science and mathematics to meet local need, provide choice to students and allow progression. There are strong links with local schools. A significant percentage of science and mathematics students progress to higher education (HE). In advanced level mathematics and design technology, students are able to choose between different options to find the course most suited to them. A forensic science course has recently started at level 3 to meet demand from the local community and has recruited well. There are strong links with local schools. Pupils are invited into college and take part in activities such as a forensic science day.

48. Subject-specific support for students is very good and extensive support from teachers is available outside lessons. The progress of students thought to be underachieving or those with learning support needs are discussed at course team meetings, and measures agreed to support them. However, the effectiveness of this support is not well monitored. The college provides study

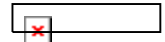
support sessions, which are well used by science and mathematics students.

Leadership and management

49. Leadership and management are satisfactory. New curriculum co-ordinators for mathematics and for science and technology have been appointed recently and measures have been adopted to raise achievement. As yet, however, there is insufficient evidence of the success of these measures. Poor achievement on some courses has persisted for several years. For example, poor achievement on advanced mathematics courses was a weakness at the last inspection. Self-assessment is insufficiently rigorous in analysing weaknesses and identifying actions to address them. Some weaknesses in teaching and learning observed during inspection had not been identified as requiring action.

50. There are effective mechanisms for sharing good practice between course teams, both formally and informally. Feedback from student surveys is analysed and used to make changes to improve the effectiveness of delivery of courses.

Business and information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on GNVQ intermediate business and GCE A-level ICT

- effective development of learning and examination skills

- effective use of high-quality learning resources in ICT

- very high standards of students' work.

Weaknesses

- too few demands made on students in some lessons

- little use of ILT in business lessons.

Scope of provision

51. The curriculum areas offer GNVQ intermediate and foundation, advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE), AS-level and GCE A-level courses in business, computing, ICT, economics and accounts. There is a range of part-time courses including computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), CLAIT plus and National Open College Network (NOCN). These courses are offered on the main site and in several venues to cater for community needs. There were approximately 616 enrolments of students aged 16 to 18 and 295 adult enrolments in the area at the time of inspection.

Achievement and standards

52. Pass rates are high and most courses have retention rates close to national averages. For example, the pass rates on GNVQ intermediate and GCE A-level ICT have been at 100% over the last two years, some 16% and 8%, respectively, above national averages. Retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate business course have risen consistently over the last three years to above national averages. Pass rates on AS-level accounts and AS-level business courses were below national averages in 2004.

53. The standard of students' work and in students' files is very high. In ICT, AS-level and GCE A-level, students show a clear understanding of computer systems and software while AVCE students are able to set up and configure simple networks. Business assignments are well presented and organised and address fully examination criteria.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business and information and communications technology, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ foundation business	1	No. of starts	12	8	10
		% retention	83	75	90
		% pass rate	100	83	89
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	25	17	17
		% retention	88	94	100
		% pass rate	91	100	100
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	48	28	17
		% retention	81	86	94
		% pass rate	85	63	94
AS-level business/management/office	3	No. of starts	129	112	113
		% retention	86	90	88
		% pass rate	80	86	74
AS-level IT	3	No. of starts	148	146	135
		% retention	86	81	85
		% pass rate	82	80	86
GCE A2 level ICT	3	No. of starts	65	62	60
		% retention	100	95	97
		% pass rate	89	100	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

54. Most teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable and committed and in general, set, use and mark assignments and other tasks in a way that helps students to progress and improve. Students understand and use appropriate technical language and produce work of a high standard. There is effective development of learning and examination skills. The experience and knowledge of examination marking schemes enables most teachers to prepare students for examinations very effectively.

