



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College

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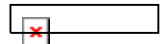
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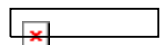
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Basic information about the college



Name of college:	City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Helen Pegg
Address of college:	Victoria Road Fenton Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2RR
Telephone number:	01782 848736
Fax number:	01782 747456
Chair of governors:	David Carr
Unique reference number:	130817
Name of reporting inspector:	John Evans HMI
Dates of inspection:	6-10 December 2004

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

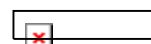


City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College was established in 1970 as the first purpose-built sixth form college in the country. The college is located in Fenton, close to the centre of Stoke-on-Trent. The site was originally intended for 700 full-time students, but now accommodates 1,600 full-time students aged 16 to 19 and about 250 part-time adult students. In partnership with Stoke-on-Trent College, the college also provides a sixth form centre at Burslem in order to raise participation rates in the north of the city. The college is organised into four curriculum sections and offers courses in 10 of the 14 areas of learning, the exceptions being land based, construction, retail, customer service and transportation and hairdressing and beauty therapy.

The college is located in a city that faces significant challenges resulting from 25 years of economic and social decline following the disappearance of the coal and steel industries and the more recent outsourcing of ceramics abroad. The 2004 index of multiple deprivation ranks the city as the 17th most deprived local authority in England. There is a culture of low attainment and aspiration among large sections of the local population. In 2004, 43% of young people gained 5 or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades A* to C, compared to 54% nationally.

Most students are residents of Stoke-on-Trent, with about 30% travelling from other parts of North Staffordshire. Approximately 78% of full-time students study advanced level courses, with the rest studying mainly at level 2. Most part-time adult students take courses at level 1. Overall, 52% of students are female and 48% male. At 9%, the proportion of students of minority ethnic heritage is almost twice that in the local population. The largest number of enrolments is in humanities, followed by science and mathematics, information and communications technology (ICT) and English. The college receives 97% of its income from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and is in financial category B. The college's mission is to provide 'high quality education in a caring environment'.

How effective is the college?



The inspection graded the quality of provision in seven curriculum areas. Inspectors judged teaching and students' achievements to be outstanding in visual and performing arts and media, good in science and mathematics, sports, leisure, travel and public services and English, and satisfactory in business and ICT, humanities and psychology, sociology, law and politics. The college's main strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- improving trends in performance

- vibrant and lively learning environment

- students' contribution to the college community

- good leadership and governance

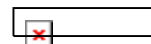
- good local collaboration which widens participation
- strong attention to equality and diversity issues
- extensive pre-entry advice and guidance
- wide range of advanced level courses
- strong academic and pastoral support for full-time students.

What should be improved

- the proportion of good and better teaching in several curriculum areas
- achievements in key skills
- students' attendance and punctuality
- provision of additional learning support
- impact of individual learning plans and target setting
- the rigour of several quality assurance processes.

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	Good. Retention rates are high overall and there are high pass rates on most GCSE and general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) courses. There is much effective and challenging teaching across a wide range of science and mathematics courses, but insufficient use is made of information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons. Course and curriculum management are good. Some of the laboratory accommodation is cramped.
Business and information and communications technology	Satisfactory. There are high pass rates on many courses, but students' achievements have declined in advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) business studies and ICT. Retention and pass rates on part-time adult courses are low. Although ILT is widely used in lessons, too much teaching fails to motivate students. Students are well supported and teachers increasingly share good practice. Links with industry are underdeveloped.
Sports, leisure, travel and public services	Good. There is much stimulating and challenging teaching in sport. Students produce high-quality work and demonstrate good practical and collaborative skills. Sports facilities are outstanding. Good links with external bodies enhance students' experience. Students make below average progress relative to prior achievement leading to low added value scores.
Visual and performing arts and media	Outstanding. There are high retention and pass rates on most courses and students demonstrate high standards of creativity in all subjects. Much teaching is very good or outstanding. There are excellent resources for design, media and dance and very constructive links with industry. Curriculum and course management are very good. There is insufficient provision at level 2 and for adults.
Humanities	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates are satisfactory overall, despite low pass rates in AS-level archaeology and geography, and a small proportion of high grades on GCE A-level courses. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with very high-quality discussion in philosophy and religious studies lessons, but insufficient use of questioning to assess individual students' learning in other areas. The range of courses is good and academic support for students is strong. There is insufficient sharing of good practice.
Psychology, sociology, law and politics	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on most courses are around national averages, but retention rates have declined in AS-level and GCE A-level sociology and AS-level law. Students in AS-level government and politics and sociology make above average progress. Lessons are well planned and learning activities varied, but they are too often disrupted by students' lateness. There is little curriculum enrichment in psychology and sociology. Support for students is good.
English language and literature	Good. Pass rates are high in most AS-level and GCE A-level English courses. Teachers ensure students are fully involved in lessons

	through well-designed practical activities. Some lessons are insufficiently challenging and students' learning is not always monitored carefully. The curriculum is well managed through effective teamwork and good course planning.
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How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are good. Senior managers display strong leadership and governance is effective. Curriculum management is generally good. The college promotes equality and diversity very well and provides a safe and welcoming environment for students. It actively canvases students' views and often acts upon them. Very good links with local organisations extend participation and promote social and economic regeneration. Pass rates are improving for students aged 16 to 18, and, like retention rates, are just above the national averages. Students' grade performance relative to their prior attainment has improved significantly. However, pass and retention rates for the small proportion of adult students are low and falling. Standards of teaching and learning are slightly below national average. The college lacks any strategy for providing literacy and numeracy support. The initiative to raise performance of courses causing concern has proved successful, though there is no system to monitor standards of assessment practice across the college. Self-assessment is detailed, but insufficiently self-critical in many curriculum areas. Some action plans are not sharply targeted or rigorous. Performance management of teaching staff is underdeveloped. Financial management is sound and the college provides satisfactory value for money.

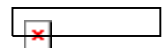
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to education and social inclusion is good. It offers a wide range of AS-level and GCE A-level courses and a range of vocational pathways from levels 1 to 3. A small number of evening courses is available to adult students. Many students have relatively low GCSE results and the college provides them with good personal and educational support. However, there is no clear strategy for provision of literacy and numeracy support. Specific help is offered to students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds through a dedicated learning mentor. There are extension programmes for able and talented students. The college provides a safe environment, promoting equality and respecting diversity. It has established very good relations with local educational institutions and agencies for social and economic regeneration, helping to extend participation and raise achievement. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups exceeds that in the local population. The college has responded appropriately to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA), with the installation of lifts to enable disabled access to all specialist and most general rooms. It has a clear race equality policy. Managers analyse the performance of students by ethnicity and gender, and produce action plans to address issues arising. Suitable training has been provided on equality, diversity and the SENDA. Some curriculum areas have carefully selected syllabi and learning materials to embrace equal opportunities issues.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Guidance and support for students are good. Students have good access to a wide range of support services for information, advice and guidance. Before entry to the college, students receive extensive and impartial guidance on the range of courses, programme combinations and career opportunities. The college has an effective careers education and guidance programme which is integrated with the tutorial programme. Specialist courses are available for the more able and talented students. Innovative strategies have been developed to support students at risk of leaving or falling behind with their studies. Induction programmes are well planned and structured, and enable students to settle into the college quickly. Good tutorial support systems are provided by specialist subject staff. Students value the opportunity to voice their opinions through the student forums. The college has no strategy for the management and implementation of additional support for literacy and numeracy provision.

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

- the friendly and sociable environment

- being treated as adults

- a comfortable and safe place to study

- feeling valued and well supported

- good teaching

- good relationships with supportive and accessible teachers

- their progress being monitored and reviewed

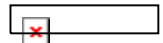
- the learning resource centre and access to resources generally

- sports facilities.

What they feel could be improved

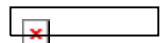
- food has become too expensive
- overcrowding in canteen and social areas
- transport problems.

Other information

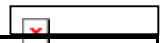


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must 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



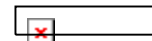
Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	69	24	7
19+ and WBL*	75	25	0
Learning 16-18	67	26	7

19+ and WBL*	75	25	0
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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. Success rates, which measure the proportion of starters who successfully achieve their qualification aim, have improved over the last three years for students aged 16 to 18 on all levels of long courses. College data for 2004 indicate that success rates for full-time students are at, or above, the national averages at all levels for long courses, but are below national average for short courses. Success rates have also improved for adult students at level 2 and on short courses although they remain below the national average in all areas except at level 1.

2. In the period 2002 to 2004, overall retention rates improved for students aged 16 to 18, especially at levels 1 and 2. Overall retention rates for these students are now around the national average at levels 1 and 3 and above national average at level 2. However, retention rates for the relatively small proportion of adult students on part-time courses are generally below national average, particularly on courses at levels 2 and 3.

3. Over the last three years, pass rates have mostly improved for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 2 and 3 and for adult students at levels 1 and 2. Overall pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved in 2004 compared to the previous year; they are now at, or above, the national average at each long course level, but remain well below national average on short courses. Pass rates for adult students are well above the national average at levels 1 and 2, but are below national average at level 3 and on short courses.

4. Overall attendance during inspection was relatively low at 82%, compared with the national average of 85% for sixth form colleges. The average attendance in lessons during inspection ranged from 77% in business and ICT to 86% in humanities. Only in visual and performing arts and media and in humanities were attendance levels during inspection equal to the national averages for different curriculum areas. The average class size during the inspection was 13, in line with the average nationally for sixth form colleges.

