



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



St Dominic's Sixth Form College

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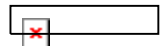
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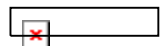
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Basic information about the college

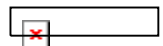


Name of college:	St Dominic's Roman Catholic Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Patrick Harty
Address of college:	Mount Park Avenue Harrow-on-the-Hill Middlesex HA1 3HX
Telephone number:	020 8422 8084
Fax number:	020 8422 3759
Chair of governors:	Anthony Aldridge
Unique reference number:	130443
Name of reporting inspector:	Vivien Bailey HMI
Dates of inspection:	1-5 November 2004

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

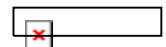


St Dominic's Sixth Form College is situated in the London Borough of Harrow. It is a Roman Catholic designated college in the Archdiocese of Westminster. The college opened in 1979 on the site of a former girls' independent grammar school. Almost all students are aged 16 to 18. The proportion of Catholic students has increased from 43% in 2003/04 to 50% in 2004/05. About 47% of the college's students are of Indian or other Asian backgrounds, which is higher than the proportion of these groups in the local population. Large numbers of students are of non-Christian faiths, including about 25% Hindu and 9% Muslim. The college serves predominantly young people of Harrow, but a third of students travel from other London boroughs. Constraints on space have prevented the college from expanding further, despite a high demand for places.

The college serves two partner Catholic high schools in Harrow. The college accepts all applicants from its partner schools as its first priority, followed by other Catholic students. The remaining places are allocated to students of other faith backgrounds, using a higher entry standard for advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) and general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) programmes. The curriculum mainly comprises subjects at AS level and GCE A level. Vocational courses are offered in business at foundation and intermediate levels, and advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) courses in travel and tourism, business and information and communications technology (ICT). General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses are available in English, mathematics, leisure and tourism and Italian.

The college strives to be committed to the personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on Christian values, academic excellence and high-quality pastoral care.

How effective is the college?



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

Key strengths

- high retention rates

- high pass rates

- high level of value added to students' prior achievements

- careful monitoring of students' progress

- outstanding commitment to Catholic mission and ethos

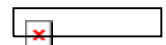
- outstanding leadership and management
- respect for, and support of, cultural diversity
- very good environment for learning and success
- high rates of progression to higher education (HE)
- very good value for money.

What should be improved

- key skills achievement
- achievements in GCSE mathematics
- some inadequate accommodation.

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

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

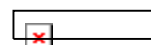


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	Outstanding. Pass rates and the proportion of high grades achieved

	are very high on all advanced courses. Retention rates are high on all courses and good value is added to students' prior achievements. Pass rates in GCSE mathematics at grades A* to C are below average. Most teaching is good or better, with no unsatisfactory lessons observed, and the area is well managed.
Business	Good. There are high retention rates on most courses and high pass rates on business courses. There is a good range of vocational business programmes. Teaching is good in most lessons, with effective use of information and learning technology (ILT). No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. The area is well managed.
Information and communications technology	Outstanding. Retention rates, pass rates and the proportion of students achieving high grades are outstanding. There is high value added to students' prior attainment on advanced ICT courses. Teaching and learning are consistently good. There is good monitoring of students' progress and support for learning, and the area is well managed.
Visual and performing arts	Good. Retention rates and pass rates are high, with a large proportion of high grades in design technology and art and design. Teaching is good and there are good materials to support independent learning. There are inadequate resources which limit the development of students' practical skills. The area is well managed.
Humanities	Outstanding. Very high retention and pass rates have been maintained over several years, with high value added to students' achievements in psychology and history. Teaching is mainly good or better and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Very good support and guidance encourage students to aim high. Management of most humanities courses is good and in psychology it is outstanding.
English and modern foreign languages	Good. Pass and retention rates are high on the majority of courses. Most teaching is good or better, and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Assessment is rigorous and support and guidance for students are very good. The area is well managed.

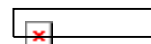
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are outstanding. Pass and retention rates are very high, and pass rates have improved significantly over the last four years. The value added to students' prior achievements is high, and progression to HE is very good. The college has a clear and effective strategy and works well with partner organisations. There is an outstanding commitment to the Catholic mission and ethos, which supports a culture of care and respect for others. The college has a strong commitment to the promotion and celebration of equality and diversity. There has been some success in increasing participation on vocational programmes at below advanced level, resulting in an increase in Catholic students. Governance is good. Governors are strongly representative of the college's Catholic community and have a good range of relevant experience. They are appropriately involved in determining the character, mission and strategy of the college. There is a well-resourced programme of staff development which is linked to college priorities. The college's management information system provides accurate and reliable information. Staff use data well to inform corporate and curriculum decision making. Quality assurance arrangements have been effective in raising overall and individual course pass rates. The proportion of lessons observed with good or better teaching matched the average for sixth form colleges, and there were no

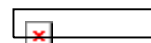
the curriculum is good. Financial management is very effective and the college provides good value for money. The college has made progress against its policies and plans in response to legislation on race relations, disability discrimination and child protection. However, formal training for staff on race relations responsibilities, and for governors on child protection duties, has yet to take place.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



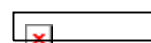
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good within the context of its mission as a Catholic sixth form college. All school leavers from the college's two Catholic partner schools are guaranteed a place at the college. The college is committed to meeting their needs within the constraints of its accommodation and resources, and has provided new vocational and non-advanced courses. The college is participating in local 14 to 19 initiatives with its partner schools to broaden its offer to Catholics further. The college attracts students from 79 schools across a wide area, including 8% of students from disadvantaged areas. The college is a multicultural community in which many faiths are acknowledged and celebrated. All students and teaching staff, whatever their faith, participate in the religious and moral education programme. Tolerance and respect for diversity are strong features of the college culture. Large numbers of non-Catholics apply to the college each year. The college manages this over-subscription by placing a higher level entry requirement on applicants of other faith backgrounds unless they are from the partner schools. All applicants must demonstrate a faith commitment. There is good educational inclusion of the small number of students with disabilities, and good additional support for learning is provided. The college is responding appropriately to the requirements of legislation on race relations and disability discrimination, and has significantly improved access for people with impaired mobility.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



There is outstanding support for students' academic, personal and spiritual development. There is excellent planning and management of student support services. Initial assessment processes are thorough and effective. Learning support provision is deployed appropriately and is effective in meeting students' needs. There are very good arrangements in place for induction that successfully introduces students into the college. The tutorial programme is well organised and well delivered and received. There is strong subject support for students in most parts of the college, although target setting to help students to improve their learning is sometimes underdeveloped. There is strong and readily available advice and guidance about careers and entry into HE. Informative and accessible staff and student handbooks provide excellent documentation about support services for students. These include a child protection handbook which clearly sets out the college's comprehensive approach to ensuring the safety and welfare of children.

Students' views of the college



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

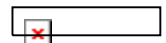
What students like about the college

- friendly, approachable and knowledgeable teachers who give extra help
- friendly and caring atmosphere
- good support and guidance from staff and chaplaincy
- interesting visits and trips
- environment where people want to learn
- ethos of college, and religious and moral education
- meeting students from other faith backgrounds.

What they feel could be improved

- provision of a common room and increase in social areas
- amount of study space in the library
- the service from vending machines.