55. In the best lessons, teachers promote good working relationships with students which foster learning. In one excellent lesson on marketing, students worked in teams to plan the task of buying a present for the teacher. Group work was effective and students developed evaluative and analytical skills well and challenged each other's assumptions. The lesson prepared students well for the examination by ensuring they thought about and developed answers on the marketing unit and used appropriate business terms in their conclusions. In an economics lesson, students explored confidently the notions of perfect competition and imperfect competition. They demonstrated a good command of subject terminology using words such as 'monopoly', 'oligopoly' and 'monopolistic' with ease and understanding. They engaged in lively discussion, through well-structured exercises, to explore and debate how firms might behave in different markets.

56. In the less successful lessons, students are not sufficiently challenged to learn and progress is slow. These lessons fail to involve students fully and there is insufficient opportunity for students to question and/or engage in group work to develop ideas. Teachers use a limited number of teaching and learning strategies and do not help students to develop evaluative and analytical skills.

57. There is effective use of high-quality learning resources in ICT. Accommodation, equipment and learning materials are used effectively to support learning. Students make good use of materials on the college's virtual learning environment. Teachers in both business and ICT make good use of interactive smart boards and LCD projectors for demonstrations and exposition of material. However, little use is made of ILT as a learning resource in the business area.

58. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. All students review targets twice a year for overall grades, but reviews take place with teachers and tutors throughout the year, targets are set and progress is checked. On some ICT courses, target setting is used extensively. Students set their own targets for assignment work and then monitor and review them with the support of teachers at the beginning and end of sessions. Reviews with students are included in the lesson plans at suitable opportunities

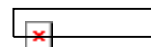
59. Support and guidance for students within the area are good. Students feel well supported and have opportunities outside lesson time to seek additional advice and help when needed. The timetabled academic support session is used well by students.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers generally make good use of resources. However, some resource restrictions have led to inappropriate timetabling arrangements. On one course unit, the specialist room was too small to accommodate the full class. Half the students were timetabled in the learning resource centre on alternate weeks. They were set tasks to complete individually without a vocationally qualified member of staff to monitor their progress and check learning. There is a good sense of teamwork and teachers work together to share and develop resources. Handbooks and support materials are helpful in guiding students through assignments. Quality assurance is satisfactory. Regular meetings are held with staff to discuss curriculum developments, students' progress, retention and pass rates.

61. The process of self-assessment pays insufficient attention to teaching and learning. Development activities have taken place, but there is no distinct drive to raise standards in teaching and learning. Appraisal and observations are carried out by line managers for both full-time and part-time staff and training needs are identified. However, the impact of training on quality improvement is not systematically measured.

Health and social care



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

Strengths

- outstanding pass and retention rates

- very good teaching that promotes effective learning

- good resources

- effective partnerships enhancing the students' experience

- very good support for students

- strong leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- poor development of key skills.

Scope of provision

62. At the time of inspection, there were 272 students aged 16 to 18 and 35 adult students within this area. Courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced level providing opportunities for progression into HE and employment. The college offers access to HE in the evening and Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) level 3 certificates for teaching assistants in the community, as part of its commitment to widen participation for adult students.

Achievement and standards

63. Many courses have outstanding pass rates. For example, students on the national diploma in early years consistently achieved 100% pass rates over the last three years. The GNVQ intermediate pass rate was 16% above the national average at 100% in 2004. The proportion of

students achieving high grades is well above the national average. For example, in the AVCE (double award), the proportion was 20% above the national average, and the first diploma and intermediate courses were 57% and 25% above, respectively. Retention rates have steadily risen at level 2 on the first diploma in caring to above the national average. There was a 31% rise in the retention rates on the AVCE (double award) in health and social care in 2004. In the same year, the retention rate on the foundation programme was 100%.