16 to 18 year olds

5. In 2003/04, over 70% of students in the college were aged 16 to 18 and 96% of them were on full-time courses. These students accounted for 90% of course enrolments, over three-quarters of which were on level 3 courses. Most enrolments were in the humanities and science and mathematics curriculum areas. Retention rates for these students are all at, or above, the national averages and, except for level 3 courses, retention rates improved in 2003/04 compared with the previous year. Similarly, overall pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are at, or above, the national averages in 2004 and show a clear improvement over the pass rates in the previous year.

6. The level of students' achievement of the higher grades of A and B in AS-level and GCE A-level subjects shows a wide variation between curriculum areas. Compared to national averages, the percentage of students achieving higher grades is generally high in visual and performing arts and media, satisfactory in ICT and in English and modern foreign languages, and low in business, sports, leisure and travel, and most subjects in science and mathematics, humanities and social science.

7. However, relative to their level of attainment on entry, students' progress is satisfactory overall. It is good in GCE A-level subjects, but below average at AS level. Students' levels of achievement relative to their prior attainment and potential are measured by one of the national systems used to determine the value added. In many GCE A-level subjects, students achieve generally high grades relative to their GCSE scores. The value added scores for GCE A-level subjects have risen in each of the last three years. However, the value added results for students on AS-level courses were low in 2004. Nevertheless, value added scores at AS level have risen dramatically over the last two years. Value added data indicate that the subjects in which students make most progress relative to their prior attainment are fine art, graphic design, dance, design and technology, electronics and music at GCE A level; accounting, three-dimensional design, graphic design, computing, dance, design and technology, French, German and mathematics at AS level; and in AVCE art and design.

8. Achievement rates in key skills are very low. In 2003/04, almost half of the 635 students entered passed their key skills test. Nevertheless, due to extremely low portfolio completion rates, less than 10% of students achieved a key skills qualification. Improvements in the delivery and assessment of key skills are helping to increase the number of students completing key skills portfolios.

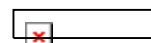
9. In most curriculum areas, the standard of work by students aged 16 to 18 is high and, in many cases, very high. Most students develop high levels of personal and learning skills. Students in media demonstrate outstanding levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Students of English literature are skilled in making presentations about set texts. Sports students reach high standards of performance and gain local and representative honours. History and archaeology students have well-developed skills in extracting information from written sources. Law students are able to understand complex legal concepts and to use appropriate terminology accurately. However, students' freehand drawing in design technology is underdeveloped; the close analysis of literary and linguistic features is not always evident from students in English; and the late arrival of too many students in science and mathematics, business and ICT and in social science subjects is disruptive to lessons.

10. About three-quarters of full-time students progressed to higher education (HE) in 2004. This proportion has increased steadily over the last four years. A larger proportion of students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds progress to HE than students from a white European background. However, relatively fewer students from vocational courses progress to HE. The percentage of students progressing from AS-level to GCE A-level subjects between 2003/04 and 2004/05 is 77%; in most subjects this rate of progression represents another significant improvement over previous years.

Adult learners

11. Part-time evening courses for adults represent a small proportion of the work of the college. In 2003/04, adults constituted about 10% of course enrolments, but represented less than 5% of full-time equivalent students. About two-thirds of enrolments by adult students were at level 1, with the other third split evenly between levels 2 and 3. Most adult enrolments were in ICT and English. Retention rates for these students are generally declining and are below the national averages, considerably so at levels 2 and 3. Pass rates, however, are well above national average at levels 1 and 2, but below national average at level 3 and on short courses. Despite pass rates for adult students generally improving in 2004, an unsatisfactory proportion of adults actually complete successfully the courses they enrol on.

Quality of education and training



12. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 109 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 70% of these, satisfactory in 24% and less than satisfactory in 6%. The proportion

was very good or excellent in 27% of lessons observed, less than the average of 35% in sixth form colleges generally. The proportion of good or better teaching in science and mathematics and visual and performing arts and media was slightly above the national average for those curriculum areas. In both areas, much of the teaching is very good or, in the case of visual and performing arts and media, outstanding. However, in business and ICT, humanities and English the proportion of good or better teaching is significantly below the national average for these areas. The levels of good teaching are considerably higher on courses at level 3 than on courses at levels 1 and 2. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was observed in almost all the curriculum areas inspected.

13. The more effective lessons have been planned thoroughly by teachers who set clear learning objectives for the students to achieve and devise a variety of learning activities which provide opportunities for students to participate fully in the lessons. Learning materials used in lessons are mostly of a very high standard. Teaching in science and mathematics, sport, visual and performing arts and media, and several humanities and social science subjects is consistently enthusiastic, stimulating and knowledgeable. In these subjects, teachers provide an appropriate level of challenge for all students. They encourage students to think for themselves, develop their own ideas and to justify their points of view. The best lessons in sport, design, drama and media are both challenging and great fun. They are also characterised by teaching which replicates and promotes high professional standards. In English, group work is used very effectively to encourage high levels of student participation. In philosophy and religious studies, teachers and students develop high-quality discussions. Teachers use different questioning techniques very effectively, both to draw out students' own views and experiences and to check their understanding of the subject. ILT is well integrated with lessons in some subjects, such as business, ICT, sport, geography and religious studies, but is underdeveloped in others, most noticeably in science and mathematics.

14. In the less effective lessons, there is often a lack of clarity about the learning objectives the teacher is intending should be achieved. The range of learning activities sometimes lacks variety and the pace of some lessons is too slow to keep students interested and to stretch the more able students. In several curriculum areas, teaching is sometimes dull and fails to motivate students. Some teachers do not make sufficient effort to involve all students. In some lessons in business and ICT, the small size of the group inhibits the teaching and learning strategies that can be used. Although teachers are supplied with information about students' preferred learning styles, the evidence that this influences individual lesson planning is very sporadic. Teachers do not always pay sufficient attention to checking the learning which has taken place in lessons and, on many occasions, teachers' use of questions and answers does not check effectively the understanding of all students.

15. The college has promoted strongly the use of teaching and learning strategies which meet the needs of all students. In many lessons, teachers make good use of extension activities to enable all students to work at the pace which suits them most. However, the planned activities and level of work do not make sufficient demands on the more able students. Lesson plans rarely identify different learning objectives for students of different levels of ability and teachers are less adept at using questioning in order to vary what is demanded of different students.

16. Learning was good or better in 67% of lessons, satisfactory in 26% and unsatisfactory in 7%. Students are generally attentive, interested and keen to learn and to contribute in lessons. On some occasions, most noticeably in science and mathematics and in psychology, sociology, law and politics, a significant minority of students arrive late for lessons. Although challenged appropriately by teachers, this invariably disrupts teachers' planned activities and the learning of other students.

17. Resources to support learning are good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Over 95% of full-time teachers are graduates and teacher trained; many have higher degrees. Part-time teachers who are not teacher trained are encouraged to achieve appropriate qualifications. Technician support is effective. Teachers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented compared with the local community and the student population. Staff development is closely linked in both the application and evaluation processes to the strategic plan, self-assessment reports and appraisal. Staff development is particularly focused on improving teaching and learning, and also on leadership and management. Four groups of students provided enlightening and innovative staff development to both teachers and governors on student life at the college. Training

in the requirements of race relations, child protection and special educational needs and disability legislation has been provided to all staff. All support staff, but only about half the teaching staff, were appraised during 2003/04.

18. The property strategy is clear and detailed and relates closely to the strategic plan. Most of the teaching and general areas of the college are clean and well furnished and maintained. However, a minority of rooms and the common room are overcrowded at times. The common room and toilets are not cleaned frequently enough at busy times. Many bright and interesting displays of students' work are on display in classrooms, corridors and common areas. The learning resources centre is new, well-equipped and welcoming. It is effectively and appropriately used by students. The college has centralised careers and Connexions advisors and learning support around this facility to provide a student-focused study area. Similarly, the common room is conveniently located next to the refectory, café and college shop to provide a centralised students' social area. The hatted accommodation and the science laboratories are outdated and are not connected to the information technology (IT) network. In the last year, the college has improved considerably the access for students with physical disabilities, so that 86% of the main site is now accessible to wheelchair users. A local agency is contracted to provide equipment or staffing to support students with, for example, hearing or visual impairments. However, the college does not have desks with adjustable height for wheelchair users or a hearing loop at reception to assist people with aural difficulties.

19. The sports facilities are outstanding as a result of the college's co-operation with the council in developing a major sports centre on the same campus. The resources in dance, media, design technology and computer-aided design are very good. IT equipment is good and is replaced every three years. The ratio of computers to students is 1:4. High-quality learning materials are used during lessons and are also available on the college's intranet, which can be accessed by students from home. However, the integration of the new virtual learning environment with the rest of the college network is underdeveloped. The college has recently invested in fixed projectors and interactive whiteboards and these are used effectively. Laptop computers are used in rooms without desktop computer stations. A wireless network system is used in the science laboratories, but it is not reliable. Teachers make good use of a well-equipped ILT workroom based within the main staff room.

20. The college has developed a comprehensive assessment policy with detailed guidelines for teachers. This has subsequently been customised in many curriculum areas. Standards are set for all aspects of assessment practice and its management. The policy is reviewed annually by the college's quality committee. However, the college has no system for evaluating the impact of assessment policies across curriculum areas. Inspectors found inconsistencies in the quality of assessment practice within and between curriculum areas. In visual and performing arts and media, several humanities and social science subjects and English, assessment feedback is usually detailed and provides constructive advice to students on how to improve. In ICT and other humanities and social science subjects feedback is often too cursory to help students improve their work.