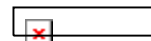
Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the

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



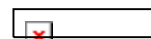
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	75	25	0
19+ and WBL*	0	0	0
Learning 16-18	75	25	0
19+ and WBL*	0	0	0

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards



1. Data on students' achievements drawn from the individualised student records (ISR) for 2001/02 and 2002/03 were provided by the LSC. Data provided by the college were used for 2003/04. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C give more details about achievements and standards on particular courses.

16 to 18 year olds

2. The college caters almost exclusively for students aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses. In 2004/05, there are 826 students, of which 95% are studying on advanced-level courses. The remaining 5% of students are on intermediate and foundation-level programmes.

3. Retention rates are consistently high. For long courses at all levels, the college's retention rates were in the top 10% nationally in 2002/03. Almost all courses have retention rates which are above or well above averages for sixth form colleges inspected in 2003/04.

4. Pass rates on advanced-level courses are very high. There has been a continuous rising trend, placing the college in the top 10% of pass rates for sixth form colleges in 2001/02 and 2002/03. In 2004 and 2003, the overall pass rate at AS level and GCE A level was 98%, compared to 94% in 2002 and 81% in 2000. In 2003/04, there has been an improvement in the proportions of high grades (A/B) achieved in AS-level and GCE A-level subjects, at 51% and 55% respectively. In

almost all subjects, the proportion of high grades achieved is above average for sixth form colleges. At AS level and GCE A level, pass rates are particularly and consistently high in science and mathematics, ICT and humanities. The proportion of high grades achieved is especially high in economics; ICT and computing; art, drama and design technology; psychology and history; and all science and mathematics subjects. There are also good achievements on AVCE courses in ICT and business, and satisfactory achievements on the AVCE in travel and tourism.

5. Students are achieving grades at AS level and GCE A level which are higher than might be expected from their prior achievements. According to one national value added system, the college's data places it high in the top 10th percentile for added value from a large sample of sixth form colleges. The amount of value added by their courses has increased over several years. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) average points scores have risen consistently over the same period, even though the students' average GCSE scores on entry to the college have remained at the same level. Students leaving the college in 2004 had an average points score of 310.5, and an average points score for each entry of 86.2 for each student, which was an increase of three points on the figure for 2003.

6. Pass rates on the foundation general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) course in business are consistently above average with a large proportion of high grades in 2004. Pass rates have also been high on the intermediate GNVQ in business, although these dipped to below average in 2004. Pass rates at grades A* to C on the small number of GCSE courses are generally above average, with the exception of those for GCSE mathematics which, despite an improvement in 2004, have been consistently below average for the last four years. This was a weakness identified in the last inspection.

7. The college has not been successful in enabling the majority of students entered to achieve accreditation for the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology (IT). Despite some success in external key skills tests in 2003/04, the majority of those entered did not complete portfolios and therefore did not achieve the qualifications.

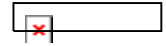
8. A large proportion of students progress to HE. In 2003, 86% of students progressed directly into HE or an art foundation programme, while the remainder took gap years or progressed into employment. Half of the foundation-level students completing in 2002/03 progressed to intermediate-level courses, and a third of intermediate students progressed to advanced level.

9. The standard of students' work in lessons is high. Attainment was judged good or better in 73% of lessons, which is above average for similar colleges. Students are highly motivated and participate well in lessons. They communicate well with teachers and each other, and display high levels of dedication to their work. Students are also developing skills of critical evaluation. They show respect for the views of others and for others' cultures. In science and mathematics and ICT, students' skills in evaluating their own performance and setting targets for improvement are underdeveloped, and in humanities some aspects of study skills are underdeveloped.

10. In all curriculum areas, stimulating discussions and effective group activities were observed. In business and economics, students demonstrate the ability to analyse data and show good understanding of business concepts and terminology. In ICT, the analysis, design and testing aspects of projects are particularly good, and some AVCE document presentation and multimedia work is outstanding. In visual arts, there is a high standard of work in sketchbooks, although practical skills in three-dimensional design and design technology are less well developed. In theatre studies, students perform with confidence. In humanities, many students have detailed knowledge and a mature understanding of their subjects. In English, students have good understanding of literary techniques, and in modern foreign languages, students are fluent in the language they are studying.

11. Attendance during the inspection, at 89%, was above the average for all sixth form colleges inspected in 2003/04. It was highest in ICT, at 95%, and lowest in English and modern foreign languages, at 81%.

Quality of education and training



12. Inspectors graded teaching, learning and attainment in 81 lessons. Of these, teaching was good or better in 75%, which is in line with the average for similar colleges in 2003/04. Teaching was satisfactory in the remaining 25%, and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Overall, grades for learning and attainment were close to those for teaching. In science and mathematics and humanities, a large proportion of students demonstrated good or very good attainment. In ICT, a large proportion of teachers demonstrated good or very good teaching.

13. The best lessons are carefully planned so that teachers use a variety of techniques and activities to stimulate learning. Teachers often deploy imaginative examples and good learning materials. For example, in modern foreign languages, students learn by reading, writing, listening and speaking the language they are studying. The use of ILT is often effective and well integrated with more traditional teaching methods. Many teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and successfully motivate their students. Students often make enthusiastic contributions to discussions and develop their skills of argument and critical thinking. Teachers check learning regularly and plan their lessons to meet the needs of students of all abilities. A few lessons are insufficiently demanding for the most able students. On occasion, teachers are less successful in engaging all students in activities or checking their understanding.

14. The college provides a safe and pleasant environment for learning. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made to the accommodation and facilities, through refurbishment and an increase of floor space in the library, canteen and recreational areas. A new classroom with full ICT facilities was opened in 2003. The college has its own chapel with beautiful stained glass and decoration, although the furnishings and seating do not lend themselves to different forms of worship or reflect the needs of all the current worshipping community. Access for people who have a physical disability has been improved through the construction of a lift. The construction of a second lift is scheduled, so that by summer 2005 all parts of the college will be fully accessible. Despite these developments, there is a severe shortage of space which hampers teaching methods, particularly in science, where there are some inadequate laboratories, and in drama, art and design technology where there is a lack of suitable specialist workspaces. There is also restricted space for private study and for student social areas. The college is well aware of these issues and has a clear vision for the future of its accommodation. It has planning permission and funding for a new building, for which construction will start in 2005.

15. There are good resources for learning. The library is well managed and provides effective support for students' learning. It incorporates a good careers library and guidance facilities, as well as a range of CD-ROMS, videos and journals. There is a satisfactory book stock which could be further developed in science and mathematics, ICT and religious studies. Students and staff have good access to computers. Progress has been made in implementing the well-considered ILT strategy. The strategy is enabling the development of an effective virtual learning environment which is accessible to students from home. Staff have appropriate qualifications and most are experienced.

16. The college's monitoring of students' progress is highly effective. On entry to the college, each student is set minimum target grades based on their previous achievements. Their progress, effort, attendance and punctuality are rigorously monitored through half-termly reviews. This process is supported by a regular cycle of reports and parents' consultation evenings, and is valued by staff and students. Through the tutorial programme, students are encouraged to evaluate their progress. They set personal targets in individual learning plans. In a few subject areas, the quality of the personal learning targets set by students is weak. There are very successful procedures for supporting students whose progress is causing concern. Very few students fail to complete their programmes.