64. Students' work is of a high standard. Students participate well in discussions and demonstrate good vocational knowledge and skill above the standard expected for their level. Students are well motivated and respond well to the lively pace in theory classes. They demonstrate good critical analysis of complex issues at level 3. Attendance is good at 89% and students are punctual to lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health and social care, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	No. of starts	9	21	18
		% retention	89	80	100
		% pass rate	100	95	100
First diploma in early years	2	No. of starts	15	13	31
		% retention	73	85	87
		% pass rate	91	100	96
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	25	42	33
		% retention	80	88	85
		% pass rate	95	82	100
AVCE (double award) in health and social care	3	No. of starts	32	36	35
		% retention	72	58	89
		% pass rate	100	105	94
National diploma in early years	3	No. of starts	21	21	17
		% retention	81	67	82
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	*	19	10
		% retention	*	47	40
		% pass rate	*	100	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

65. There is much very good teaching across the subject area. Teaching methods and activities are varied and stimulating and students learn effectively. Most teachers use questioning to probe understanding and encourage the development of analytical and evaluative skills. Lessons are thoroughly prepared and extensively resourced with high-quality materials. There is excellent use of ILT to enhance learning across the area.

66. In the better lessons, students' interest is maintained through the use of well-crafted, highly creative learning materials. Many lessons involve the use of ILT. Learning is planned to meet the needs of individual students. For example, in a level 3 early years lesson, students were given different pictures of adults and children of different ages, gender and cultures. They were asked to

list the possible social and individual issues that they could deduce from the picture. Students demonstrated good critical analysis of the different types of families and the assumptions people make. The teacher then demonstrated, using the intranet, services that were provided for different family groupings. Each student then extended the range of services using the Internet. Students were actively engaged in the exercise and worked with a clear sense of purpose. In another lesson, a group of adult students explored how good readers made use of semantic, syntactic, graphic and phonological clues to develop meaning and further extend their reading skills. Groups were given a story told in a series of symbols which they had to decode into an English text. There were lively discussions assisted by good prompts from the teacher. An excellent feedback session explored how students felt as they struggled with the decoding exercise and related this to the experiences of children in the early stages of acquiring reading skills. The teaching of key skills is often unsatisfactory and the standard of some students' work is low.

67. The area has created a highly effective learning environment that promotes and reinforces the early years and social care vocational ethos. Rooms and adjacent areas have an attractive, stimulating and welcoming ambiance. High-quality displays decorate classroom walls, floors and corridors. Resources are extensive and range from simple graph paper and pens to electronic whiteboards. Staff use ILT effectively in class. The health and social care intranet is well used by students.

68. Staff are very well qualified in their vocational area and all have teaching qualifications. Many of the staff are examiners or external verifiers, and they use their expertise effectively in planning revision lessons and maintaining internal verification systems. Feedback to students is good and provides good guidance for the achievement of higher grades.

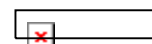
69. Academic and pastoral support for students is very good. Students value the weekly timetabled academic support sessions. Effective use is made of individual student reviews and progress is monitored towards projected attainment grades. There is effective co-ordination of the large number of work placement providers across the area.

Leadership and management

70. Curriculum leadership and management are strong. Staff co-operate closely to develop and improve the quality of provision. Records of students' progress and course and section management records are impeccably maintained. New staff are fully inducted into the team and ably supported. The team's close attention to strategies for bringing about improvements in retention and pass rates is reflected in outstanding pass and retention rates.

71. Communications both formal and informal are effective. Graded lesson observations form part of the cycle of appraisal. Staff undertake vocational updating to keep their knowledge and teaching practices up to date. There are good links with consortium sixth form colleges to share good practice. Partnerships with feeder schools are effective in extending the health and social care curriculum to students aged 14 to 16 and those aged 16 to 18.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- o outstanding pass and retention rates on GCE A-level courses

- exceptional pass and retention rates at AS level in religious studies
- well-prepared lessons which meet the needs of all students
- courses which respond to and make effective use of students' skills and interests
- outstanding leadership and management of the curriculum.

Weaknesses

- underdevelopment of students' oral communication skills.

Scope of provision

72. AS-level and GCE A-level courses are provided in geography, government and politics, history, law, philosophy and religious studies. At the time of the inspection, 61% of the 687 enrolments in humanities were on AS-level courses.

