



St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College

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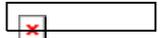
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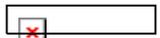
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Basic information about the college

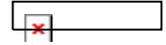


Name of college:	St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	John Rourke CBE
Address of college:	74 St Charles Square London W10 6EY
Telephone number:	020 8968 7755
Fax number:	020 8968 1061
Chair of governors:	Sister Dorothy Bell OBE
Unique reference number:	130411
Name of reporting inspector:	Maggie Startup HMI
Dates of inspection:	22-26 April 2002

Part A: Summary

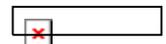


Information about the college



St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College was opened in September 1990 following the reorganisation of Roman Catholic secondary education in the central area of the Archdiocese of Westminster. The college is on a single site in North Kensington. There are three main buildings: one is purpose built and two are former school buildings. The population of the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty. There are sizeable communities of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian people. A third of the students speak other languages in addition to English. Of the 995 full-time students on roll in September 2001, 41% identified themselves as white, 38% as black and 20% were of Asian heritage or were from other groups. The level of deprivation of St Charles' students is classed as very high in the recently published Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Further Education (FE) statistics. It ranks 8 out of some 105 sixth form colleges. The provision is focused on 16-19 year olds. Although the college performance report shows students aged 19+, there is no adult provision as such. These older teenagers are enrolled on mainstream full-time courses. Students are drawn from four partner schools and over 70 other secondary schools throughout London. Some 60% of the students are female. St Charles is a Catholic college that welcomes students from other Christian or other faith backgrounds. In the 2001/02 year group, 65% of students are Catholic and 9% are Muslim. The mission of the college is to provide high quality Catholic comprehensive education for all its students. Christian values in daily college life are expressed as mutual respect and support, genuine concern for others, tolerance, co-operation, self-esteem, diligence and perseverance.

How effective is the college?



The quality of provision in business studies and economics and in English was judged to be outstanding. In seven other curriculum areas the quality was good and in social sciences, it was satisfactory. No area of learning was judged to be unsatisfactory. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

- well-planned and well-managed teaching
- many students attain higher grades than might be expected based on prior attainment
- shared values throughout the college which promote an inclusive culture
- excellent accommodation

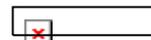
- good range of courses and enrichment activities
- teachers' high expectations of students
- very good academic and personal support for students
- well-motivated students who both challenge and support each other and work with enjoyment.

What should be improved

- proportion of students who complete their courses and achieve qualifications
- rigour of action plans to drive forward improvements
- provision for additional learning support
- pass rates on a number of courses, particularly General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and a few GCE A levels
- assessment of students' level of attainment in key skills when they join the college
- absence of a basic skills strategy.

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	Good. There is very good teaching overall. Pass rates in GCE A-level biology are high. Students' conceptual understanding is sometimes underdeveloped. Retention rates on GCSE courses are low.
Mathematics and computer studies	Good. Pass rates on GCE A-level mathematics courses are high and students do well in the light of prior attainment. The monitoring of students' progress in mathematics is thorough. The pass rate on GCE A-level computing, although improved, is still poor and there is insufficient challenge in many computer studies lessons. The retention rate on GCSE mathematics is low. Teaching is good overall.
Business studies and economics	Outstanding. Students are well motivated and focused. They receive a high proportion of very good teaching that encourages them to succeed and realise their potential, particularly at foundation and intermediate level. There are outstanding pass rates on many courses. The well-managed provision reflects an effective team approach.
Physical education	Good. There are high pass rates on GCE A-level physical education, GCSE and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) sport and recreation courses. GCE A-level students make very good progress in relation to their level of attainment on entering the college. Retention rates on GCE A-level physical education are low. NVQ assessment practices are poor. Teaching is good or better in 63% of lessons.
Art and design	Good. There are excellent pass rates on all levels of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and in GCE A-level art. Although significantly improved in 2001, pass rates in A-level design and technology remain poor and in GCSE design, very poor. Much of the teaching is of very good quality. The area is well resourced, enabling all students to fully participate.
Performing arts	Good. Students achieve high pass rates in media and film studies, with GCE A-level students achieving higher grades than might be expected of them based on their GCSE grades. There are poor retention and pass rates in music. Teaching is good overall. In some lessons, poor punctuality and the lack of a professional approach by a few students in practical workshops has a detrimental effect on students' learning and attainment.
Humanities	Good. There are good pass rates on most courses that include instances of very high proportions of grades A-C. Retention rates on GCSE courses and in history, politics and philosophy GCE A-level are low. Most teaching is good to outstanding. Students are well motivated due in part to careful teaching of course programmes which reflect their multi-cultural interests.
Social sciences	Satisfactory. Students' achievements are satisfactory overall, and there are good pass rates in GCE Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and GCSE sociology, with many students attaining higher grades than might be expected based on their prior attainment. The proportion of students successfully completing courses has declined