17. Assessment practices across the college vary in their quality and effectiveness. In English, languages and most humanities subjects, assessment is particularly thorough and rigorous. In many

subjects, appropriate and challenging homework is set regularly, marked promptly and returned to students within a few days. The comments and feedback provided by teaching staff are usually thorough and helpful, with clear guidance setting out how individual students can improve their performance. There have been inconsistencies in the internal assessment and verification processes on vocational business courses. There are also variations between teaching departments in the number of key skills portfolios that successfully pass through the internal moderation process. While teaching departments have all developed their own marking policies, there is no college-wide attention to best practice in the assessment and moderation of students' work.

18. The college's provision is mainly focused on advanced-level courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18. There is a choice of 28 AS-level and GCE A-level subjects supplemented by 3 AVCE courses in business, ICT and travel and tourism. Students have access to most subject combinations, including the combination of traditional and vocational GCE A levels. GCSE courses are currently available in four subjects, including an applied GCSE in leisure and tourism. The college also delivers GNVQ business programmes at foundation and intermediate levels, mainly for students from the two partner Roman Catholic high schools. The curriculum offer at levels 1 and 2 is limited. However, the college is committed to extending that range into other curriculum areas if demand from the two schools is sufficient.

19. Currently, the college draws students from 79 schools in Harrow and beyond, and demand for places substantially exceeds the college's present capacity. All applicants are expected to be practising members of the Roman Catholic Church, or to be members of any other religion recognised by the college, and to be in sympathy with the Catholic ethos. Entry requirements for advanced-level courses are set at seven GCSE passes at grades A* to C for GCE A-level and AS-level programmes, and five such passes or equivalent for advanced vocational courses. Applicants who are not Catholics and not from one of the partner schools are expected to attain grade B passes in six of the seven GCSE subjects.

20. Enrichment provision is extensive and varied and contributes very effectively to the personal development of all students. The programme of activities provides 27 different options ranging over diverse interests including golf, dancing, web design, meditation, digital imaging, film and relationships. All first year and one-year students take part in one or more of these activities, which they value highly. There are 94 students engaged in a successful voluntary community service programme, through which they contribute to a wide range of worthwhile social and community activities. This work enables the college to implement its ethos of caring for others. Students on vocational courses undertake some relevant work experience as part of their studies. This option is underdeveloped for AS-level and GCE A-level students. There is a good programme of work experience and employment links for students aiming for careers in medicine and healthcare, but few other students on AS-level and GCE A-level courses have similar opportunities.

21. The college fulfils its legal obligations in relation to religious education and collective worship. Lay members of the chaplaincy team work effectively to strengthen the prayer life of the college. The range of opportunities to participate in prayer and worship is outstanding. Most students value the 9.00 am prayer which enables people of all faiths to worship together. Tutor group assemblies in the chapel allow students to express their own beliefs. Mass is celebrated weekly and at important points in the college year, and is well attended.

22. The religious and moral education programme (RME) is validated by the Archdiocese of Westminster Education Service. Students find it helpful to discuss moral and religious issues with those of other faiths. Attendance and the retention rate on the course are extremely high. The teaching of RME is satisfactory or better, although some teachers would benefit from further training, for example, in conducting sensitive discussions. Highly motivated second-year students of all faiths have been trained to teach first-year students as part of the peer RME programme. This opportunity is valued greatly by all those involved. The ethical, moral and philosophical modules of AS-level and GCE A-level religious studies are attractive to students, resulting in one of the highest United Kingdom entries. There is a full and varied programme of special activities, retreats, events and visits which help to enrich the spiritual, moral and social development of students. Significant numbers of students choose to prepare for confirmation, which takes place annually in the college chapel, and a small group is trained each year so they can act as Eucharistic ministers.

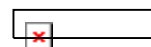
23. There are some productive and developing links with schools and other organisations. The college is a participant in the Harrow Pathfinder Project on 14 to 19 education across the borough, and working relationships with the two partner Catholic schools are close and effective. The three institutions have met to discuss joint developments in the 14 to 19 curriculum and a conference on this subject is scheduled for 2005. College staff are teaching AS-level religious studies to Key Stage 4 students in one partner school and developing similar arrangements in the other. College students are studying Latin and using sports facilities for AS-level physical education at a nearby independent school. The college's curriculum is responsive to demand from school pupils. New provision includes AS-level courses in music and physical education in 2004. A fast track HE course in logical and critical thinking has been introduced to challenge the most able students. In its first year, 95% of students on the programme were successful. The college provides a summer school and taster days for its partner schools and also works with local Catholic primary schools. College staff visit all the other high schools in Harrow to inform potential students about its provision and open days. The college also has links with schools in Europe, leading to visits and exchange programmes.

24. There is outstanding support for students' academic, personal and spiritual development. Support for students is well planned and managed effectively. Students receive good subject and pastoral support in their curriculum areas, and college managers place a high priority on supporting all students to achieve their full potential. The effectiveness of support for students is kept under review and there are frequent changes to improve the provision. Arrangements for the induction of new students are thorough. Students are introduced to the many aspects of college life and made aware of their opportunities and responsibilities. The wide range of activities includes advice on how to succeed, what to do if things go wrong, and how to make the most of learning in a Christian environment. Students also benefit from a well organised and substantial tutorial programme. Student support activities are documented in a series of informative handbooks for staff and students. A separate booklet outlines the various faiths represented in the college and encourages staff and students to value diversity in accordance with the college ethos. A child protection handbook sets out how the college meets its responsibilities for the safety and protection of children.

25. The initial assessment of students' learning needs is carried out thoroughly. All students take a computerised screening test that identifies preferred learning styles, assesses the need for additional study support, and indicates any specific learning difficulties. This process is supplemented by a separate test of communication skills, and by information received from previous schools. Arrangements to meet students' support needs are established rapidly. A wide range of learning support is currently in place and is valued highly by the students involved. These include students with severe sensory and mobility impairments, for whom the college has provided significant additional equipment and services. There are very good opportunities for subject support in most areas of the curriculum. Subject workshops are valued highly by students. A 'Mystery of Art' workshop, for example, successfully extends learning activities in the history of art. Students often access individual help by e-mail and report that teaching staff are generous with their time in providing support outside the classroom.

26. Careers guidance is highly developed and effective. There are substantial resources available to students in the college library and on the intranet. The college has its own Connexions adviser. There is comprehensive assistance to students in making their applications to university, which they value highly. Specific support is available for students seeking careers in the health professions, including a programme of visits and visiting speakers.

Leadership and management



27. Leadership and management are outstanding. A new principal joined the college in September 2004. Communication throughout the college is good, and staff find managers open and responsive. The principal is accessible to staff and students. The management of the curriculum is good throughout the college and there is some very strong leadership at course level.

28. The college is consistently among the top performing colleges in England. Pass rates are very high, and most have improved significantly over the last four years. Retention rates are consistently high and well above the average for sixth form colleges, particularly so, those on advanced-level courses, which comprise 95% of the college's provision. The value added to students' prior achievements is outstanding. The proportion of lessons with good or better teaching observed by inspectors matched the average for sixth form colleges, and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. Students' satisfaction with their courses is high. Progression to HE is very good, with 86% of leavers joining university or art foundation courses in 2004.