21. Students are actively involved in self-assessment and evaluation of their own performance at all stages of their course. They speak highly of the good working relationships they have with subject tutors. Value added analysis is used to inform the setting of initial target grades. Students' progress is systematically monitored and reviewed to identify those at risk of withdrawing or underachieving and therefore needing support. Individual progress reviews take place three times a year and seek to measure progress made against agreed targets.

22. Individual learning plans are still being developed within the college. The current version collates the outcomes of initial assessment, accreditation of prior learning and any diagnostic information. Reports from subject, personal and support tutors are also held in the file. There is no single document which combines this information effectively to create a holistic learning plan for each student. Although subsequent and incremental targets for improvement are set during progress reviews, these are not always specific enough to provide students with meaningful objectives and insufficient attention is given to identifying clearly what students need to do in order to meet their improvement targets.

23. Parents are kept informed of students' progress formally and informally. At all stages of students' engagement with the college there is effective communication with parents. They are invited into college following every progress review, three times a year. Parents of students on level 2 courses are contacted when they attain a high standard of work. Parents are informed when students are absent without permission and when they are at risk of leaving. Reports to parents are systematic and thorough and information given out at parents' evenings is also comprehensive.

24. The range of subjects offered at AS level and GCE A level is very wide and further extensions are planned. These courses account for 79% of enrolments by full-time students. The college makes a strong commitment to supporting minority subjects such as archaeology, classical civilisation, geology, philosophy and a range of modern foreign languages. Well-subscribed GCSE re-sit courses are provided in English and mathematics and students can also take GCSE biology or science as an additional qualification. In addition, the college provides a number of vocational pathways at levels 2 and 3 in science, art and design, business, ICT, sport, health and social care and public services. About 75% of students who take a level 2 qualification progress to an advanced level course within the college. Although under-subscribed this year, a foundation course with a science core usually provides access for full-time students at level 1. The programme of part-time courses for adults is limited in scope.

25. The college has a standard entry requirement for advanced level courses of 4 GCSE passes at grade C or above. Considerable attention is devoted to matching programmes to students' capabilities and aspirations. Students may take 3, 4 or 5 AS-level subjects in their first year, depending on individual circumstances. Timetabling is designed to maximise students' opportunities to select any subject combinations, take courses at different levels and combine vocational and academic study. About 200 students currently combine a vocational course with an AS-level subject.

26. Good links with employers have been developed in several curriculum areas. For example, all students in sports and in health and social care have work placements and work experience is made more widely available through the enrichment programme. In sports and visual and performing arts and media, links with industry provide an excellent source of extension studies and project work for students. In science, business and ICT, links with industry are underdeveloped for both students and teachers. There is a good college-wide enrichment programme which provides opportunities for students to become involved in a wide range of sporting and non-sporting activities. About 40% of full-time students were participating in the enrichment programme at the time of the inspection.

27. The college encourages, but does not require, full-time students aged 16 to 18 to complete one key skill. At least a third of students choose not to study a key skill. At level 2, key skills in communication and application of number have recently been integrated with GCSE English and mathematics courses. At level 3, students can attend discrete key skills lessons which prepare them for the tests and help them plan their portfolios. To date, achievements in key skills have been poor, primarily due to few students completing their portfolios. A clear strategy of embedding key skills assessment into students' main courses of study has started to demonstrate positive results in communication and application of number, but less so in IT.

28. The college collaborates extensively and effectively with other local providers to ensure that students' needs and interests are met. A particularly constructive partnership with Stoke-on-Trent College has resulted in a joint sixth form centre in Burslem, which makes a valuable contribution to widening post-16 participation in the north of the city. Gaps in provision at levels 1 and 2 are not critical due to sensible referral arrangements between the local colleges. Some 150 pupils aged 14 to 16 from local high schools are currently attending the college under the Increased Flexibility (IF) programme to take a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) or vocational GCSE course.

29. Student support services are well planned and co-ordinated to best meet the needs of students. They have good access to an appropriate range of information, advice and guidance services. The learning resources centre houses specialist staff, including two Connexions personal advisers, a behaviour mentor, and several learning mentors who help students improve their study skills. Two specialists work with students with dyslexia and numeracy needs, an able and talented co-ordinator promotes ways of extending the learning of more able students, and a community liaison tutor promotes links with the black minority ethnic community and challenges cultural barriers to learning.

Students benefit from extensive links to a wide range of external agencies, such as the local lesbian and gay centres, drugs and housing advice and health centres. Students value this network of support and are very clear about where and how to access specialist services.

30. Before entry to the college, students receive detailed and impartial guidance on the range of courses, programmes and career opportunities. Through a series of open evenings, taster sessions, interactive college presentations and discussions with college staff, prospective students are helped to make realistic and informed choices. Clear and informative packs are sent to applicants during the summer months. Subject departments, support staff and personal tutors all play an active part in the initial guidance of students through various college events.

31. An effective careers education and guidance programme is integrated with the tutorial process and provides a wide range of informative material to assist students at all stages of their programme. Students value the one-to-one guidance and the open evenings led by specialist staff, who provide helpful recruitment advice. An employers' fair, held for the first time in 2004, was attended by 15 employers and training providers and attracted 100 students. The college has developed strategies to support students at risk. A summer residential event in partnership with local universities and colleges was held in 2004. The programme was designed to encourage progression of students aged 17 and over, and all 23 of the students who participated were retained. Students falling behind in their studies are required to attend the vacation study 'catch-up programme'. Specialist courses are available for the more able and talented students.

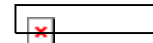
32. Induction is well planned and structured and enables students to settle into the college quickly. Students receive a comprehensive pack of essential information and a detailed planner, which includes useful tips and contacts, in which they can record assignment deadlines, tutorial and review dates. It also provides details of the college charter, student entitlement, progress reviews, the appeals procedure, and the support available to students. Teachers provide high levels of academic and pastoral support to students, much of it channelled through tutorials. Subject specialists contribute to a wide and varied programme of learning activities which are made available through the tutorial system.

33. The college provides extensive and positive opportunities for students' involvement in college activities. For example, the initiative known as the VIP scheme develops students as ambassadors for the college at promotional events, encourages their involvement in charity and community initiatives, and trains them to provide mentor support to colleagues. Any student may volunteer for this scheme and over 100 students participate. Students value the opportunities provided to voice their opinions through the student forums. Students' work is displayed prominently throughout the college and this reflects the strong ethos of celebrating and sharing the achievements of students.

34. There is no strategy for the management and implementation of additional learning support for students with literacy and numeracy needs at the main college. Appropriate tests for literacy and numeracy are currently under review. Individual support needs for literacy and numeracy are not identified through diagnostic testing and do not inform the development of individual learning plans. Students at the Burslem centre have access to a more tailored programme of learning support supported by clear procedures and documentation, appropriately qualified staff and specialist resources. At the main college site, some procedures are in place for initial screening of dyslexia, learning styles and study skills. Study skills and dyslexia are supported effectively by learning mentors and one-to-one specialist support. Limited software packages are available for students with literacy, numeracy and dyslexia needs. The college does not have a hearing loop system and the range of adaptive technology is limited.

35. The college has made an effective response to child protection legislation. There is a designated member of staff and two deputies. All staff, including a link governor, have received training which included recognising signs of abuse. Appropriate procedures are in place for staff to follow. Enhanced disclosure is carried out for all new staff and the college has good links with relevant external agencies.

Leadership and management



36. Leadership and management are good. The college brands itself as a young person's college and provides effective support mechanisms to boost the development, confidence and social skills of individual students. The college has made significant improvements in the performance and quality of courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18, its major provision. Pass rates have risen in recent years and are slightly above national averages. Many students embark on level 3 programmes with relatively low grade GCSE scores. Even if they do not gain high grade passes at level 3, the ethos and values of the college and the support offered help their personal and social development. Value added analysis shows that the grade performance of students relative to their prior attainment has improved since 2002 at GCE A level and has risen significantly at AS level. Retention and pass rates on evening courses for adults are low and declining. This is only a small element of the college's work, but is not managed or monitored with sufficient rigour.

37. The principal and senior managers display strong leadership in embedding the vision and values of the college, to provide high-quality education in a caring environment. These themes are supported firmly by all staff and by the governors. The strategic plan is clear and creative. It is based on a thorough understanding of the local educational and social context, including levels of deprivation and low aspiration. This plan, and associated development and operational plans, are geared towards increasing participation in education and the provision of programmes to meet individual need. Target setting for retention and pass rates is undertaken against realistic guidelines.

38. The college is strongly committed to boosting the social and economic regeneration of the Stoke-on-Trent area. Much effective collaboration takes place with other educational providers. Excellent co-operation with the local general further education (FE) college has provided a sixth form centre which has widened participation in the north of the city. The venture also involves common timetabling with a high school which enables 40 more students to study at the centre. The college also has good links with schools for pupils aged 11 to 16, designed to increase progression rates. Effective links have been forged with local universities to raise aspirations and promote progression into HE. A 'partnership for learning' has been established for joint planning with the three other local colleges in the area, supported by the local LSC. The college also works closely with organisations promoting the economic and social regeneration of the city. For example, it is exploring relocation to the university quarter, to be part of a key regeneration project. Collaboration with local bodies takes place in an atmosphere of trust and high regard for the college.

39. Equality of opportunity and diversity are promoted strongly by the college. It has made an appropriate response to the SENDA. Lifts have been installed to enable wheelchair access to all specialist and most general rooms at the Fenton campus. Much is done to recognise and celebrate cultural diversity and to support the progress of students from minority ethnic groups. For example, a learning mentor has been appointed to work with students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students of minority ethnic origin exceeds that in the local population. A group of female students of Pakistani background won an award from the local Race Equality Council for their work in promoting participation in education and understanding of their cultural background. The college itself won a similar award as institution of the year. It spent the prize money on developing a multi-faith prayer room, a facility requested by students. However, the proportion of staff of minority ethnic background is smaller than that in the local population. To address this imbalance, the college has advertised vacancies in journals and newspapers geared towards minority ethnic groups.