	in recent years, particularly in psychology. Overall teaching is satisfactory, there is some good teaching in sociology, but much teaching and learning is conducted at too slow a pace.
English language and literature	Outstanding. Teaching is very good in most lessons: it is purposeful, well planned and successfully involves students. There are very good pass rates on all courses. Students contribute well in class and produce good written work. There are low retention rates on some courses, particularly at GCSE.
Modern foreign languages	Good. There are high pass rates and many high grades in Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. Retention and pass rates in GCE A-level French are less consistently good. Many students taking GCE A-level subjects attain higher grades than might be expected based on their prior attainment. Teaching is mostly of good quality.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and chair of governors provide strong leadership and all senior managers give clear direction to the college's work. Financial management is good. The Catholic ethos is well established. It provides a firm basis for building effective relationships and positively influences the attitudes of both staff and students towards their work in the college. Equality of opportunity is central to the college's life. Management at course level is a strength: there is good teamwork, effective communication and good practice is shared. There have been improvements in pass rates at level 3 overall, and there is clear indication of students attaining higher grades than might be expected based on their prior attainment on a wide range of courses. A strong feature of the quality assurance process is the attention given to the close analysis of individual student's performance against their GCSE point scores on entry. In more than half the curriculum areas, self-assessment lacks thoroughness, fails to identify areas of weakness or priorities for development and improvement.

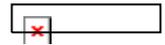
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. A third of students are from denominations or faiths other than Catholic. The college's ethos fosters a strong social, academic and spiritual atmosphere, enabling all students to work together with a shared sense of purpose and mutual respect. The college is strongly committed to a policy of inclusiveness and has attracted students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have been well integrated into the curriculum. The college responds well to the needs and interests of students, in particular those from minority ethnic communities, who benefit from qualifications in relevant languages.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

at enrolment in their course choices. Induction is carefully planned to enable students to settle into college life quickly. A wide range of enrichment activities and opportunities serve to extend students' experiences and build confidence. Teachers provide extensive and effective academic monitoring to help students achieve success. There are outstanding opportunities for spiritual and moral development and a wide range of personal support is available to students. Careers education and guidance are comprehensive. Progression of students to higher education (HE) is improving. There is not enough provision for additional learning support. This is a weakness. With very low take up by students, the college has been ineffective in removing potential negative connotations sometimes associated with learning support.

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

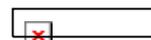
- multi-cultural college community
- effective support and commitment from subject staff and tutors
- good teaching and discipline
- friendly and respectful atmosphere
- good environment and accommodation
- wide range of extra-curricular activities
- equal treatment from staff for students of all abilities.

What they feel could be improved

- overcrowded library and not enough books to meet demand at examination time

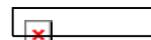
- insufficient computers
- range of food and prices in the canteen.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). 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 LLSC. The LLSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) receives the college's post inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



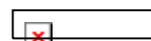
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors



Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	72	25	3
Learning 16-18	77	21	2

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).