29. The college has a clear and effective strategy which is shared and understood by the LSC, other colleges and partner schools. There is a positive atmosphere in the college, which reflects a culture of care and respect for others, and creates a supportive atmosphere for learning. The curriculum comprises mainly advanced-level courses, for which there is substantial oversubscription. Vocational and lower-level courses have been developed in selected areas in response to demand from partner schools. Further vocational developments are constrained by lack of student demand and limited accommodation. Only 5% of provision is below advanced level, but the two Catholic 11 to 16 partner schools do not feel that their leavers are denied non-advanced opportunities. There is appropriate provision in other local colleges. The partner schools acknowledge the college's responsiveness and willingness to provide courses where numbers are viable.

30. Commitment to the Catholic mission and ethos is outstanding and has improved since the last inspection. There is strong leadership from senior managers, who ensure that prospective staff and students understand the mission. Expectations are explained in detail during induction and the mission statement is prominently displayed around the college. The mission impacts on all areas of college life. The largest non-Catholic faith group is Hindu, but a range of denominations and faiths is represented. Members of all faith groups participate in the rich variety of worship experiences which are strongly supported by college managers. The Faith First Audit, developed by the college, is an effective method of monitoring the ethos. Its use has been extended within the archdiocese and further afield. The Catholicity and curriculum committee ensures that governors are well informed about all aspects of the mission. They show commitment to the ethos through attendance at the annual Catholic ethos day, the carol service and mass at the start of the academic year.

31. Governance is good. Governors are strongly representative of the college's Catholic community and have a good range of relevant experience. Consideration is being given to seeking board members from other faiths with large numbers in the student cohort. Governors are appropriately involved in determining the character, mission and strategy of the college. They fully endorse the proposed development of more vocational programmes in partnership with the two main Catholic partner schools. Governors welcomed the resulting increase in the proportion of Catholic enrolments at the college in 2004/05. Governors are well informed for their supervisory role, through an annual strategy review, which engages governors with managers, and through reports and briefings at meetings. An annual joint governor and staff development day, which also includes staff of the two main Catholic partner schools, further informs governors about curriculum matters. Governors are supported by good financial and quality performance data.

32. Governors and managers have put considerable effort and determination into pursuing the accommodation strategy, in order to resolve the college's difficulties with space and specialist facilities. As a result, they have succeeded in gaining planning permission for a complex accommodation enlargement and refurbishment project. The board is appropriately focused on student performance, aided by a quality and standards committee, which receives good management information for its monitoring role. However, the standards committee has not focused on key skills performance by full-time students aged 16 to 18.

33. The college has a strong commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity. There is a very well-embedded culture of celebrating diversity, including a range of events such as Diversity Week, an Asian fashion show, a black heritage talent show and the Holocaust Memorial Week. The student population is very diverse, both ethnically and by faith. Mutual awareness and understanding of diversity is reinforced through daily prayers for all faiths and weekly mass, and through the religious and moral education lessons which are delivered by all teachers, half of whom are Catholic. These practices support the impressive college environment of tolerance, respect and positive values.

34. The college has responded appropriately to obligations under legislation on race relations, disability discrimination and child protection. It is making progress against its race equality policy and plan. There is collation and analysis of data on participation and students' achievement by ethnicity, gender and faith. Areas of concern have been identified for further action, for example, the achievements of young white males of British and Irish background. Performance analysis by disability has not yet taken place. The staff profile has also been analysed by ethnicity, faith and gender, leading to recruitment of staff from other faiths. Further development and promotion of equality and diversity is planned as the role of a new committee. Training for staff on themes relating to disability has been extensive, in support of new students with particular disabilities. There has also been substantial investment in improvements to physical access following an accessibility audit. Staff have not yet had training on race relations legislation and governors have not been formally trained in their responsibilities under child protection legislation.

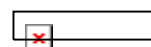
35. Resources to support staff development are good and appropriately link training and development to strategic priorities. Both academic and support staff have good opportunities for professional development. The promotion of the use of ILT in teaching has been particularly effective. The staff appraisal scheme has been effectively modified into a performance management system. However, the staff development programme does not reflect the outcomes of performance management and quality assurance. In particular, there has been insufficient recognition of the need to develop teaching and learning techniques, approaches to key skills delivery and business or industry updating. There is limited sharing of good practice in some curriculum areas.

36. The college's management information system provides accurate and reliable information. Returns to the college's main funding body are timely and accurate. Staff use data well to inform corporate and curriculum decision making. There is good availability of computers for staff, through which access to the college management information system and the virtual learning environment is developing. There is a high degree of ownership and use of data by course leaders to inform quality issues. Budget holders are well provided with data to support sound financial monitoring.

37. Quality assurance arrangements have been effective in improving pass rates overall and on most individual courses. Procedures and processes are comprehensive within a well-documented annual cycle. Course and departmental review processes result in action plans for improvement, which are mostly successfully implemented. The college has revised its approach to key skills as previous strategies have not led to successful accreditation of students' achievements. The self-assessment report for 2004 is broadly accurate in its assessment of the quality of provision, but does not recognise less effective aspects of teaching. The proportion of high grades awarded to teaching and learning through the college's internal system of lesson observations was significantly higher than those awarded by inspectors. The application of best practice and shared standards is inconsistent between subjects and departments, for instance, with regard to assessment practice and the setting of learning targets for students.

38. Financial management is very effective. Managers and governors monitor the college's financial position closely, including appropriate benchmarking. The college regularly achieves substantial budget surpluses, which are used to support curriculum initiatives, new building projects, and equipment investments. Risk management systems are good. On the basis of students' pass rates, high retention rates, high value added scores, efficient use of staff resources and accommodation, and good class sizes, the college provides good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- very high retention rates on all courses

- very high pass rates and added value on advanced courses

- large proportion of high grade passes at advanced level

- effective use of ILT in teaching

- highly motivated and conscientious students.

Weaknesses

- consistently low pass rate in GCSE mathematics

- much cramped accommodation that limits teaching opportunities.

Scope of provision

39. The college offers chemistry, physics, biology, human biology, mathematics and further mathematics at AS level and GCE A level. A GCSE in mathematics is also available, which includes study at the foundation tier. There is no other provision below advanced level. There are large numbers of students on many advanced courses. For example, in 2002/03, 192 students studied AS-level mathematics. A small number of students undertake GCE Advanced Extension Awards. There are 517 students aged 16 to 19 enrolled on full-time mathematics and science courses. Of these, 42 are studying GCSE mathematics.

Achievement and standards

40. Retention rates are very high. They are close to 100% in most subjects and in many cases have been consistently so for the last three years. Pass rates are very good on all advanced-level courses. For example, pass rates for AS-level mathematics and AS-level human biology were 15% and 16% respectively above national average pass rates for this type of college in 2003/04. All advanced-level students achieve pass grades above those predicted by GCSE results on entry. The proportion of grades A and B passes for advanced courses significantly exceeds national averages.

Progression rates from AS-level to GCE A-level courses, and to HE, are high. The pass rate for students on GCSE mathematics improved in 2003/04, but remains significantly below average. This was identified as a weakness in the last inspection.