Achievement and standards

73. Outstanding pass rates have been consistently achieved over the past three years at GCE A level. In religious studies, law and history, the percentage of students obtaining a high grade at GCE A level in 2004 far exceeded the national average. Many students achieve well above their predicted grades. Pass rates for religious studies have been outstanding over the last three years and have been above the national averages in geography, politics and law. The percentage of students achieving high grades at AS level in religious studies is very high. In 2004, for example, 37 of 46 students achieved a grade A or B. Very high retention rates have been sustained above the national averages over three years on most GCE A-level courses. At AS level, retention rates are very high and well above the national averages in religious studies and politics.

74. Students' written work is of a high quality. Files are well organised and methodical. Students develop good study skills. They are able to research, organise and evaluate factual information. Oral skills are less well developed and a significant number of students lack confidence and are unable to express themselves well in discussions and in answers to class questions. Attendance rates are high and were 90% during the inspection.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level geography	3	No. of starts	54	48	53
		% retention	93	90	87
		% pass rate	92	93	91

AS-level law	3	No. of starts	149	149	163
		% retention	85	89	87
		% pass rate	88	92	87
AS-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	44	54	48
		% retention	93	96	96
		% pass rate	95	98	96
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	31	37	25
		% retention	97	100	96
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	55	44	49
		% retention	95	98	98
		% pass rate	94	100	100
GCE A-level law	3	No. of starts	72	92	93
		% retention	100	99	99
		% pass rate	99	97	99
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	15	36	39
		% retention	100	94	97
		% pass rate	100	100	97

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

75. Most teaching is effective, imaginative, and inspiring. Well-planned lessons have clear, attainable objectives. Anticipated learning outcomes do not always include skills development. Teachers have good exposition skills. The most successful lessons are those which maintain high levels of student activity. Topics are covered thoroughly and lessons are delivered with conviction. A good range of quality resources are used to stimulate and enrich learning. This was effectively demonstrated in a geography lesson on population resource indicators in which video clips, overhead projector slides, data tables, maps and worksheets were skilfully integrated. There are excellent and innovative practices in religious studies and philosophy lessons. In a religious studies lesson, the teacher combined the use of puppetry and a cartoon-based powerpoint presentation to explore Pavlov's theory of determinism. In most lessons, the particular learning needs of individuals are addressed by the use of various activities which keep students fully engaged. Students are encouraged to draw on their experience of contemporary issues, such as in a politics lesson which compared the United States of America and United Kingdom legislatures. Much attention is given to the development of study skills. Geography students effectively developed analytical and decision-making skills using high-quality source material from the development of brown-field sites in Stoke. Teachers have high expectations of students in lessons. In law, students deal confidently with new knowledge and explore complex legal issues.

76. Teachers are well qualified and experienced to meet the needs of all students. There are good levels of specialist resources. Subjects are mainly taught in dedicated rooms which have appropriate equipment, suitable furnishing and attractive, useful wall displays in rooms and nearby corridors. There is insufficient use and development of ILT, but this is being addressed and good websites on the intranet are being used. There is easy access to resources which enable students to learn effectively from independent study. The college learning centre has adequate reference books for extended study.

77. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are very thorough. Assignments are set and

marked regularly. There are some inconsistencies between staff and subject teams in marking styles and written feedback. Effective use is made of subject-based initial assessment exercises to identify learning needs at an early stage. Students at risk of leaving their course are identified, given ALS and their progress is monitored. This is particularly well done in law. Subject teams analyse performance as part of course reviews and take action when appropriate. There is good liaison between subject and personal tutors.

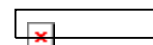
78. Courses are well developed to appeal and respond to students' interests. Crucial, contemporary issues are prominent in schemes of work. There is raised awareness of equality and diversity issues in curriculum studies. Topics draw abundant attention to values such as equal opportunities, moral rights and obligations, gender matters, persecution of minorities and animal rights. There are well-developed course contributions to the development of key skills. Most students progress to HE with a high rate of progression to subject-related degree courses.