40. The college has produced an appropriate race equality policy. Managers conduct a thorough review of the performance of students by ethnic origin and gender. This analysis is reported to governors. Pass rates of students of Pakistani background, the largest minority ethnic group, slightly exceed those of students who are of white origin. Through the Equal Opportunities Committee, action plans are in place to seek to redress gender imbalances in recruitment, and low retention and pass rates by particular ethnic groups. An audit has been conducted of equal opportunities within the

curriculum. This has been followed up by discussions with focus groups of students and the shadowing of students, to see equal opportunities through students' eyes. Bullying and harassment are dealt with firmly. Students feel they study in a safe environment in which diversity is respected.

41. A key part of the college's quality improvement strategy is the identification of courses causing concern. Assistant principals and curriculum managers explore the root causes of poor performance and agree tailored action plans with teaching teams. All eight subject areas giving concern in 2003 showed increases in pass rates in 2004. The college has had less success in raising retention rates, which are broadly satisfactory for students aged 16 to 18, but reflect a high drop-out rate for 17 year olds across the city. However, actions to engage students over the summer of 2004 did help increase the proportion of students returning for the second year of their programmes. This was an issue of major concern for the college in previous years.

42. The college has developed a detailed approach to self-assessment, although the summative reports devote too little attention to perceived weaknesses and are insufficiently self-critical in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in many curriculum areas. The college's internal lesson observation scheme exaggerates the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers have recognised this and have involved an external consultant to moderate internal observations and train observers further. However, curriculum managers do not routinely observe their own teaching staff. Students' views are actively sought and are taken seriously by managers and governors. As well as undertaking periodic surveys of students' views, the student forum meets twice per term. The college management team and the governors discuss the outcomes, which are presented by student governors. Managers make formal responses back to the forum, agreeing changes, advising on the resolution of problems, or explaining why change is not possible or practicable. A student shop and improved furnishing in classrooms have been introduced in direct response to students' requests.

43. Despite quality improvements in a number of areas, the performance management of teaching staff is underdeveloped. The appraisal system is not operated rigorously. In 2003/04, less than half of the teachers were appraised whereas college policy required all to be covered. The lesson observation team observed only 70% of teachers rather than the 100% targeted. The staff development plan is clearly linked to strategic objectives and appraisal outcomes where available. Planning for teaching to meet the needs and aptitudes of all students has been a major theme of staff development, though the inspection indicates that teachers have not yet mastered techniques to achieve this in the classroom. There are inconsistencies in approaches to moderating assessed work across curriculum areas. The college has no mechanism to monitor or audit such standards, other than comments in the self-assessment reports. The college has yet to develop a clear strategy to meet the literacy and numeracy needs of students identified as requiring support.

44. The management structure of the college was revised in 2002. Management training, with an emphasis on the management of teaching and learning, has been a key focus of staff development. Standards of curriculum management are generally good. The curriculum is well planned. Subject teams meet frequently and communication is good within sections. However, the sharing of good practice is insufficiently developed in humanities and social sciences. Analysis of students' performance is generally thorough. Action planning for improvement is focused and effective in some curriculum areas, but lacks rigour and precise milestones to measure the impact of policies in most.

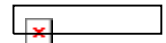
45. Governance is strong. Governors are well informed about the academic performance of the college. They question and challenge senior managers appropriately, and use their expertise well on relevant committees. Governors' training needs are identified clearly and effective clerking ensures training and induction are matched to individual needs. Governors participate in an annual review of the strategic direction of the college with senior managers at a weekend planning event. In 2004, this session involved presentations by a number of student groups, giving their perceptions of student life at the college. Individual governors are linked with a number of functional areas of the college, including child protection. However, links with curriculum areas are less developed.

46. Communication is good in the college. Time slots are allocated for weekly curriculum team meetings, section meetings and staff briefings from senior managers. There are whole-staff meetings usually twice each term. A weekly staff newsletter is produced. Staff are well informed

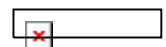
about college developments. Access to, and use of, management information systems are satisfactory. Managers and teachers make good use of the curriculum reports produced, which provide very useful background information on each student in a lesson. Assistant principals and senior tutors have computerised access to attendance and retention and pass rates data, and share these with curriculum managers. However, curriculum managers and teachers do not have computerised access to most reports and are thus reliant on paper copies, which may not be current.

47. The college has failed to reach its funding targets in recent years and has had to repay money to the local LSC. However, recruitment of students in the current year is at record levels and the college is more optimistic about meeting its funding target. Financial management procedures and reporting are sound. The college is embarking on a benchmarking exercise to compare its cost structure with four other sixth form colleges in the region. Room utilisation is high and teachers are timetabled to their contracted hours. Attendance rates in lessons observed during inspection are a little below the average seen in inspections nationally, but the average number of students present in lessons matches the national average. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- high retention rates

- high pass rates on most GCSE and GCE A-level courses

- much effective and demanding teaching

- extensive range of courses

- good course and curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- decline in pass rates in vocational science and AS-level physics courses in 2004

- insufficient use of ILT in lessons

- cramped laboratory accommodation

- poor attendance and lack of punctuality.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers GCE A-level and AS-level courses in biology, chemistry, electronics, environmental science, geology, mathematics, further mathematics and physics. Vocational science courses are available at level 2 in the form of the GNVQ intermediate in science and at level 3 in the form of the AVCE in science. The college's full-time foundation level course is centred on a science core. GCSE courses in human biology, science and mathematics are offered to students at both foundation and intermediate levels. The vast majority of students attend full time and are aged 16 to 18. There are over 900 enrolments in science and almost 500 in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

49. Pass rates on most GCSE and GCE A-level courses are high. The pass rates in GCSE human biology and science are well above the national average, and the pass rate in GCSE mathematics has risen to the national level. Pass rates in GCE A-level subjects have all risen to a level at, or above, the national average. In 2004, pass rates in GCE A-level electronics, environmental science and geology were 100%. The pass rate in GCE A-level physics rose by 13% compared to the previous year. Pass rates in AS-level subjects have all risen to the national average except in AS-level physics where the pass rate was well below the national average in 2004. Pass rates in the GNVQ intermediate and AVCE science courses also declined in 2004. The proportion of advanced level students achieving grades A and B is well below national average in all courses except AS-level biology and GCE A-level mathematics and physics. Students' grades in GCE A-level and AS-level subjects relative to their prior attainment at GCSE have shown improvement. Nevertheless, with the exception of AS-level electronics and GCE A-level geology, they are still below the national averages for sixth form colleges.

50. Retention rates are high. For example, the retention rate in AS-level mathematics is 94% compared with a national average of 89%. Students generally demonstrate high levels of attainment within lessons. The quality of students' assignments and project work is high. They make effective use of the Internet to enhance the quality of their work. For example, good ICT skills are very apparent in the project work of GNVQ foundation science students. However, students are often late for lessons at the start of the day and after short breaks. The average attendance at lessons observed during inspection was low at 82%. Nevertheless, students are well motivated, work productively and demonstrate good academic knowledge and understanding.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ intermediate in	2	No. of starts	17	18	27

science		% retention	71	83	85
		% pass rate	75	80	74
GCSE science (double award)	2	No. of starts	40	35	25
		% retention	93	83	80
		% pass rate	76	45	60
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	151	190	234
		% retention	90	93	81
		% pass rate	35	32	45
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	77	60	55
		% retention	95	95	96
		% pass rate	79	81	72
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	167	173	130
		% retention	97	94	94
		% pass rate	60	58	78
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	82	93	105
		% retention	95	99	94
		% pass rate	94	92	91
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	44	43	66
		% retention	98	98	91
		% pass rate	91	90	95

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

Quality of education and training

51. Much of the teaching is good or very good. Lessons are well planned and learning objectives are clear and usually achieved. All teachers are knowledgeable about their subject. In most lessons, teachers give clear explanations and regularly check students' understanding through the use of open questioning. Good use is made of experimental work in science to reinforce theory. For example, in an AVCE science lesson on chemical equilibrium, the teacher demonstrated effectively a reversible reaction by heating and cooling copper sulphate crystals. In most lessons, teachers have planned a wide range of activities which help to stimulate learning. In one GCSE mathematics lesson, for example, students were introduced effectively to the topic of probability by undertaking different group activities. In science, students pursue experiments with care and enthusiasm. For example, in a chemistry GCE A-level lesson, students observed all the safe practices required when studying the reactions of metal ions with ammonia to form complex ions. Teachers make insufficient use of ILT to enliven their lessons, maintain students' interest and extend their learning.

52. Teachers are well qualified and all have relevant specialist teaching experience. Technician support is good. Although classrooms are well furnished, the science laboratories are cramped and two mathematics rooms are too small for the size of groups occupying them. This restricts the range of classroom and practical activities that can be used. Stimulating wall posters are evident in all areas and good examples of students' work are displayed in most rooms. The library has an adequate stock of mathematics textbooks, but many science textbooks are outdated and have not been borrowed recently. Only a minority of rooms have data projectors and those in science are not linked to the college network. Science and mathematics sections of the intranet site are well developed.

53. Homework is set regularly and students' work is marked carefully. Teachers develop good

materials to support assessment and assignments are well planned, interesting and lead to purposeful learning. Most teachers make constructive comments and give helpful feedback. Regular progress reports are discussed with students and sent to their parents or carers.