Achievement and standards



1. St. Charles College has nearly 1,000 full-time students, the majority of whom are following either GCE A-level or AVCE courses. On GCE A-level programmes overall, students get significantly

AVCE courses, the pass rates and the proportion of students who complete their course are broadly in line with sixth form colleges nationally. However, there are very few sixth form colleges with similar levels of deprivation among their students. Given this, the students' performance at level 3 is even more creditable. Here, pass rates had been gradually declining from 86% in 1998 to 82% in 2000, compared with a national average of 85%. However, in 2001, course data show an improvement in pass rates at this level to 89%.

2. The college makes very good use of two nationally recognised systems for measuring how well students perform in relation to their qualifications on entry. Information from one of these shows that on just over half the courses, students performed better than predictions based on their GCSE results (value added achievements). In 2001, students did significantly better than might be expected on GCE A-level courses in English, psychology, art, biology, Spanish, physical education and geography. On a minority of courses, the reverse of this was true and students got significantly worse grades than those of which they were capable. This was the case in design and technology and music. In the new GCE AS examinations, students' performance in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results was strong in sociology, history, geography, Spanish and French. However, GCE AS students of media and film, computing, and design and technology product design did worse than might be expected. The second system enables comparison with some of the best performing colleges nationally. In a league table of over 200 participating colleges, St. Charles came 14th in 2000 and 2nd in 2001 for its overall value added achievements. The Spanish and geography departments were the top performing departments in the sample.

3. Around 16% of the students at the college take qualifications at level 2. Most take courses leading to intermediate GNVQ, others (4%) retake GCSEs and a small minority take NVQs. The number of students taking intermediate vocational qualifications has declined from 116 in 1999 to 95 in 2001. Nevertheless, the college remains the largest provider of intermediate GNVQs in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Pass rates on these qualifications have risen steadily from 72% in 1999, to 86% in 2000, to 91% in 2001. This compares very favourably with a national pass rate for intermediate vocational qualifications of 67.5% in 2001. The overall performance at level 2 is less satisfactory. While the proportion of level 2 students who complete their course is slightly higher than the national average, the percentage passing was significantly lower in 1998, 1999 and 2000. On some GCSE courses, retention rates are very low, for example, mathematics (52%) and English (66%).

4. Around 8% of the students at the college are taking level 1 courses in either foundation GNVQ or level 1 NVQs. For three out of the last four years, the retention rates on these courses have been slightly higher than the national average. Pass rates, conversely, have been lower. Nevertheless, they have improved significantly in recent years. In 1999, for example, only 62% passed, compared to a national average of 70%. In 2000, the level 1 pass rate at the college improved greatly to 71%. This was still below the national average for that year of 77%. Results in 2001 have improved further to 96%.

5. The attainment of students was judged good or better in 64% of lessons observed. In about 33% of lessons, it was judged satisfactory and in four lessons (2.9%) it was unsatisfactory. In most curriculum areas, there was at least one lesson where the students' attainment was very good. There was a significant proportion of lessons where attainment was very good or better in science, business studies, humanities and English. In media and modern languages, there were examples of excellent standards being achieved in lessons.

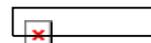
6. Attendance during the inspection week was satisfactory and in some curriculum areas it was good, for example, in humanities and science. In performing arts and media, poor punctuality had a detrimental effect on the learning and attainment of students.

7. The standards achieved in most students' written work show that staff have demanding expectations at all levels. This was particularly the case in business studies, for example. In social sciences, however, more able students were not sufficiently pushed to tackle questions in enough depth. Although the coursework in sociology was good overall, with imaginative topics chosen to reflect concerns in the community, only a minority of students was sufficiently analytical or evaluative in exploring social scientific ideas.