79. Students receive good advice on entry and during their course of study. They build good supportive relationships with staff and quickly settle into programmes of study. Staff are sensitive to students' needs and provide additional learning and personal support both formally and informally.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management are outstanding. Courses are very well organised. Communications are efficient and there is an excellent team ethos across subjects. Teachers and managers understand their roles and carry out their duties responsibly. Course management files contain excellent records of performance data, analysis and progress reviews. Ideas and good practice are regularly shared. Good schemes of work are being developed, but currently lack adequate reference to anticipated learning outcomes. There is a common desire to improve performance and to enrich provision. Self-assessment is fair and the most appropriate areas for improvement are identified for action.

Psychology and sociology



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

Strengths

- high pass rates and retention rates on GCE A-level courses

- very good value added at GCE A level

- good teaching and learning

- outstanding resources which enhance learning

- good support for students
- effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- declining and low pass rate in AS-level psychology.

Scope of provision

81. The college offers full-time courses in psychology and sociology at AS level and GCE A level. Students are aged 16 to 18. There is no level 2 or evening provision. At the time of inspection, there were 276 students studying psychology at AS level and 133 at GCE A level. Some 130 were studying sociology at AS level and 63 at GCE A level. Some 34 students mix psychology or sociology with GNVQ or national certificates.

Achievement and standards

82. Achievement at GCE A level is excellent. Students achieve better grades than expected from their GCSE profile. Pass rates at GCE A level are very good and consistently just above the national average for similar colleges. In both 2002 and 2003, there was a 100% pass rate in sociology. At AS level in psychology, there has been a decline in pass rates over the last three years to below national averages. In 2004, 42 students failed to achieve the AS-level qualification and the pass rate fell to 80%. Achievement of high-grade passes is generally low, with the exception of GCE A-level psychology.

83. Retention rates are high. At GCE A level, they are slightly above the high national averages for similar colleges with almost all students completing the course. At AS level, there has been consistent improvement over the last three years and rates are high in sociology and around the national average for psychology.

84. The quality of students' written and oral work is variable, especially in the AS-level groups, reflecting the low average GCSE entry, but there is clear development of communication skills and the ability to support discussion points with evidence. Students are able to give clear explanations of social science concepts and are able to describe the work of groups such as radical and black feminists.

A sample of retention and pass rates in psychology and sociology, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	231	215	236
		% retention	83	88	91
		% pass rate	93	82	80
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	102	95	114
		% retention	84	92	93
		% pass rate	97	84	92

GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	103	142	103
		% retention	97	96	98
		% pass rate	98	97	97
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	51	60	56
		% retention	98	98	98
		% pass rate	100	100	98

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

85. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are structured effectively to get the most from students' own experience or research. For example, the contribution of students to a lesson on marriage, parenthood and divorce trends was greatly enhanced by an earlier homework task which gave them specific questions to ask of older friends and relatives. In another lesson, attractive powerpoint slides were used in a quiz to discover and build upon students' existing knowledge of sleep and dreams and to introduce some terms such as REM sleep.

86. Teachers make good links to previous learning and students often work with the same material in a variety of ways to foster familiarity.

87. There is effective use of teaching strategies to engage students' interest, increase depth of learning, make links with earlier topics and test understanding. In one lesson, questions were asked to check knowledge of the nervous system and transmitter molecules; all students simultaneously showed their answers on small whiteboards providing clear information about which points needed further elaboration before the class progressed. However, in some lessons, students are not given sufficient encouragement to expand on short answers.

88. Attention is continually drawn to examination requirements. In one lesson, students marked examination answers to a question relating to sects and cults to develop an insight into what is required and to help differentiate between description and evaluation. Mnemonic posters such as BATMAN (Because, Alternatively, Therefore, Moreover, Although, Nevertheless) were helpful to remind students of some key words to trigger evaluative comments.