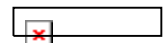
54. Students speak highly of the effective individual support they receive from their teachers. They make good use of weekly workshops to reinforce or extend their subject understanding. Revision lessons are offered in vacation periods. Students' progress relative to their minimum target grades is monitored effectively. Students diagnosed with dyslexia receive good support. Students' absences are followed-up thoroughly by subject and personal tutors. Systematic consideration and proper responses are given to students' comments and feedback.

55. There is a broad curriculum in science and mathematics. A comparatively wide range of subjects is offered at AS level and GCE A level. Full-time vocational courses are available at levels 1, 2 and 3. GCSE courses are available at both foundation and intermediate levels in human biology, science and mathematics. The learning experience of some science students is enhanced through field trips, industrial visits and attendance at 'master classes' at the local universities. Students make good use of the opportunities to progress from foundation and intermediate levels to advanced level programmes in both academic and vocational courses. A large proportion of AS-level students continue the same subject at GCE A level and a significant proportion of students subsequently move into HE.

Leadership and management

56. Curriculum management is good. Subject teams work well together and share good practice. Communications between managers and teachers are effective. Teachers regularly review students' performance at meetings. There is a clear emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning and students' views are taken fully into account when reviewing courses. Links with schools are well established and joint training activities with staff from another sixth form college have provided useful professional development. Although the self-assessment reports recognise the weaknesses identified in the inspection, they are not sufficiently self-critical and action plans lack rigour.

Business and information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses

- effective use of ILT to support learning

- good academic and pastoral support

- effective sharing of good practice.

Weaknesses

- declining achievements in AS-level business studies and ICT

- low retention and pass rates on part-time courses for adults

- teaching that fails to motivate all students

- insufficient monitoring of assessment practices in ICT

- underdeveloped links with industry.

Scope of provision

57. At advanced level, full-time students can take AS-level and GCE A-level courses in accounting, business studies, economics, computing and ICT, or vocational courses in the form of AVCE business or ICT. At level 2, the college offers the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma in business and the GNVQ intermediate in ICT. These courses recruit mainly students aged 16 to 18. In addition, a vocational GCSE in business studies is provided for 14 to 16 year olds from local schools. There is no full-time provision at level 1. A variety of part-time IT courses aimed at adult students are delivered in the evening. There are currently around 800 enrolments by full-time students on business and ICT courses and 30 adult students attending part-time evening courses.

Achievement and standards

58. Retention rates are broadly in line with national averages. Pass rates are high on several courses. In 2004, pass rates rose to well above the national average in GNVQ intermediate in IT, AS-level accounting and AS-level computing. The percentage of students achieving high grades in AS-level computing also increased to 46%, significantly above the national average of 28%. However, pass rates in AS-level business studies and ICT, including the proportion of students achieving high grades, have declined over the last 3 years and are below national averages. In AS-level accounting there was also a clear increase in 2004 in the proportion of students achieving better grades than anticipated from their GCSE scores. Generally, however, value added data suggest most students make no better than average progress in this curriculum area. Retention and pass rates are generally low on part-time courses for adults, where student numbers are very small.

59. The standard of students' work in lessons is generally satisfactory. Students in computing and ICT have well-developed practical skills and make good use of the Internet for research for projects and assignments. The majority of students are able to work well at their own pace from workbooks and task sheets. ILT is used to good effect in many business lessons to support and enhance the learning, and often theory is reinforced by practical application using computers. Attendance is good and students are punctual to lessons on most courses, but the start of some lessons is delayed or disrupted by students arriving late.

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 intermediate in IT	2	No. of starts	40	39	18
		% retention	88	87	94
		% pass rate	57	71	88
AS-level ICT	3	No. of starts	138	125	118
		% retention	92	86	85
		% pass rate	76	67	69
AS-level computing	3	No. of starts	53	60	40
		% retention	96	90	98
		% pass rate	88	87	95
AS-level accounting	3	No. of starts	29	33	32
		% retention	93	97	91
		% pass rate	85	53	93
AS-level business studies	3	No. of starts	163	156	131
		% retention	93	90	90
		% pass rate	86	76	74
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	91	106	83
		% retention	97	95	93
		% pass rate	94	98	97
AVCE in ICT (double award)	3	No. of starts	32	32	23
		% retention	97	97	87
		% pass rate	74	97	90

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

Quality of education and training

60. Teaching is generally satisfactory. In the better lessons progress is brisk, the learning activities selected succeed in engaging the students' attention and teachers actively encourage students' involvement through monitoring progress and prompting responses. Good lesson planning promotes these positive features as well as clearly identifying the learning outcomes students should achieve. Teachers use high-quality learning materials and, in many lessons, ILT is used effectively to reinforce and extend the learning. Some teachers provide a thorough recapitulation at the end of each lesson and use a variety of evaluative methods to check the level of understanding and to consolidate key points. In one lesson on computer malpractice and crime, the teacher added interest by demonstrating the download of a virus and its impact on files. This was followed by a lively discussion on computer security and a range of activities which used realistic scenarios to illustrate theoretical issues.

61. However, too many lessons fail to motivate students or make sufficient demands upon them. In some lessons, there is a bland mix of teaching and learning activities which fail to stimulate students. Teachers make too little effort to involve all students. For example, there is little use of targeted questioning. In some IT workshops the rate of progress is slow, there is no clear focus on learning and lessons are not managed well. Adults attending part-time evening lessons work well at their own

pace, closely following the workbooks provided. There is little group interaction or formal tracking of progress, but teachers give good support to individual students.

62. Teachers are well qualified in their subject area. The majority have teaching qualifications, but there has been little, if any, recent industrial updating. Good use is made of ILT to support the teaching and learning. College online resources to support students' learning are being developed and materials so far produced are of a high standard. These resources are accessible to students both in the college and at home. Interactive revision materials to assist with the preparation of examination and internal tests are available online. DVDs are used effectively in lessons to bring the subject to life and enhance learning.

63. Students are provided with an assessment timetable and clear information on the criteria that have to be met. Interim assessments are used purposefully to monitor students' progress in relation to their target grades. While assessment is generally fair and accurate, and meets awarding body requirements, marking and feedback are of variable quality. Some assessed work contains minimal feedback with little or no constructive comments on how students can improve. However, there are some excellent examples of assessed work with detailed comments and advice giving clear guidance for improvement.

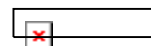
64. Links with industry are underdeveloped. Students do not have sufficient opportunities to undertake work placements and the use of external visits and visiting speakers is limited. In some lessons, teachers are unable to place particular topics into an appropriate business context and little reference is made to current business practices. In addition to the college-based courses, AS-level courses in business and ICT and the GNVQ intermediate in business are provided at the sixth form centre in Burslem. The ICT key skill is taught mainly in discrete lessons and less progress has been made in integrating the assessment of IT with students' main courses of study than is the case with the other key skills. Pass rates are low due to students failing to complete their portfolios. The take-up of college enrichment activities by business and ICT students is limited.

65. Students receive very good advice and guidance at interview and during the induction process. All full-time students have a scheduled group tutorial each week with their personal tutor and an additional allocation of time for one-to-one tutorials with the curriculum manager. Subject reviews are carried out 3 times a year to measure progress and set targets. Part-time students do not benefit from tutorials and there is no formal tracking of progress. All full-time students are screened for literacy and numeracy and the outcomes are passed to subject staff to inform their lesson planning. Although lesson plans tend to highlight these learning needs, teachers do not yet have strategies for meeting them.

Leadership and management

66. Leadership and management are good in these curriculum areas, with a clear commitment to improvement. There are clear lines of responsibility and good communication channels, with regular meetings to disseminate information and monitor course performance. Course files, schemes of work and lesson plans are well presented, but have not become effective tools for improving standards. Sharing of good practice is increasingly taking place on a formal as well as informal basis and there is a high level of liaison and co-operation between teams, particularly for assessment practice in business and materials development in ICT. These developments have not yet had a measurable impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Strategies have been put in place to improve achievement in AS-level business studies and ICT, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of these. The self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical and the action plan lacks rigour.

Sports, leisure, travel and public services



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

Strengths

- high-quality student work
- much stimulating and challenging teaching on sports courses
- outstanding sports facilities
- good management of links with external organisations.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on first diploma in sport
- insufficient progress relative to prior attainment.

Scope of provision

67. The college offers a wide range of full-time courses in sport, leisure and travel and tourism at levels 2 and 3. Courses include the first diploma in sport, first diploma in uniformed services, AVCE in travel and tourism, AVCE in leisure and recreation, BTEC national certificate in sport, and AS-level and GCE A-level physical education. A range of short courses, such as the national pool lifeguard and rugby leaders' awards, provides opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications. There are currently 385 full-time students taking part in sport, leisure, and tourism courses, 51 at level 2 and 334 at level 3, all aged 16 to 18. There is no part-time provision.

Achievement and standards

68. Students' achievements are satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on most courses are either in line with the national averages or, in some cases, significantly higher. In 2003, for example, retention and pass rates in AVCE travel and tourism were both 100%. Retention rates in AS-level and GCE A-level physical education have been consistently above the national averages for the last three years. However, many students make insufficient progress relative to their prior achievement. In GCE A-level physical education, for example, the proportion of students achieving their predicted grades is low. The pass rate in AS-level physical education is declining and was below the national average in 2004. Completion rates on the short sports leadership course are also low. There is good progression both within the curriculum area and into HE and vocationally-related employment.