8. Much of the students' written work at the college is very well presented and some shows evidence of extensive research and skilful use of supporting evidence, for example, in English, physical education and performing arts and media. Most students have at least a satisfactory understanding of the concepts which underpin their course of study. In physical education, students show excellent understanding in their application of training principles to improve fitness levels. In performing arts and media, students' work shows a sound level of understanding, good analytical skills and well-developed critical thinking. In mathematics, students show good understanding of graphical representation and ably apply the techniques of integration and solve differential equations. In sciences, students display solid understanding of scientific theory and are able to apply it correctly in practical work, using appropriate technical language. In one outstanding second-year drama class, students demonstrated exceptional performance skills, use of comic timing, space and physical expression. Some practical work in performing arts, however, was marred by an insufficiently professional approach by the students.

9. In class discussions, most students make good contributions. In Spanish there was some outstanding discussion in the foreign language about the problems of adolescence. In English, students' feedback from their group discussion was well articulated and confident, and many made thoughtful and perceptive comments, with good command of relevant vocabulary. In physical education, students were able to evaluate data and propose logical explanations. In social sciences, students' contribution to class discussions showed a competent grasp of basic concepts and methodologies. In the very small minority of lessons where attainment was unsatisfactory, students demonstrated little evidence of prior knowledge and a poor grasp of basic concepts.

Quality of education and training



10. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 139 sessions. They judged that, overall, teaching was good or better in 71.9% of the sessions observed and satisfactory in 25.2%. Only 4 lessons (2.9%) in mathematics, physical education and modern foreign languages had unsatisfactory teaching. Seven curriculum areas had no unsatisfactory teaching. A significant proportion of lessons were judged very good or outstanding (43%). The highest proportion of these, nearly 90%, was seen in English. In business studies and economics, over 66% of teaching was very good or outstanding and in humanities, science and performing arts and media, over 50% of the lessons were in this category.

11. Most course planning is good and takes account of the needs and interests of students and their particular circumstances. A particular strength is the sensitivity paid to equal opportunities issues. Considerable emphasis is placed on the need to recognise, respect and celebrate the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the students, through both subject content and teaching approach. For example, teaching in sociology of the family and of religion is designed to promote the view that different family forms and religious beliefs are of equal value.

12. There is effective and enthusiastic teaching by an adequate number of staff who are appropriately qualified in their subjects and are committed to continuing professional development. The majority of lessons are well structured and delivered with confidence. Teachers use a variety of teaching styles and methods to gain students' interest and take account of their different and most productive methods of learning. For example, in mathematics, good introductory exercises outlining the lesson aims and establishing timescales for planned activities immediately attracted students' enthusiasm. The regular use of group work, a feature of these lessons, works well. In performing arts and media, students' interest was captured in the best lessons by imaginative and stimulating tasks, where theory was explored through practical exercises. In one outstanding lesson in economics, the teacher incorporated up-to-date material drawn from a website to provide a scenario and data for detailed analysis of market failure. Following a confident exposition of theory and good examples to provide a contextual framework to concepts, the teacher used exploratory questioning to help students refine and articulate their understanding.

13. Not all teaching was effective, however. In many lessons there was, quite properly, a focus on developing the skills and techniques necessary to achieve success in the forthcoming examinations. In a few lessons, this restricted the range of activities to revision work and teaching was less stimulating and failed to involve students sufficiently. In social sciences, students spent too long working on their own and answering questions that could have been tackled in advance of the lesson. This slowed down the pace of the learning and the teacher's role was marginal. In performing arts and media, large group discussions around a series of revision questions did not involve or stimulate all the students sufficiently. In a number of curriculum areas, poorer lessons were seen where both more able and less able students were allocated tasks of insufficient challenge and so became inattentive. Inspectors' scrutiny of the very detailed schemes of work in English showed much more variety in methods and use of resources earlier in the college year, than those being used currently.