89. There are effective strategies to stretch the most able students including handouts designed to meet the needs of individual students and additional text materials. Intranet and other additional resources are frequently indicated and there is an emphasis on students taking responsibility for extending their studies outside the classroom. In psychology rooms, there are well-used 'need stretching' and 'need help' boxes which contain a good variety of additional articles or summaries relating to recently studied topics. Some students have not yet developed the confidence to translate text material into their own words and in a small number of lessons there are limited attempts to encourage this. Subject support sessions are used very effectively to target the learning needs of individuals and groups.

90. Staff are well qualified and some are examiners in their subjects. The dedicated subject base rooms are comfortable and well resourced. Posters on the wall include student summaries of topics such as conjugal roles and gender differences giving the opportunity for reinforcement of previous learning. There is an excellent intranet which is well used, accessible from college or home and is easy to navigate. Good links to external sites allow students to follow up their interests in detail.

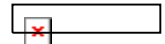
91. Students receive effective feedback on their progress, but a minority of marked work contains limited written advice. Key skills are well integrated with the curriculum. Students make effective use of ICT, for example, many receive the British Psychological Society regular update e-mails. Guidance and support are very good. Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) guidance is well structured and effective.

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management are good. There is a very strong and effective team approach to the planning and delivery of sociology and psychology programmes. There is much sharing of good practice. Part-time and new staff are effectively supported. There is an effective teacher observation system which identifies areas for improvement and staff take advantage of appropriate developmental activities.

93. The formal self-assessment procedure failed to report the decline of AS-level psychology pass rates. Students at AS level are gaining lower grades than expected from their GCSE profile. The curriculum team have thoroughly analysed the causes of students' failure and have taken appropriate steps to raise performance in the one module which caused the problem last year. There is effective promotion of equal opportunities through the curriculum when covering topics such as cultural differences. The promotion of equality and diversity is addressed through compulsory sessions as part of an enrichment day and through regular tutorials.

English



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

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates in GCE A-level English language
- much outstanding teaching and learning
- good learning resources and accommodation
- very good teamwork to raise standards.

Weaknesses

- low proportion of higher grade passes at GCE A level
- low GCSE English pass and retention rates in 2004.

Scope of provision

94. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in English language, English literature and English language and literature during the day and GCSE English courses in both the day and evening. Over 600 students take these qualifications, the overwhelming majority being students in the 16 to 18 age group.

Achievement and standards

95. Pass and retention rates in GCE A-level English language in 2004 were 100%. AS-level English literature results rose in 2004 from previously low levels. Retention rates at GCE A level are high for all courses, but in GCSE English the retention rate declined sharply in 2004. GCSE English pass rates have been below the national average in two of the last three years. Attendance is good. Low numbers of students achieved at the higher grades at GCE A level in 2004. At AS level, achievement at the higher grades is variable, but in 2004 higher-grade pass rates in AS-level English language and literature were nearly twice the national average.

96. The standard of students' written work is generally good, with many students demonstrating sound analytical and research skills. This is particularly evident in assignments in GCE A-level English language, where work is of a high standard. Many students contribute confidently and enthusiastically in lessons. In a GCE A-level English literature lesson, students became absorbed in a debate about moral questions at the heart of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* offering increasingly sophisticated interpretations. Students' files show much evidence of research from the Internet and library sources.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	151	117	127
		% retention	80	83	74
		% pass rate	50	59	51
GCE A2 level English language	3	No. of starts	53	45	50
		% retention	91	98	100
		% pass rate	96	95	100
GCE A2 English language and literature	3	No. of starts	44	25	26
		% retention	100	96	100
		% pass rate	100	100	92
GCE A2 English literature	3	No. of starts	43	43	23
		% retention	95	100	91
		% pass rate	95	100	95
AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	83	82	94
		% retention	82	90	88
		% pass rate	85	97	93
AS-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	43	44	77
		% retention	88	93	84
		% pass rate	89	88	100
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	77	60	73
		% retention	79	83	92
		% pass rate	89	70	91