69. The written work of most students is of a high quality. Assignments and portfolios are well presented and demonstrate students' highly developed ICT skills. Portfolios contain a wide range of vocationally-relevant and detailed work. Students on sports courses are confident, well motivated and show a clear understanding of the links between theory and practice. They reach high standards of sporting performance, gaining local and representative honours in a variety of sports. Generally,

students are very enthusiastic about their studies and, in making class presentations, they demonstrate good skills in research, presentation and collaborative group work. Attendance is satisfactory and students are punctual to lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in sports, leisure, travel and public services, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
First diploma in sport (and precursor)	2	No. of starts	17	21	21
		% retention	88	81	90
		% pass rate	67	82	79
GCE A-level physical education	3	No. of starts	81	67	76
		% retention	100	97	95
		% pass rate	96	97	93
AS-level physical education	3	No. of starts	95	121	125
		% retention	91	86	90
		% pass rate	93	91	85
AVCE leisure and recreation and travel and tourism (single awards)	3	No. of starts	29	29	19
		% retention	79	79	84
		% pass rate	57	83	94

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

Quality of education and training

70. Much teaching is good, particularly in sports lessons. In the most effective lessons, clear objectives are set and teachers use a variety of teaching methods. Lessons are stimulating, demanding and often fun. In one GCE A-level physical education lesson, for example, the teacher used 'boxercise' to explore energy pathways, transforming factual theory into an enjoyable practical activity through which students learned effectively. The sharing of good practice and teaching materials is encouraged and valued. It has led to teachers making good use of powerpoint video clips and miniature whiteboards on which students can share their own ideas. Teachers are enthusiastic and often have a lively style of presentation. In practical sports lessons, students are given the opportunity to plan, deliver and evaluate fitness assessment sessions. The skills demonstrated by these students were of a high order and their teachers managed the evaluation process sensitively. Teachers are quick to link theory and practice effectively and they encourage students to highlight examples from their own work placement or experience. In the less satisfactory lessons, the teaching is uninspiring and fails to motivate students sufficiently, which results in students not paying attention.

71. The specialist sports facilities for both curriculum studies and recreational activities are outstanding. Sports courses and teaching staff are based in an £8 million sports complex shared with the local authority, with exclusive use of many facilities during the day. Dedicated teaching rooms have attractive wall displays, interactive whiteboards and data projectors. The majority of sports teachers have a specialist qualification and are involved in national and local sports initiatives. Teachers are eager to take up professional development opportunities and some also act as external exam board moderators and specialist trainers for national organisations.

72. Assessment is good. It is accurate, fair and carried out regularly. Assignments are well designed and cover very appropriate topics. Students' progress is monitored closely. Assignments are marked carefully and returned with constructive feedback that enables students to improve their performance.

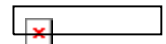
73. There is good academic and pastoral support for students, including a well-organised system for supporting students giving cause for concern. The assessment of individual students' needs and learning styles is increasingly influencing the teaching and support provided. Course inductions are well planned and prepare students successfully for their programmes of study. Students have good access to teachers and value the support they receive.

74. There is good curriculum enrichment. Students' participation in the sports academy, external visits and short courses broadens their experience considerably. There are good opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications, such as coaching certificates, and take-up rates are high. Very good links have been developed with an impressive range of external sporting bodies. Students develop a good understanding of current industry practice through these links and clearly recognise the relevance of what they are studying to their future employment. The college provides successfully a GCSE leisure and tourism course for year 10 pupils from local schools.

Leadership and management

75. Leadership and management are good. Teaching teams meet regularly and focus on curriculum issues in order to raise standards. Teachers work well together and are encouraged to share good practice. Communication across the curriculum area is good. The extensive links with external bodies are very well managed to maximise the benefits to students. The curriculum manager, supported by programme leaders, has initiated a range of strategies to raise retention and pass rates. For example, some underperforming courses have been withdrawn and new courses introduced which better match the needs of students. It is too early to judge the success of these initiatives.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses

- much very good and outstanding teaching

- high standards of creativity demonstrated in all subjects

- excellent resources for design, media and dance

- links with industry and HE enhance the student experience

- very good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient provision at level 2 and for adults.

Scope of provision

76. Some 680 students are enrolled on one or more courses within the visual and performing arts and media curriculum area. Courses offered include AS levels and GCE A levels in art and design, dance, design technology, film studies, media studies, music, performance studies and theatre studies. A BTEC first diploma in art and design was introduced in 2004. General courses are also available in fine art, sculpture, textiles and graphics. Evening lessons for adults in digital photography, drawing and painting, computer-aided design and pottery were being followed by 44 students at the time of inspection. AS-level and GCE A-level media studies are available at the Burslem sixth form centre and an applied GCSE in art and design is provided for 14 to 16 year old pupils from local high schools at the main college site.

Achievement and standards

77. Students' achievements are generally very good and in some subjects outstanding. Pass rates in GCE A-level art, design, music, film studies, performance studies and dance are 100%. In art, music and dance and in AS-level fine art, pass rates have been 100% for the last two years. The proportion of students achieving high grades is above national average in AS-level art, design, film studies and dance. However, the pass rate in AS-level drama has been below the national average in each of the last three years. The degree of progress made by students relative to their GCSE performance has improved steadily over the last three years and is now generally very good. Retention rates are at, or above, national averages and are outstanding in most GCE A-level subjects. Retention rates in AS-level design technology are below national average. Progression to HE courses is good, with some students securing places on the more competitive university arts courses.

78. The standard of students' work is generally very high and in some subject areas it is outstanding. A range of ambitious, large-scale pieces of art and design work are displayed throughout the college, clearly celebrating the achievements of students whose work is of a consistently high standard. The music video and promotional packaging displayed as part of the GCE A-level media coursework is excellent and demonstrates a high degree of aesthetics and good design practice. The level of analysis, synthesis and evaluation presented by media students is outstanding. The standard of the model making and three-dimensional work by design students is very high, with some interesting jardinières incorporating a range of materials based on the Memphis group. Freehand drawing and thumbnail sketching in design technology is underdeveloped.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level media studies	3	No. of starts	118	106	104
		% retention	86	88	88
		% pass rate	86	91	97
AS-level art studies (fine art)	3	No. of starts	49	41	57
		% retention	98	95	95

		% pass rate	90	100	100
GCE A-level drama	3	No. of starts	38	26	19
		% retention	97	96	100
		% pass rate	89	100	95
GCE A-level media studies	3	No. of starts	63	69	69
		% retention	95	95	99
		% pass rate	100	100	99
GCE A-level design technology	3	No. of starts	18	38	25
		% retention	100	100	96
		% pass rate	94	93	100

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

Quality of education and training

79. Teaching and learning are very good across the curriculum area and are outstanding in media, design, dance and film studies. Lesson plans are focussed on students and are task-oriented. The best lessons use a wide range of teaching and learning strategies successfully. These provide significant depth, texture and contrast to the learning experience. An outstanding lesson in dance was taught with enthusiasm and energy. This challenged the students to excel and to respond in a creative and individual manner. Learning was continually checked and assessed and students were given colour-differentiated choreographic task cards to extend all levels of ability. A very good lesson in performance studies focused on political theatre since 1956 and the use of satire. The teacher set political theatre in context and enabled the students to relate it to their own world. In art and design, teachers ensure that students develop their own formal visual language in order to be able to analyse their own work and the work of others.

80. Teachers are well qualified and experienced and have good specialist knowledge and expertise. Many of them are actively engaged in developing their own practice by exhibiting artwork, writing a product design textbook or being principal examiners for national examination boards. They have recent industrial, professional and performance experience and several have taken part in residential placements at national car manufacturers. Some of the facilities and resources are outstanding. The performing arts area benefits from an excellent 250-seat theatre with space for dance and drama, and the facilities available for film and media studies are very good. However, the open-plan accommodation for art is inadequate for the increased numbers of students. The residual noise from the adjoining studios is disruptive and Internet access is not available in the art block.

81. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are very good. Assessment is well organised, regular and leads to continuous improvement. Learning is checked during lessons to assess individual progress and understanding of the topics being taught. In media and film studies, teachers provide marking guidelines which are supportive and constructive. They help the students to know where they are up to and also how they can improve performance.

82. Good links have been developed with industry and the community. These help to provide vocational focus and relevance. Product design students are involved with a company designing sports drinks bottles, kit bags and body armour for skateboarders. Throughout the project, company managers monitor the progress of the students, evaluating their prototypes and individual design folders. Close links with a theatre in a neighbouring town have led to additional tutoring in stage

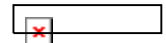
lighting for drama students. The range of enrichment opportunities is wide and includes residential cultural visits to London and visits to galleries, museums and theatres. Useful connections with media companies enrich the learning experience for media students. Staff from HE institutions provide portfolio reviews and advice and guidance on future progression opportunities. The range of courses for adult students is very limited and fails to give them access to many of the high-quality resources available at the college. Level 2 provision for full-time students provides a pathway in vocational art and design, but not for performing arts and media.

83. Guidance and support for students are excellent. Teachers help to promote and nurture students' individuality successfully and develop, through their teaching and tutorial support, students' ability to learn independently. There are clear communications between teachers and learning mentors, who provide study support to students. This is taken up by a large number of students in this curriculum area. Teachers provide workshops and studios during vacation periods to give additional tuition to students who fall behind in their project work.

Leadership and management

84. Curriculum leadership and course management are very good. Success rates are high and continuing to rise across the curriculum area. The management structure and team organisation are well defined and understood. The lines of communication are clear. Quality procedures are well established and all staff are involved in their implementation. Self-assessment reports are very clear and rigorous. They celebrate achievements and good practice, but are also reliable in identifying areas for improvement. Regular team meetings focus on students' performance and progress. Teachers are pro-active in sharing good practice within the curriculum area. They also play a leading role in cross-college staff development on marking and assessment, and team building.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- very high quality discussion in philosophy and religious studies lessons
- good use of ILT to enhance students' learning in geography
- very wide range of subjects
- strong academic support for students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates in AS-level archaeology and geography

- small proportion of high grades in GCE A-level subjects

- insufficient use of questioning to challenge and assess individual students' learning

- insufficient sharing of good practice.