41. Students are articulate and very able. They communicate effectively with teachers and each other. Work is carried out promptly and they are rarely distracted during lessons. Class discussions are energetic and ideas flow freely. Students' files are well organised and many indicate significant amounts of work being carried out at home or outside teaching hours. Students are courteous and polite. Most students enjoy contributing in lessons and often work on the board in front of the class.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE mathematics*	2	No. of starts	60	39	49
		% retention	87	97	88
		% pass rate	17	26	21
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	109	146	154
		% retention	98	95	98
		% pass rate	94	95	93
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	60	57	56
		% retention	100	95	98
		% pass rate	93	89	91
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	179	192	181
		% retention	97	98	98
		% pass rate	78	81	90
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	98	110	128
		% retention	100	99	98
		% pass rate	94	98	100
AS-level human biology/biology	3	No. of starts	124	146	169
		% retention	97	98	99
		% pass rate	94	92	96
GCE A-level human biology/biology	3	No. of starts	75	97	100
		% retention	99	99	97
		% pass rate	96	99	100

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

Quality of education and training

42. Teaching is good or better in the majority of lessons and no lessons are unsatisfactory. Most lessons are planned and prepared well. Lesson objectives are usually clear, although they are not always shared with students. Learning materials are often very good, and many of the workbooks supplied are detailed and well structured, with little need for note taking. In the best lessons, teachers employ a variety of stimulating teaching techniques. There is effective use of ILT in teaching. Teachers of AS-level mathematics make very good use of graph drawing software to introduce aspects of calculus. Interactive whiteboards are often used effectively to incorporate learning materials which would otherwise not be available. In one physics lesson, there was good

use of ILT to demonstrate the relationship between kinetic and potential energy using a simple projectile. Discussions are stimulating and energetic. In human biology, teachers skilfully use a variety of teaching techniques which enables students to grasp complex ideas quickly. In chemistry, teachers use imaginative examples to illustrate principles. In one lesson, the chemistry of materials in training shoes was used to illustrate intermolecular forces. Teaching does not always take enough account of the different learning needs and styles of the students.

43. There is good monitoring of students' progress against their target grades. Students receive homework from each subject at least weekly and it is usually completed on time. Homework is marked and returned promptly, in most cases annotated with useful comments to help students to improve. Extensive use is made of past examination papers and examiners' mark schemes.

44. Support and guidance for students are good. Teachers are accessible to students, who value their support. All students have their learning support needs evaluated on entry and support is provided promptly. Teachers receive basic guidance on working with students who have additional support needs. Communication between specialist learning support staff and teachers is good. Students' attendance is monitored and tutors receive weekly reports. All students have a weekly group tutorial session. Students complete their own half-termly reviews of progress, but the resulting targets for learning are often insufficiently precise.

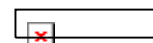
45. Subject support workshops are offered in all subjects at the end of each teaching day. These are effective in their provision of study support. Attendance is not compulsory, but students are often requested to attend by teachers. Students are able to receive support in any aspect of their academic studies in these sessions. Students undertake a range of enrichment activities including biology field trips, and industrial visits. In 2004, a party of students travelled to Malta to examine prehistoric archaeology.

46. Resources for science and mathematics are satisfactory. Staff are well qualified in their specialist fields and most have a teaching qualification. Technicians give very good support for practical lessons. Laboratories are dated and their layout limits the teaching styles possible in theory lessons. Many mathematics and science lessons are held in rooms which are too small for the group size. Supplies of laboratory glassware and consumables are good. The provision of ILT is very good, and all science laboratories have an interactive whiteboard and associated networked computer. Textbooks are provided to students on long-term loan and there is a small stock of texts for use in laboratories. The stock of books and journals in the library is limited, and many volumes are outdated. Plans for a new science teaching block are well advanced.

Leadership and management

47. Leadership and management are good. Science and mathematics is organised into four separate subject departments, each with a team leader, one of whom acts as overall head of science. The departments have considerable autonomy and use different quality assurance procedures and approaches to matters such as homework, record keeping, and reviews of students' progress. Departmental meetings occur regularly to discuss operational and strategic issues, with opportunities for the sharing of good practice. The science departments meet together termly and share a variety of developmental activities. There are developing links with European partner institutions through the Comenius project. Teaching links with local secondary schools are developing.

Business



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

Strengths

- high retention rates
- high pass rates on most business courses
- effective use of ILT to extend learning
- good range of vocational business programmes.

Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge and pace in some lessons
- some cramped teaching accommodation
- ineffective internal verification procedures.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in economics and business studies. In addition, there are vocational courses in business at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Other provision comprises a GCSE course in leisure and tourism, and AVCE in travel and tourism. Students taking the advanced vocational route in both business and travel and tourism can study for either the single or double award. There are currently 296 students studying business programmes and 47 following leisure, travel and tourism programmes.

Achievement and standards

49. There were high pass rates in AS-level and GCE A-level economics and business studies, and in vocational programmes in business in 2003/04. Pass rates were 100% or close to that figure in GCE A-level business, AS-level and GCE A-level economics and foundation GNVQ. The proportion of passes at high grades was outstanding in AS-level economics and in foundation GNVQ. Retention rates have been consistently high on most programmes during the last three years.

50. The standard of work produced by students is high and most students attain their learning goals. Business and economics students are developing the ability to analyse data and show good understanding of business concepts and terminology. Vocational students make good use of the Internet to research reference material effectively and present business information.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	26	22	24
		% retention	92	95	96
		% pass rate	88	95	61
GCE A-level business studies	3	No. of starts	46	41	38
		% retention	100	95	97
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	58	58	49
		% retention	100	97	100
		% pass rate	100	98	98
AS-level economics	3	No. of starts	78	57	65
		% retention	97	100	95
		% pass rate	86	95	97

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

Quality of education and training

51. Teaching in most lessons is good and no lessons observed were less than satisfactory. Lessons are carefully planned and relate to clear schemes of work. In the best lessons, teachers make skilful use of questioning to confirm students' understanding. Electronic slides are used effectively with supporting high-quality handouts. Varied activities including verbal exposition, questioning and role plays effectively engage and stimulate students. There is extensive and enriching use of ILT in lessons, often with the use of laptop computers by students. Students are able to undertake interesting and demanding tasks in lessons. In a travel and tourism lesson, students made very effective use of ILT in designing and producing promotional marketing material which they were then able to project to the other members of the group using the interactive whiteboard. In some lessons, there is unsatisfactory learning by a minority of students. These students are insufficiently engaged in activities and do not make the best use of their time. Teacher questioning is insufficiently focused and the pace of the lesson is slow. In these lessons, all students work at the pace set by the teacher without the opportunity for more able students to undertake more challenging tasks. The start of some lessons is disrupted by poor punctuality which some teachers do not challenge adequately. Some rooms are too small to accommodate groups comfortably and learning activities are inhibited.

52. The resources for ILT are good. Students make good use of open access ILT facilities and those in the library for independent research. There are relevant and imaginative wall displays in base rooms and corridors. Library resources for business and travel and tourism are satisfactory and additional resources are held in base rooms. There is a lack of current industrial experience in the teaching teams. No staff have qualifications or industrial experience in travel and tourism and the industrial experience of many of the business staff is either limited or dated. No staff development activity is currently planned to improve staff industrial experience.

53. Assessment on vocational programmes is well planned to ensure that students are not overloaded at certain stages in their programme. The parents of learners on vocational programmes are routinely informed of assignment deadlines so that they can encourage students to work effectively to meet them. Homework is set regularly and returned promptly. Many of the comments written by teachers are too general and offer little guidance on how to improve. Students on vocational programmes undertake work experience relevant to their course, but AS-level and GCE A-level students do not benefit from this opportunity to experience current business practice and awareness of the commercial world.

54. Internal verification procedures on vocational programmes are ineffective. There is no formal procedure for the internal verification of assignment briefs prior to issue to students. Internal verification of assessment decisions on vocational programmes has previously been scheduled for the summer term which has left insufficient time for corrective action in instances of inaccurate assessment. New procedures are being put in place for the current academic year, but these have yet to have an impact.