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

97. Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is thoroughly and carefully planned. Students benefit from a good range of teaching strategies and much innovative teaching which is varied, lively and makes demands upon them. In a GCE A-level lesson on *The Catcher in the Rye*, students looked at narrative sequencing through a lively class discussion and interactive materials. They then explored important themes in well-structured group work. In a GCSE English lesson on the language and imagery of advertising, the teacher introduced material which raised global and cultural questions that encouraged students to work at a high level. They were constantly prompted and their learning challenged. There is close attention by all teachers to developing oral and written language skills and students in many lessons show confidence in their use of complex vocabulary and mastery of some key concepts. Teachers introduce texts in ways that connect with students. For example, the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy was successfully introduced to students through the use of biographical detail. All teachers relate literature and language study to social context effectively.

98. Accommodation is good and there is a wide range of quality learning resources available. All rooms are equipped with electronic whiteboards which teachers are increasingly using to good effect. For example, in two lessons teachers were able to instantly call up definitions of words from an electronic dictionary. Teachers are well qualified and share their expertise. Library resources are good and students are encouraged to make use of a range of learning resources.

99. Work is regularly assessed and feedback is helpful. Teachers work carefully to examining body standards in assessing students' work. There is very regular reference to assessment criteria and examination requirements in all lessons, but this does not inhibit innovation in teaching.

100. Students speak very highly of the quality of their learning experience in English and of the support of teachers. They regard teachers as approachable and constantly willing to help. Additional lessons that teachers offer, as well as the formal student support programme, are valued by students. Students find one-to-one tutorials helpful. The enrichment programme is seen as relevant and enjoyable.

Leadership and management

101. Leadership and management in English are good. A new curriculum co-ordinator has maintained a clear team focus on raising the level of students' achievements and further improving the quality of teaching and learning. Quality assurance in the area is good. The self-assessment report is generally accurate and has identified clearly the areas for improvement. Some aspects of the quality process such as review meetings are thinly documented and lack evaluative comment. Quality improvement initiatives are having a positive impact. There is excellent sharing of good practice among the members of the teaching team. Clear and apposite improvement strategies have been developed to raise standards.

102. Promotion of equality and diversity is strong in this area and teachers integrate diversity issues effectively with lessons. Teamwork and joint planning and review are key features of much of the successful work in the English curriculum.

Part D: College data

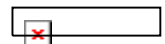


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	2	78
2	9	12
3	88	4
4/5	0	2
Other	1	4
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 (%)
Science and mathematics	900	34	10
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	169	0	2
Business administration, management and professional	366	77	5
Information and communication technology	385	875	14
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	29	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	197	12	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	166	0	2
Health, social care and public services	307	66	4
Visual and performing arts and media	491	0	5
Humanities	3,730	15	40
English, languages and communication	569	67	7
Foundation programmes	101	605	8
Unknown AOL	0	79	1
Total	7,381	1,859	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+		
		2002	2003	2004	2002	2003	2004
		1	Starters excluding transfers	144	156	119	67
	Retention rate %	90	86	92	87	91	89
	National average %	75	83	*	72	73	*
	Pass rate %	85	94	88	79	60	57
	National average %	75	72	*	73	75	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	552	674	631	149	56	23
	Retention rate %	81	83	82	84	68	83
	National average %	82	81	*	70	69	*
	Pass rate %	74	95	98	40	68	68
	National average %	84	86	*	70	74	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	4,581	4,370	4,791	29	26	50
	Retention rate %	88	90	90	66	100	78
	National average %	89	90	*	72	73	*
	Pass rate %	84	86	83	79	88	82
	National average %	87	88	*	73	77	*

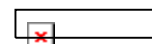
Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary colleges or sixth form colleges).

Sources of information:

1. National averages: *Benchmarking Data 2001 to 2003: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, Learning and Skills Council, September 2004.

2. College rates for 2000/2001 to 2002/03: College ISR.

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)	83	15	2	72
Level 2 (intermediate)	83	17	0	12
Level 1 (foundation)	80	20	0	5
Other sessions	0	0	0	0
Totals	83	16	1	89

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