Scope of provision

85. Students can take AS-level and GCE A-level courses in archaeology, classical civilisation, critical thinking, geography, general studies, history, philosophy and religious studies. History is the most popular subject with 172 students. Subjects which are less popular in other sixth form colleges succeed in attracting significant numbers, with 87 following philosophy and 54 on religious studies courses. Archaeology has the lowest number of students: 14 at AS level and 5 at GCE A level. A low number of adult students are studying AS-level archaeology in the evening. There are currently 981 students enrolled on one or more humanities subject.

Achievement and standards

86. Students' achievements are satisfactory. Pass rates have risen on most courses and in 2004 they are generally at, or close to, the national averages. Pass rates in AS-level and GCE A-level classical studies and AS-level general studies are high. In AS-level and GCE A-level archaeology and AS-level geography, pass rates are low. The pass rate in AS-level geography has declined over the last three years to significantly below the national average. A small proportion of students achieve high grades in GCE A-level subjects. In most subjects, students do not achieve the grades predicted from their GCSE performance. Retention rates are satisfactory and are mostly in line with national averages, but show a declining trend over the last three years.

87. Students are enthusiastic and are well prepared for lessons. Essays they produce are well constructed and argument is supported by appropriate evidence. History and archaeology students show good skills in extracting information from written sources. However, the writing skills of weaker students are underdeveloped and their work lacks sufficient detail and structure. Weak numerical skills slowed the pace of learning in one general studies lesson. Most students who study archaeology, history and classical civilisation progress to HE. Attendance is satisfactory and students are punctual to lessons.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	91	86	82
		% retention	95	92	87
		% pass rate	92	80	93
AS-level philosophy	3	No. of starts	44	39	45
		% retention	95	87	87
		% pass rate	86	76	79

AS-level classical civilisation	3	No. of starts	35	20	24
		% retention	94	90	92
		% pass rate	88	83	100
AS-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	32	21	21
		% retention	97	90	90
		% pass rate	100	84	89
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	68	64	52
		% retention	97	98	94
		% pass rate	94	90	98
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	57	54	54
		% retention	96	96	94
		% pass rate	98	94	96
GCE A-level general studies	3	No. of starts	123	198	188
		% retention	96	97	87
		% pass rate	81	62	83

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

Quality of education and training

88. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are well prepared and succeed in maintaining students' interest. Very high-quality discussion takes place in lessons in philosophy and religious studies. Students offer their views confidently and are willing to take risks to further their learning. Teachers are systematic in asking probing questions to help students develop their ideas and confidence. However, in the majority of lessons, teachers do not target sufficient questions at individual students to extend their understanding and assess their learning. Teachers in geography and religious studies use ILT well to enhance students' learning. In one GCE A-level geography lesson, following a well-illustrated presentation using a data projector, students undertook an environmental impact study on a coral reef. All students were able to justify their decisions. In the weaker lessons, learning objectives are too general and the pace of learning is slow. In AS-level geography lessons, teachers do not allow sufficient time for students to reflect on what they have learned.

89. Resources are good. Teachers are well qualified and have good subject knowledge. They undertake a wide range of staff development activities to keep their skills and subject knowledge up to date. Staff and students have good access to IT. Well-designed learning materials are available on the intranet for students studying geography. Classrooms are clean, well lit and most have data projectors. There are good displays of students' work in classrooms and corridors. In a religious studies classroom, students had displayed a list of words to help familiarise themselves with religious language terminology. The library is well stocked and students have up-to-date textbooks.

90. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Teachers in all subjects set homework frequently and return it promptly. Teachers correct errors in spelling, punctuation and inappropriate phraseology. The best assessment practice, including detailed feedback, is provided in classical studies and religious studies. In general studies and critical thinking, students' work is not annotated with enough guidance to help them improve their performance. A thorough initial assessment provides subject teachers with useful information about students' key skills and learning support needs. Attendance and academic progress are monitored closely. Teachers review the progress of all students closely against target grades based on GCSE performance. Some improvement targets set for students are not sufficiently specific to aid progress.

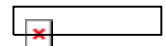
91. Academic support for students is good. Teachers are sensitive to students' needs and give effective support. They give generously of their time outside the classroom. Students are enthusiastic about the quality and availability of support. A programme of revision lessons throughout the year provides good support for students studying history. The range of study guides is good and many of these are available on the college's intranet. Good induction programmes help students make the transition from GCSE to AS level.

92. There is a good choice of AS-level and GCE A-level subjects. Effective collaboration with the local FE college allows students from the north of the city to study AS-level history, geography and general studies at the Burslem sixth form centre. A satisfactory range of enrichment opportunities enhances students' understanding of their subjects. Students visit national and local museums and undertake fieldwork. The philosophy department recently hosted a conference entitled 'Philosophy, Religion and Science' for sixth form students, with speakers of national renown. Enrolment to adult evening courses is low.

Leadership and management

93. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum is well planned. Managers have been successful in raising pass rates, but not retention rates. Analysis of data on achievements is good and actions are planned to improve underperforming subjects. Equality and diversity are managed effectively. Managers actively seek students' views and act on the results. Strategies to improve high grades and develop teaching methods to meet the needs of all students have not yet had a full impact. The self-assessment report is very detailed and identifies most of the college's strengths, but it is less successful at identifying weaknesses in teaching and learning. Insufficient sharing of good practice takes place within subjects and across the area; teachers do not regularly observe other teachers. Appraisal is not used to set targets for course improvement.

Psychology, sociology, law and politics



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

Strengths

- Students' good progress in AS-level government and politics and sociology relative to their prior attainment
- well-planned and effective teaching leading to good participation in learning
- good support for individual students.

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates in AS-level and GCE A-level sociology and AS-level law

- students' lateness disrupting lessons
- insufficient curriculum enrichment in psychology and sociology.

Scope of provision

94. The college offers AS levels and GCE A levels in government and politics, law, psychology and sociology across two sites. These subjects are taken mainly by full-time students aged 16 to 18. Psychology is the most popular subject, with more than 300 students enrolled at AS level and 150 at GCE A level. In sociology, 195 students are taking AS level and 74, GCE A level. In law, there are 187 students studying at AS level and 80 at GCE A level. Government and politics has the lowest number of students: 39 at AS level and 15 at GCE A level. AS-level law and psychology are also offered as evening courses, but only 7 adult students are currently enrolled.

Achievement and standards

95. Students' achievements are satisfactory. Pass rates have generally risen over the last three years and are at, or close to, the national averages. Retention rates on most AS-level courses have declined to below national averages. On GCE A-level courses, retention rates are broadly in line with national averages for most courses. The proportion of students achieving high grades is below national averages on most courses. Students studying AS-level government and politics and sociology in 2004 gained higher grades than those predicted from their GCSE scores. However, many GCE A-level law students gained lower grades than predicted from their earlier attainment levels. There is a high progression rate to HE courses amongst students studying social science subjects.

96. Standards of attainment in lessons are satisfactory or better. In most lessons, students express their views clearly and confidently in debates and discussions. Their work is generally of a high standard and demonstrates a sound knowledge and understanding of the subject. For example, law students studying negligence and general defences understand complex legal concepts and use appropriate terminology accurately. Students demonstrate good skills of analysis and evaluation. In psychology, students were able to evaluate with confidence the effectiveness of several techniques of eyewitness recall and recognition. In some lessons, however, students demonstrate only a basic knowledge of the subject and fail to develop their evaluative and analytical skills more fully. In many of the lessons observed, teaching and learning were disrupted by students' lateness.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	21	18	36
		% retention	95	94	86
		% pass rate	85	88	94
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	136	149	154
		% retention	91	89	81
		% pass rate	69	74	81
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	246	293	261
		% retention	95	86	86

		% pass rate	82	87	86
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	133	132	146
		% retention	95	92	80
		% pass rate	82	77	92
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	125	142	147
		% retention	93	96	97
		% pass rate	85	98	97
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	59	71	63
		% retention	95	99	89
		% pass rate	84	89	96

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

Quality of education and training

97. Most teaching of social science subjects is good. Lessons are planned effectively with clearly stated aims and objectives. Lessons are designed to include a variety of tasks and activities to stimulate students and engage their interest. There are good opportunities for students to contribute through question and answer sessions, discussion and group work. Strong emphasis is placed on enabling students to develop their own skills of reasoning and analysis. In one politics lesson, for example, students working in groups identified many causes for the troubles in Northern Ireland rather than accepting a one-dimensional view. Students in a law lesson provided carefully reasoned judgements on the severity of a crime and debated the sentencing of the offender. In a sociology lesson, students were able to refute Parson's sociological research and identify the flaws in his theory. Effective use is made of ILT in lessons and relevant websites are used by students for research purposes. In most lessons, students are engaged in learning and work hard and purposefully. In a minority of lessons, planning and direction are lacking and learning objectives are unclear. In these lessons, students do not become sufficiently engaged in purposeful learning.

98. All teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Many classrooms are well resourced with data presenters, interactive whiteboards and Internet access. However, accommodation is often cramped in the demountable classrooms used by many psychology and sociology lessons. Students benefit from a wide range of high-quality, college-produced resource materials. They also make good use of online resources through the college's intranet.