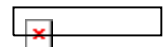
55. There is a good range of vocational business programmes. Provision is available at all levels through the foundation and intermediate GNVQ programmes and the AVCE in business. Some students progress from one level to the next. A half of the foundation GNVQ students in 2002/03 progressed to the intermediate level, and a third of intermediate students to advanced level.

56. There is strong subject support for students. There are regular reviews of students' progress where individual targets are set and reviewed. Teachers make particular efforts to give individual support to students who appreciate the opportunity to attend workshops at the end of the college day for additional support and guidance. Further support is provided, both inside and outside of lessons. In lessons, learning support assistants work effectively with teachers in supporting students' needs. Advanced-level students receive good advice in tutorials on applications and entry to HE.

Leadership and management

57. The department is well managed. Communications are good and teachers share ideas and work collaboratively. There are regular meetings of the business team, which are minuted. Course reviews are detailed and evaluative, and result in development plans, but students' views on the quality of their experience are not systematically collected. A large proportion of students are of minority ethnic origin, and teachers and students work harmoniously and respectfully together.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates

- excellent value added to students' prior attainment on advanced ICT courses

- very good use of ILT in lessons

- good teaching and learning

- good monitoring and support leading to student progress

- effective management.

Weaknesses

- some cramped accommodation
- inadequate target setting for students.

Scope of provision

58. The college offers a range of ICT and computing courses at advanced level. These are AS-level and GCE A-level computing, AS-level and GCE A-level ICT, AVCE single and double awards in ICT and advanced supplementary vocational certificate of education (ASVCE) in ICT. Key skills in IT at level 3 are offered to all advanced-level students in the college. There are 186 full-time students enrolled in this curriculum area, not including key skills IT, and two of these are students aged 19+.

Achievement and standards

59. Pass rates are outstanding. All pass rates are at 100% or well above the national average for sixth form colleges. Over the last three years, the percentage of high grades obtained has also been significantly above average on almost all programmes. Retention rates for the last three years have been very high or better on the majority of courses. Students perform significantly better than indicated by their GCSE results on AVCE and GCE A-level ICT courses. Almost all students on GCE A-level courses and a large proportion of students on AVCE courses progress to HE, many into computing or IT related degrees.

60. The standard of students' assignment work is high and some work is excellent. All work is extremely well presented and organised. Analysis, design and testing aspects of projects are particularly good and some AVCE document presentation and multimedia work is outstanding. Students have well-developed IT skills and can use the Internet effectively for research. They are very attentive in lessons and demonstrate good communication skills through confident and articulate answers. Students work very effectively in groups. In one AVCE lesson, students collaborated in groups to carry out an analysis of a commercial multimedia package. The groups responded with confidence and clarity to issues raised by the teacher and by the end all groups had allocated roles and tasks, made significant progress on tasks, taken minutes, arranged a meeting before the next lesson and ensured the group leader had copies of their individual work.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level computing	3	No. of starts	40	37	21
		% retention	100	100	95
		% pass rate	93	95	100
AS-level ICT	3	No. of starts	91	67	36

		% retention	99	99	97
		% pass rate	96	100	95
ASVCE in ICT	3	No. of starts	23	18	16
		% retention	91	83	100
		% pass rate	95	100	94
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	27	19	23
		% retention	100	100	96
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level ICT	3	No. of starts	65	72	50
		% retention	100	96	96
		% pass rate	96	100	100
AVCE ICT (double award, two years)	3	No. of starts	21	17	20
		% retention	90	100	100
		% pass rate	95	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

61. Teaching is consistently good or very good, and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Lessons are well planned and prepared. In many lessons, a digital projector and online resources are used very effectively to make points clearly and to engage students. Proficient use of information on the college's virtual learning environment enables the teacher to organise groups, instantly relate teaching to syllabus requirements, or bring up other learning material. In the best lessons, there is a seamless integration of ILT and traditional board work techniques, for example, to provide access to learning material and enhance or manipulate it through student or staff contributions. Learning is regularly and rigorously checked. In the most effective lessons, discussion develops students' confidence and communication skills. In one lesson on website design, the teacher divided the work into a variety of short tasks and made very good use of regular plenary sessions to get students to show their progress, share ideas and relate their immediate work to the overall unit assignment. In a minority of lessons, more able students are not challenged sufficiently. There are few opportunities to develop numeracy skills.

62. The college offers a high standard of IT equipment which is maintained effectively. Appropriate professional software is available and there is an extensive range of learning resources and course materials on the virtual learning environment, which is well used by students and staff. The library book stock is adequate for course requirements, but does not offer sufficient material to allow students to read around the subject or to challenge the most able students. Teachers have a good range of teaching and commercial experience. They are knowledgeable and their dedication to improvement contributes significantly to the enthusiasm and excellent work ethic of the students. The cramped accommodation in two of the IT rooms restricts the variety of teaching and learning styles which can be used.

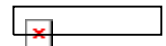
63. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Students understand the criteria against which they are judged and the ways in which their work can be improved. Comprehensive and well-maintained records on students' progress enable early action to be taken by staff where necessary. Homework is set regularly and marked speedily, with comments by teachers which help students to improve. Regular reviews of students' progress help them to understand how they are performing, but the targets set are too general to allow students to develop skills in evaluating and managing their own learning.

64. Support for students is good. Subject support is well developed through regular additional workshops, which provide further help for those who need it, and additional challenge for the most able students. Students can also e-mail staff to obtain extra help outside lessons. The department maintains a detailed profile on each student so that teachers are very familiar with a student's needs and learning style. There is good support for students with disabilities. Special training has been given to prepare staff to support a visually impaired student. All students feel valued and supported.

Leadership and management

65. There is effective management of the department which leads to improvement. Weekly minuted meetings lead to good communication and issues are dealt with quickly. Students' feedback and staff views from the end-of-course review are acted on and have led to improvements for the students, for example, a change to a more relevant unit in the AVCE. The department is sensitive to equal opportunities issues and takes action to address them. For example, as females are under-represented on ICT programmes, a female teacher visits partner schools to promote the subject. Teachers are offered commercial work placements to update vocational experience. An extensive course review process identifies a range of actions for improvement and there is regular monitoring of progress against actions during the year.

Visual and performing arts



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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- high retention rates

- good materials to support independent learning

- effective use of critical skills to broaden students' understanding.

Weaknesses

- inadequate resources which limit learning

- underdeveloped practical skills.

Scope of provision

66. There are 244 full-time students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on AS-level and GCE A-level courses in art and design, history of art, design technology and theatre studies. Students study AS-level music at a Catholic partner school.

Achievement and standards

67. Pass rates are high with 100% pass rates on GCE A-level courses in art and design, theatre studies and design technology in recent years, and also in AS-level theatre studies. Retention rates are also high. The percentage of high grades achieved on AS-level and GCE A-level courses has increased over the last two years, with particularly high percentages in AS-level design technology and AS-level art. Students perform significantly better than indicated by their GCSE results in design technology and theatre studies. There is good progression to HE.