14. Good working relationships between teachers and students, and among students, are a strength of the college. As a result, students show no inhibition in asking questions and contribute to discussion with confidence. The high level of student motivation and learning is based on the foundation of supportive teaching. In art and design, students responded well to the friendly and lively, but purposeful atmosphere. They worked on their own, asking for help when needed and offering help to others in the class. In many curriculum areas, individual support for students in lessons is supplemented by workshop sessions. Staff give freely of their time outside normal teaching hours. Frequent use is made of carefully prepared workbooks in mathematics. Handouts, revision guides and course materials are of a very good standard in all curriculum areas.

15. In most lessons learning is regularly checked. In the best lessons, teachers take account of the different levels of attainment of their students and prepare different tasks matching the range of ability. Teachers take care to ensure that the students learn logically and expect them to explain concepts using correct terminology. In a minority of lessons, however, opportunities for teachers to reinforce learning were not taken. For example, in an humanities lesson, the pace was dictated by the teacher's desire to cover intended objectives in the lesson plan. Here, not enough emphasis was placed on questioning techniques which might test and probe the students' knowledge more deeply, and little time was given to allow students to digest new information or to practise new skills.

16. The college occupies a compact, attractive site, which is fully accessible to students with disabilities. Accommodation and the college grounds are well maintained to a high standard. Students respect the fabric of the building. They are proud of their environment and many feel secure within the college.

17. A number of improvements have been made to the accommodation since the last inspection. Very good specialist resources support teaching in most curriculum areas. For example, media and film studies benefit from a new editing suite with 'state of the art' equipment. The college has made significant investment in computer facilities and has quadrupled its technician support. An upgrading programme has been implemented and four new computer suites developed, one of which is an iMac centre. The college has recently launched its own intranet site for staff and students. Despite the improved computer/student ratio of 1:5.6, there are too few computers for use on a drop-in basis. There are stimulating classrooms, with good use of visual material and displays of students' work that provide a real subject identity. In some, study areas have been developed with networked computers and an extensive range of learning materials.

18. The library, although small, is extensively used and has a well-stocked, up-to-date textbook collection. The learning resource manager has excellent working relations with all departments. Teachers for their respective curriculum areas indicate to the manager which topics students are studying so that specific resources can be made, and are, available. The library promotes subject-focused displays, information on useful websites and provides a good range of periodicals and journals. The self-assessment report recognises the lack of space for private study and there are plans to extend the library as part of the accommodation strategy.

19. In most curriculum areas, homework is regularly set and marked thoroughly, with constructive written and oral feedback to students, notably in business, mathematics and computer studies, art and design, and modern foreign languages. However, there were examples of inconsistent quality in

the checking of work in humanities. In social sciences, students' written work was not always corrected and files contained errors of style, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

20. The college places a strong emphasis on target setting and monitoring students' progress. Teachers use students' GCSE results to predict the minimum grade they should get in the examination they take at the college. The students are given this grade as the minimum they should aim for. Students' progress against minimum target grades is monitored closely by teachers and tutors in formal and informal reviews. Parents are kept informed through parents' evenings and through helpful reports. There is consistent and robust use of the electronic attendance register to monitor attendance and punctuality. Poor attendance is followed up rigorously.

21. The assessment of students' work is thorough in most curriculum areas. There are examples of well-established and effective internal verification systems, particularly in English, art and design, performing arts and media and business studies. In most cases, students understand how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. However, assessment practices in NVQ sport and recreation are poor, too much is classroom based and does not reflect the need to assess work undertaken in work placements.

22. The college does not assess the students' level of attainment in key skills when they join the college. Instead, students follow key skills courses at the same level as their qualification programme. As a result, a significant number of students with entry level and level 1 numeracy and literacy needs are struggling on key skills levels 2 and 3 courses. This is a weakness that the college recognises. Whilst not all staff are qualified to teach specific key skills, they do attend monthly meetings, share guidance material and much good teaching of key skills was observed by inspectors. However, pass rates in this area are weak overall and below the targets the college sets for itself.