99. Students' work is mostly assessed thoroughly. Effective use is made of feedback forms for essays and coursework which set out assessment criteria and give students clear guidance on how to improve. In most cases, this process is supplemented by extensive annotation of each student's work. Teachers' comments are generally positive and helpful. They provide some critical analysis and useful advice on essay construction and spelling and grammatical errors are corrected. In some instances, teachers provide only brief and generalised comments, with insufficient constructive advice. Students' individual learning plans lack specific and meaningful targets to enable them to improve.

100. Students studying these subjects are very well supported. Teachers provide effective encouragement and support in lessons by providing high levels of attention to individual students. They also provide extra help outside lessons through additional workshops, revision lessons and one-to-one advice. In psychology and sociology, additional support is given specifically for guidance on coursework and this results in students improving their grades.

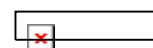
101. At AS level and GCE A level, the range of provision is satisfactory. However, progression opportunities from level 2 are limited, since these subjects are not offered as GCSEs. In law and politics, there is good curriculum enrichment to extend students' learning experience. This takes the

form of visits to local magistrates and crown courts, guest speakers, an annual visit to parliament and organised visits to revision and sixth form conferences. In psychology, no extra-curricula activities are provided. In sociology, curriculum enrichment is limited. Students make good use of the opportunities to develop their key skills in application of number and communication, which are well integrated with their law, psychology and sociology courses.

Leadership and management

102. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Measures to bring about an increase in retention rates and improvements in students' achievements are beginning to be successful. Regular subject team meetings focus mainly on operational issues, but also scrutinise underperforming courses and aspects of teaching and learning. The self-assessment process results in a development plan with targets towards which progress is monitored. Comprehensive data analysis, the outcomes of lesson observations and feedback from students influence the content and priorities of the plan. Equality and diversity issues are managed well. Achievements by gender and ethnicity are monitored carefully and all subject teams monitor their teaching materials closely. However, improvements in teaching and learning are insufficiently established. Sharing of good practice is underdeveloped across all subjects.

English language and literature



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in most AS-level and GCE A-level English courses

- effective group work ensuring high levels of student participation

- good assessment practice helps students to improve

- good course and curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently demanding lessons

- ineffective monitoring of learning.

Scope of provision

103. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in English language, English literature, English language and literature and GCSE English. Over 400 students are following advanced courses and approximately 150 students are currently enrolled on GCSE English. AS-level English literature and GCSE English are also offered at the Burslem sixth form centre. AS-level English language and English literature are offered as part of the college's adult evening provision, but uptake of these courses is small, with only 14 students currently enrolled.

Achievement and standards

104. Students' achievements in AS-level and GCE A-level English are good. Pass rates in GCE A-level English language, English literature and English language and literature have been consistently high over the last three years at 97% and above. Pass rates at AS level are in line with national averages and have risen steadily in English language and literature from 84% in 2002 to 99% in 2004. The pass rate in GCSE English was low in 2003 at 30%, but this improved significantly in 2004 to 59%. Retention rates on most courses are high. However, the retention rate has declined in AS-level English language and is now below national average. A large proportion of students achieved high grades in AS-level and GCE A-level English language and in AS-level English language and literature in 2004, but the proportion of students achieving high grade passes is much lower in AS-level and GCE A-level English literature. Value added data suggest that students make insufficient progress in relation to their prior attainment, particularly at GCE A level. However, students' achievement of their target grades improved at AS level in 2004.

105. Students produce good written work and make informed contributions to class discussion. They work well on collaborative tasks, for example, in AS-level English language, students designed informative posters illustrating the linguistic features of reading schemes for primary school children. In English literature, students were skilled at making presentations about set texts, for example, on the representation of key characters and themes. Higher level skills including the close analysis of the literary and linguistic features of texts and the critical evaluation of material are not always apparent in students' responses.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	120	152	138
		% retention	88	72	87
		% pass rate	65	30	59
AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	54	35	40
		% retention	94	89	83
		% pass rate	94	84	94
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	116	98	112
		% retention	94	90	92
		% pass rate	92	93	91
AS-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	106	108	79
		% retention	92	94	87
		% pass rate	84	90	99
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	32	41	25
		% retention	94	95	92

		% pass rate	97	97	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	96	68	46
		% retention	95	99	96
		% pass rate	98	100	98
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	54	67	72
		% retention	98	94	99
		% pass rate	100	98	99

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

Quality of education and training

106. Much English teaching is good. Most lessons are well planned and incorporate a range of teaching and learning methods to engage students' interest and keep them actively involved. Teaching is enthusiastic and in the best lessons material is presented in an imaginative manner, often incorporating group work. In one AS-level English language and literature lesson, students enjoyed exploring different comedy genres in preparation for their coursework. They were able to explore the features of parody by completing a range of activities, for example, parodying the style of a fashion show commentary through writing a script for an 'unfashion' show, a send up of an Oscar acceptance speech and the dialogue for a student ineptly accompanying an inspector on a guided tour of the college. These activities captured students' imagination and began to sharpen their grasp of the forms of comedic writing. Teachers are able to use students' interests and experiences to bring texts to life. In AS-level English literature, students exploring the representation of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* reflected on the difference between contemporary and eighteenth century attitudes towards marriage and in doing so were able to formulate a sound understanding of the social and cultural context of Austen's work. In GCSE English, a lesson examined short extracts of *Macbeth* to evaluate Lady Macbeth's motivation and psychological decline. The students demonstrated a very good grasp of the play and articulated thoughtful comments on Shakespeare's methods of characterisation.

107. In some lessons, teaching is less successful. Material is not sufficiently demanding and the learning of more able students is not extended adequately. Teachers do not always outline the precise aims of lessons and activities and it is unclear how students are expected to proceed with tasks. Learning and the progress made by students are not monitored carefully, for example, through checking the achievement of objectives at the end of lessons. Much teaching fails to develop students' skills of analysis and evaluation.

108. Resources are good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Many have worked as examiners and attend courses regularly to update subject knowledge. Classrooms are equipped suitably and there are some excellent displays of students' work about set texts, writers and language issues. These create a very positive impression of the subject and a stimulating learning environment. Handouts and other learning resources used in lessons are of a high quality. Schemes of work indicate that ILT is integrated with the curriculum in some key areas and the department has an intranet site that students can access from home. Although still developing, this resource contains much effective material including worksheets, further reading activities, links to useful websites and grammar guides.

109. There is a clear and comprehensive assessment policy which is applied consistently. Students are provided with an assessment schedule that outlines key deadlines and coursework requirements. Assessment is regular and feedback is detailed and constructive, normally including clear guidance to students about how to improve work. The feedback on assignments is mapped against specification requirements and enables students to identify how marks can be achieved. Reviews of progress take place regularly. However, although targets for improvement are set in progress reviews, outcomes achieved are not always clearly stated. Teachers do not always assess and monitor students' work very rigorously within lessons.

110. The range of courses is appropriate to the needs and interests of students. The college offers three distinct AS-level and GCE A-level English courses and ensures that students are informed fully of the nature of these courses through pre-enrolment information and advice in the form of taster days, open evenings and publicity material. The curriculum is enriched through theatre visits, conferences and links with universities. The communication key skill at level 2 is integrated fully with the GCSE English course, but opportunities for embedding the level 3 key skill into advanced programmes are not fully exploited.

111. Students receive sound guidance and they value the high quality of individual support provided through the tutorial system and by their teachers. Induction is well organised and ensures students settle quickly into their courses. Information on students' learning styles, additional learning needs and GCSE scores on entry is collated at induction and distributed to teaching staff, but the extent to which this information is used to plan teaching and learning is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

112. Leadership and management in English are good. There is much effective teamwork and collaboration amongst teachers in planning course delivery, designing resources and evaluating results. Equality and diversity are considered carefully when selecting literary texts and language topics. Subject team meetings are held regularly and team members routinely discuss teaching and learning, students' progress and curriculum development. Part-time teachers are well integrated with the team and participate fully in departmental activities. Reviews of students' results are detailed; the curriculum manager analyses individual modular results, trends and patterns and these directly inform curriculum planning, lesson content and delivery. Although the self-assessment report identifies some weaknesses, action planning to address areas of concern lacks detail and rigour.

Part D: College data

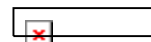
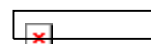


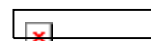
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2003/04

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	1	66
2	21	16
3	77	16
4/5	0	0
Other	1	2
Total	100	100



Source: provided by the college in autumn 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2003/04



Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	1,320	41	20
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	80	26	2
Business administration, management and professional	315	59	6
Information and communication technology	860	257	16
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	296	63	5
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	142	70	3
Visual and performing arts and media	418	4	6
Humanities	1,818	33	28
English, languages and communication	856	119	14
Foundation programmes	0	0	0
Total	6,105	672	100

Source: provided by the college in autumn 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	86	28	24	211
	Retention rate %	60	71	71	70	50	72
	National average %	81	75	83	71	72	73
	Pass rate %	75	85	76	72	85	85
	National average %	67	75	72	68	73	75
2	Starters excluding transfers	716	574	533	121	207	68

	Retention rate %	82	84	83	72	49	43
	National average %	80	81	81	71	70	69
	Pass rate %	81	83	84	80	53	72
	National average %	84	84	86	69	70	74
3	Starters excluding transfers	5,742	4,939	4,864	69	121	75
	Retention rate %	82	94	92	68	88	63
	National average %	80	89	90	65	72	73
	Pass rate %	83	79	84	36	62	85
	National average %	86	87	88	67	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 2001 to 2003: 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)	73	23	4	88
Level 1 (foundation) and 2 (intermediate)	57	29	14	21
Totals	70	24	6	100

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