68. Work in sketchbooks is of a high standard with thorough primary and secondary research. Students experiment through drawing and other methods, and produce thoughtful written evaluations of their work. Practical skills in three-dimensional design and design technology are less well developed. In theatre studies, students perform with confidence and are able to evaluate their own performance. Students are supported in their faith and spiritual development, and are encouraged to express themselves in their art and drama practice. They develop communication and critical skills, and treat both peers and staff with respect. Social, cultural and religious differences are recognised and valued.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level art/fine art	3	No. of starts	49	60	35
		% retention	92	87	97
		% pass rate	91	98	100
AS-level theatre studies	3	No. of starts	22	24	29
		% retention	95	92	90
		% pass rate	100	100	96
AS-level design technology	3	No. of starts	34	37	33
		% retention	97	95	100
		% pass rate	91	94	97
GCE A-level art and design	3	No. of starts	29	30	25
		% retention	100	93	96
		% pass rate	100	100	96
GCE A-level theatre studies	3	No. of starts	15	18	20
		% retention	100	100	95
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level design technology	3	No. of starts	33	26	27
		% retention	100	96	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

69. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and schemes of work recognise the range of students' abilities and learning styles. Critical skills are used effectively to broaden students' understanding, and students consider cultural, ethical and moral issues in their work. In art history, students discuss topics ranging from traditional religious painting to conceptual art and feminist art practice. Students explore their cultural backgrounds and share their understanding with the group. A Spanish student was able to discuss the domestic objects in the paintings of Velazquez and the symbols in Picasso's Guernica. One Hindu student used henna in large paintings, while another made an 'installation' based on saris worn by her family and which included video recordings of music and dance. Design technology projects focus on enhancing the standard of living for people with varying abilities and needs. Students have designed a range of products for people who have disabilities. In theatre studies, texts are chosen to explore political and cultural issues. While studying their recorded performance of a scene in a Mike Leigh play, a group of first year students discussed regional accents and the notion of class and culture. There is a fast pace to lessons. There is not always time for reflection and evaluation.

70. There are very good materials to support independent learning. The virtual learning environment has lesson plans, electronic slide presentations, study skills leaflets, essay mark sheets and past examination questions. The history of art pages have detailed commentary on images and suggestions for further consideration. For example, a lecture on Poussin on the virtual learning environment describes how his paintings contain moral themes which can be understood on a number of levels and identifies discussion points raised in the lesson. 'Mystery of Art' workshops extend and complement learning.

71. Staff are well qualified and undertake professional development to postgraduate level. Some aspects of resources are inadequate. Art and design technology rooms are cramped for the numbers of students using them. This constrains practical activities in lessons and limits the ambition and scale of work. History of art takes place in the art studio with ineffective blackout and projection facilities. The design technology room has limited computers and software. There are no facilities for three-dimensional studies and woodwork tables are placed alongside the computers, limiting the development of practical skills. Part-time technician support is insufficient for the increased student numbers.

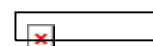
72. The monitoring of students' progress in design technology is good. There are half-termly assessments to monitor students' progress and parents are kept informed on a regular basis.

73. Students review the work of the previous year's students and suggest marks for the modules. This is discussed in the group with staff who explain why a particular grade was awarded and suggest improvements to improve the grade. Students are encouraged to see how their own work compares and to evaluate how they could improve. Detailed homework questions with clear written feedback prepare students well for examinations.

Leadership and management

74. Leadership and management are good. Art and design staff meet regularly to discuss students' academic progress and pastoral care. There is good teamwork within the area and staff make the best use of the cramped resources. The theatre studies teacher is in a different department, but communication is good. Good practice is shared regularly. Staff have initiated an art garden, commissions for local churches and a governors' prize, and hope to establish an artist in residence scheme. Promotion of equal opportunities is very good and is integrated into the curriculum.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates

- good teaching

- good use of resources and ILT

- effective assessment and monitoring of students' progress

- very good guidance and support for students

- effective management to bring about improvements.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently demanding teaching in a few lessons.

Scope of provision

75. Humanities courses account for well over one third of all enrolments in the college. Full-time courses are offered at AS level and GCE A level in psychology, politics, history, religious studies, geography and classical civilisation. Of some 820 enrolments, almost 40% are on psychology courses. Politics, history and religious studies each have about 130 enrolments. The number of students studying religious studies is very high in comparison with most colleges. Fewer students study geography and classical civilisation. A small GCSE provision has been discontinued.

Achievement and standards

76. Retention and pass rates are outstanding. In psychology and history, the proportion of students achieving grades A or B has increased and is now high. In these subjects, and in GCE A-level politics, the value added to students' prior achievements is very good. On other courses, students generally do as well as predicted, based on their GCSE results.

77. Attainment in lessons is good or better. There is a high level of dedication among students to their courses. In religious studies, students' enthusiasm for the subject is demonstrated by their frequent questions and willingness to discuss. Many humanities students have detailed knowledge

and a mature understanding of their subjects. History students show a good grasp of British history in the mid 20th century. The more confident are fluent in discussion, often contributing to well-informed arguments. Students listen carefully and build upon other students' views. In one lesson about Islam, the contribution of several Muslim students enriched discussion between students of different faiths. Skills in critical evaluation are progressively developed and effectively applied in students' written work. Study skills are less well developed. Some first year students work less effectively because they have not acquired the skill of selecting relevant material and summarising it in their own words.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	155	173	161
		% retention	97	99	94
		% pass rate	95	98	96
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	40	44	62
		% retention	100	100	97
		% pass rate	85	100	100
AS-level geography	3	No. of starts	27	36	39
		% retention	100	100	97
		% pass rate	96	96	97
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	113	111	117
		% retention	97	97	99
		% pass rate	99	99	99
GCE A-level politics	3	No. of starts	60	56	61
		% retention	100	98	100
		% pass rate	100	100	97
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	53	50	48
		% retention	98	98	98
		% pass rate	100	96	98

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

Quality of education and training

78. Teaching is mostly good or better, and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. In the best lessons, teachers are quick to enthuse students, maintaining their interest through challenging and well-planned activities. In a politics lesson held on the day of the American presidential election, students drew on their experience of a recent visit to Florida where they had observed the election campaign. Their understanding of differences in policy between Republican and Democratic parties was first tested in a lively way, then extended by activities which required the critical application of wider knowledge. Many lessons are enriched by a combination of good resources, including ILT, which are readily available in humanities classrooms. Psychology students made good use of short video clips, a worksheet and a range of text books to assess a psychological investigation into the acquisition of sign language by a chimpanzee. These resources and related, well-structured activities enabled students to make good progress in their evaluation. In geography, there is a lack of fieldwork to complement learning in the classroom. Students' ILT skills are imaginatively developed through assignments in several subjects, including history, politics and psychology. Extensive online materials are easily accessible to humanities students to consolidate and extend

their learning. In a small number of lessons, too little attention is paid to the different needs and abilities of students. Some students are not drawn into discussion and make limited progress. Staff are appropriately qualified and have benefited from training in the use of ILT. Rooms have a strong subject identity, but a few are small for the size of classes.

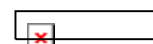
79. Assessment is effective. Students are well prepared for examinations and receive good support in completing their coursework. Staff return marked work promptly and use lessons and workshops to offer further guidance. In psychology, teachers provide very clear feedback, in most cases with marks and comments against each assessment objective. Students receive frequent feedback on how they are performing in relation to their target grades. High expectations are set by subject teachers and tutors. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own performance and are aware of what they have to do to succeed. There are effective procedures to monitor and support students who are underperforming.

80. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Students' individual learning needs are assessed and sensitively met. Teachers use imaginative ways to provide effective induction to humanities courses. In psychology, students use IT to analyse and present statistics gained from a small piece of investigative research. All humanities courses have timetabled workshops variously used to provide extra support to students. The tutorial system works well. Students benefit from the programme of group tutorials as well as from the individual support they receive from personal tutors. There are well-planned arrangements to support students applying to HE. Much good guidance is available to students on the college's virtual learning environment, including photographs and advice on courses and careers from former geography students.

Leadership and management

81. Leadership and management are good on most humanities courses, and outstanding in psychology. Since the last inspection, successful action has been taken to improve pass and retention rates which are now high. Excellent support for students has contributed to the maintenance of high retention rates. Psychology teachers share a strong commitment to the continuous improvement of the provision. They undertake rigorous reviews and evaluation of their courses which lead to well-conceived action for improvement. Insufficient attention has been paid to the systematic dissemination of best practice between humanities subjects.

English and modern foreign languages



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- stimulating teaching in GCE A-level English and German

- effective use of the target language in modern foreign languages

- rigorous assessment

- very good support and guidance for students

- effective leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates in AS-level French

- below average proportion of high grades on some level 3 programmes.

Scope of provision

82. The college offers courses in AS-level and GCE A-level English literature, English language and literature, French, German, Italian and Spanish as well as GCSE English and Italian. There are 203 enrolments on AS-level and GCE A-level English courses and 70 enrolments on AS-level and GCE A-level modern foreign language courses. Students are aged 16 to 19 and are studying full time. There are 45 students enrolled on GCSE English and Italian courses.

Achievement and standards

83. Pass rates are consistently high on most courses. The majority of students achieve grades at least in line with expectation, based on their GCSE results. Over a three year period, students in GCE A-level English literature have achieved results significantly higher than GCSE results would suggest. However, in AS-level English language and literature, students' performance was lower than expectation. In AS-level French, pass rates are below the national average for the sector. The percentage of high grades achieved is also lower than average on some courses, although this improved in 2004. Where numbers are low, individual outcomes can significantly affect the overall percentage. Pass rates in both GCSE English and Italian have improved and are now above average. Retention rates are very high on the majority of courses.

84. Students' work in lessons is of a high standard. They speak confidently and fluently in English lessons, and in their target foreign languages. In an English literature lesson, students ably analysed and discussed narrative voice and narrative viewpoint in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. In Italian lessons, standards of fluency are high, supported by the presence of experienced Italian speakers amongst the students. Marked coursework and written work in students' files indicate that they are achieving the linguistic and literary skills appropriate to the level of course followed.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	37	40	35

language		% retention	89	90	80
		% pass rate	42	64	68
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	60	46	63
		% retention	98	96	100
		% pass rate	98	95	100
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	33	39	31
		% retention	97	95	100
		% pass rate	100	97	100
AS-level English literature	3	No. of starts	72	79	74
		% retention	96	94	93
		% pass rate	99	100	96
AS-level French	3	No. of starts	23	24	21
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	87	71	76

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

Quality of education and training

85. Most teaching is good or better, and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. There is effective learning in English and modern foreign languages. Teachers have good subject knowledge and good linguistic competence. They share their enthusiasm for their subjects with their students. This leads to a high level of motivation and the development of appropriate knowledge and skills.

86. Most lessons are interesting and stimulating. In an English lesson, an extract from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* was effectively exploited as a follow up to discussion of frame theory and the conventions of classroom interaction. Foreign language teachers make effective use of the target language for teaching and learning, and students are acquiring good oral skills. They are developing authentic accents and speak confidently. The best lessons in English and modern foreign languages include a wide range of activities which cover reading, writing, listening and speaking. In highly effective lessons, students are challenged intellectually and linguistically. In a German lesson, imaginative learning materials led to a lively debate about sport which challenged and extended students' linguistic skills. Advanced-level students are successfully developing higher level thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In an English literature lesson, students identified techniques used to create effects in *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks and were able to discuss their personal response to associated texts such as *Regeneration*, *Journey's End* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In a minority of lessons, time is not used to the best effect. Learning activities do not get under way swiftly enough and too often the end of the lesson is rushed or over-runs. Most students contribute well in lessons and remain on task. However, some students are not sufficiently challenged and do not engage fully in the lesson.

87. Resources for teaching and learning are good. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Modern foreign language teachers all have first hand experience of the languages they teach and use this to good effect. Teaching rooms are well equipped, but cramped conditions in some rooms restricts teaching and learning opportunities. Video and audio equipment are used to enhance learning. Interactive whiteboards are available, but the full potential of these is yet to be exploited.

88. Assessment procedures and practices are rigorous. Work is carefully and regularly marked, and students are given guidance on ways to improve the standard of their written and oral work. They formulate an action plan to remedy weaknesses. Guidance is most effective when it identifies skills in terms of reading, writing, listening or speaking. In some lessons, however, written work is not

closely monitored and errors of grammar, spelling or fact remain uncorrected.

89. There is extensive, high-quality enrichment in terms of theatre visits which support texts being studied, for example, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Journey's End*. Visiting authors have added richness to learning. Particularly successful was the visit to the newsroom of a national newspaper where students used professional software to produce an edition of the paper. Modern foreign language students can participate in an exchange visit to Berlin, correspond with French students or engage in work experience in France.

90. Support and guidance for individual students are very good. Tutors know their students well and give freely of their time to help them raise the standard of their work. This is valued by students. There is early identification of specific learning needs. Initial assessment identifies students' learning styles and this is taken account of in teaching and learning. Subject-specific initial assessment enables teachers to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in language learning. This is used to inform planning and to monitor students' progress. The system of progress reviews for students is effective in enabling them to evaluate their progress and set targets.

Leadership and management

91. Leadership and management are good. Priority areas for development are clear. Management at course level is efficient and effective, with an appropriate focus on improving teaching and learning. Communication at all levels is excellent. Regular departmental meetings effectively address curriculum development and students' progress. Equality of opportunity is promoted through assignments and course materials, which reflect students' cultural diversity.

Part D: College data

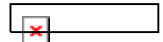
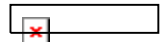


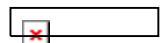
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2002/03

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	1	40
2	4	0
3	64	56
4/5	0	0
Other	31	4
Total	100	100



Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2002/03

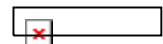


Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	1,029	0	19
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	64	0	1
Business administration, management and professional	301	8	6
Information and communication technology	728	44	14
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	29	0	1
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	0	0	0
Visual and performing arts and media	140	1	3
Humanities	1,710	17	32
English, languages and communication	377	16	7
Foundation programmes	63	0	1
Other/unknown	806	2	16
Total	5,247	88	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year		
		16-18		
		2001	2002	2003
2	Starters excluding transfers	182	183	154
	Retention rate %	95	86	93
	National average %	80	81	81
	Pass rate %	79	78	92
	National average %	84	84	86



3	Starters excluding transfers	3,130	2,744	2,800
	Retention rate %	87	96	96
	National average %	80	89	90
	Pass rate %	91	93	94
	National average %	86	87	88

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

Sources of information:

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

2. College rates for 2000/01 to 2002/03: *College ISR*.

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	80	20	0	74
Level 2 (intermediate)	20	80	0	5
Level 1 (foundation)	100	0	0	1
Other sessions	0	100	0	1
Totals	75	25	0	81

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