23. Further additional activities with assessment opportunities are not always available for students who have passed key skills examinations in January. The more able students are not subsequently allocated sufficiently motivating or challenging tasks. Integration of key skills assignments with elements of the vocational and academic courses is inconsistent, so that a significant number of students do not appreciate the broader value of the skills in their subject areas.

24. The college is committed to providing a curriculum that meets the needs of students irrespective of prior achievement. There is a good range of GCE AS/A-level and GCSE subjects and vocational courses. However, there is no provision at entry level and limited provision at level 1. For example, no interim course exists for students with grade D or below in mathematics. The full potential of links with industry, to enhance the vocational relevance of courses, is not recognised in some areas, so students do not have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in the real work place. The college keeps its curriculum under continuous review to meet students' needs. The Advanced Extension Award in mathematics for high-achieving students who receive additional learning opportunities, was introduced in September 2001, when the free standing mathematics units was discontinued. Within subject areas, topics are carefully chosen to reflect the interests of students and local communities. In sociology, for example, the modules taught are those which are most relevant to students from a culturally diverse inner-city community. In modern foreign languages, the college is the largest provider nationally of Portuguese.

25. Students have good opportunities before enrolment to familiarise themselves with the college and the courses available. Particularly useful is the opportunity to sample lessons. There is collaborative activity with the four partner schools, including successful taster days for Year 10 pupils. Prospective parents have the opportunity to attend open days. Enrolment is managed efficiently and students receive detailed information and guidance from both senior pastoral managers and subject specialists. Induction to the college is carefully planned.

26. Nearly a third of students are from denominations or faiths other than Catholic, and the college's ethos fosters a strong social, academic and spiritual atmosphere enabling all students to work together with a shared sense of purpose. Courses in sociology, humanities, and art provide good examples of opportunities for learning by building on and utilising the diversity of students' background, knowledge and faiths.

27. There is a broad range of popular enrichment activities in response to students' perceived needs and aspirations. This includes revision workshops, social events, music and drama, sport and recreation. The college encourages students to contribute to local community life. Students are involved in innovative fundraising events and are encouraged to undertake mentoring schemes, work experience placements or community work through, for example, the Millennium Volunteers programme. A variety of visits, often linked to curriculum areas, take students away from the college to destinations in Britain and abroad.

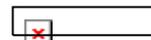
28. The college has no basic skills strategy or policy document outlining its approach to this provision. Additional learning support does not match the poor level of attainment of many students on entry to the college. This is a weakness. Currently, 60 students are receiving one-to-one support and of these only 18 are level 3 students. On occasions, students have turned down the offer of help because the college has been ineffective in removing the potentially negative connotations associated with learning support. The schemes of work do not include tasks for students to learn on their own and students whose first language is not English are not benefiting from long-term language development. There are 12 students in the college with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities and they are receiving help in a learning support workshop. Eleven of these are students with dyslexia.

29. In line with its mission statement, the college has been successful in making prayer and liturgy central to the life of the college. Staff and students can start the day with the Morning Prayer of the Catholic Church in the chapel. There is a weekly Mass in a specially extended lunchtime. A prayer or spiritual reflection occurs at least weekly in group tutorials and all students attend a weekly assembly. The chaplain works with staff and students to prepare liturgies at appropriate times in the church's calendar and to mark key stages in the journey of students through college. At the physical centre of the college is a beautifully designed chapel that provides a quiet and peaceful space for students and staff. The college accommodates the devotional practice of Muslim students. The recently appointed first lay chaplain of the college has developed good arrangements for acquainting the students with what the chaplaincy has to offer. Students enjoy the compulsory religious education lessons which make an outstanding contribution to their spiritual and moral development. In one lesson, looking at Christ's teaching on forgiveness, the respectful and sensitive approach of the teacher, together with a well-chosen video extract, prompted a mature and insightful response from students of all abilities.

30. Each student is allocated to a tutor group and meets with their tutor daily for a 15-minute tutorial or an assembly. Tutor groups contain students from different course levels and from each of the year groups. Second-year students often provide strong role models for the younger students. Students have a range of different people to turn to for personal support. The key person is their tutor but support is also available from the pastoral directors and from the lay chaplain, who offers confidential counselling. At an early stage in their college life, the college identifies students with poor attendance or behaviour patterns, or with personal problems, that might put them at risk of not completing their course of study. Prompt action leads to the college being successful in retaining the great majority of these potentially vulnerable students.

31. Careers education at level 3 is delivered well through a key skills information and communications technology (ICT) assignment. The material is up to date, detailed and helpful. Two sessions cater for students who intend to progress directly to employment. Students are well supported in making applications to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and received good information at the recent HE conference. With a high proportion (80%) of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there are improving levels of progression to HE. In 2001, 68% of GCE A-level students and 55% of advanced GNVQ students, an increase of 14% on the previous year, went on to HE institutions. Capital Careers Service deliver three group sessions annually to students on vocational courses and careers guidance interviews to students on foundation and intermediate courses. Careers guidance for advanced students is available from group tutors, teachers and the college's careers adviser.

Leadership and management



32. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and chair of governors provide strong leadership. All senior managers give clear and positive direction to the college's work. The governing body effectively monitors the college's performance and participates constructively in the formulation of college policy and monitoring the strategic plan. Governors have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses. A high level of commitment to the Catholic ethos permeates the life of the college. The principal reports to governors on the impact of the Catholic mission at each meeting of the board.

33. The Catholic ethos is recognised as providing a firm platform for effective relationships between staff and students, which in turn encourage positive attitudes to work. This ethos is sustained by a general religious education programme and through many opportunities for prayer and liturgy. The statutory obligation to provide opportunities for collective worship is fulfilled within an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. Equality of opportunity is central to the college's life. Students are valued equally regardless of the level of course being studied, their gender, ethnicity or ability/disability. The college accords different cultures and beliefs clear respect and there is recognition of this diversity in the curriculum. A recent survey of students indicated wide support for the college's Catholic ethos and awareness of the equal opportunity policy, which figures prominently in student handbooks.

34. The two vice principals each effectively manage two of the four divisions. The four directors of individual divisions are successful in performing their cross-college, pastoral and curriculum responsibilities, as well as taking overall responsibility for the work of subject heads in their divisions. Co-ordination and management of the curriculum are good. The senior management team, comprising the principal and two vice principals, review college policy and link effectively with the quality and strategic management group, which meets four times each term to make major decisions, set targets and review progress. This group comprises the senior management team, the four directors and the librarian. Staff value the consultation which takes place in divisional meetings which occur twice each term. There is effective communication within divisions and clear line management: this is in a college where managers, because of the college's size, have a number of roles. Management at course level is a strength. Teachers work well in teams, produce teaching material of high quality, share good practice and discuss effective teaching strategies in their regular meetings.

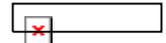
35. The college internal inspection system is well embedded in its quality assurance process. In a four-year cycle, each subject is inspected by a team of senior staff supported by external specialist advisers. This inspection system has focused teachers' attention on improving teaching and learning. Teaching observations feature prominently and regularly in the scrutiny of students by subject area heads and grading takes place. In the early stages of the cycle in academic years 1998/99 to 1999/2000, this lacked rigour but has been much more thorough in the last two years. A strong feature of the quality process is the attention given to the close analysis of individual student's performance against their GCSE point scores on entry. These data are used both as indicators of likely performance of all courses, as well as in setting academic targets for individual students while in the college. This analysis has led to significant, beneficial changes to a range of courses. This approach has provided successful achievement in a college where many students enter GCE AS courses with low GCSE scores. Examination results overall improved in 2001. College subject-review and self-assessment cycles are well-established practises. While realistic targets are set at course level, their review against actual achievement in more than half of the curriculum areas lack thoroughness. In these areas, significant weaknesses in teaching have not been identified and monitoring by heads of subject areas and directors has been ineffective.

36. The principal is appraised by the chair of governors. The former appraises the senior management team with the help of governors. All other staff are appraised by line managers. A comprehensive and well-funded professional development programme is produced each year. This programme reflects the needs of staff identified through appraisal and the needs of the college identified through the development of strategic and operational plans. A number of individual teachers are supported on higher degree courses. A post recognition review of the Investor in People standard was successfully completed in March 2002. An indication of effective professional

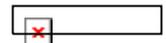
development is the highly successful introduction of GCE AS into the college.

37. The college's management information system is adequate in its provision of reliable data to enable managers to make informed decisions. At times, subject heads have been inconsistent in their use of data to measure performance. The college is in the process of upgrading the system. Budgets in the college are well controlled and monitored. Timely and detailed financial information is compiled for the governors' finance and premises committee, and regular verbal and written updates and overviews are given to directors, vice-principal and the principal by the vice-principal (premises and resources). Financial management is good. There is effective deployment of both staff and resources. The college offers good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in GCE A-level biology
- very good teaching overall
- very supportive relationships
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- excellent accommodation.

Weaknesses

- poor pass and retention rates in GCE A-level physics

- low retention rates on GCSE courses
- insufficient opportunities for the development of conceptual understanding in some lessons.

Scope of provision

38. The college offers GCE AS and GCE A-level courses in biology, chemistry and physics and GCSE courses in biology and science. At the time of the inspection, there were 56 students enrolled on GCE AS courses, 55 on GCE A-level courses and 40 on GCSE courses. There is no provision at foundation level.

Achievement and standards

39. Pass rates in all three GCE A-level subjects have improved over the last three years, 1999 to 2001. In 2001, the pass rate for GCE A-level biology students was 100%. This compares well with the national average for sixth form colleges of 90%. The pass rate in physics is poor. In 2001, it was 70%, compared with the national average of 90%. The percentage of grades A to C at GCE A level for all three subjects is poor compared with national data. There has been improvement over the last three years when comparing the value added based on students' GCSE results. In biology, students do far better than predictions based on GCSE results. In 2001, 67% of GCE A-level chemistry students went on to courses in HE.

40. Retention rates at GCE A level are comparable to national averages except in physics, where they dropped significantly in 2001 to well below national figures. In biology and chemistry, the retention rate at GCE AS is good, and in physics it is outstanding.

41. Students understand scientific theories and can apply them correctly. GCE AS chemistry students were able to interpret the stability of sand in thermodynamic and kinetic terms. In GCE A-level physics, students could explain their experimental results in terms of Newton's law of cooling. In GCSE biology, students understood the conditions necessary for growth and were able to suggest why athlete's foot occurred on the feet rather than the hands. Students understand scientific language and use it correctly when writing up experiments.

42. Students do well on the GCSE biology course. Just over two thirds of students improved their previous result by at least one grade. However, retention rates on GCSE courses were low compared to national figures in 2001.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE biology	2	No. of starts	41	31	39
		% retention	88	91	74
		% pass rate	42	40	45
GCSE chemistry	2	No. of starts	12	10	13
		% retention	92	80	69
		% pass rate	82	50	44
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	29	20	21

		% retention	79	90	57
		% pass rate	57	40	70
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	26	26	22
		% retention	81	73	86
		% pass rate	67	56	94
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	35	38	26
		% retention	74	76	77
		% pass rate	65	76	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

43. Teaching was very good overall, with 75% of lessons observed being good or better, and none was unsatisfactory. Lessons are well planned and managed. Teachers respond flexibly in lessons to students' needs. In a biology lesson, where students had not revised the structure of DNA sufficiently, the teacher adapted the lesson plan and summarised the main points. Teachers use language appropriate to the students in each class, varying their vocabulary and intonation effectively. Graphic descriptions are used well to help students to learn and recall information. Relating science to everyday situations helps to maintain students' interest. A teacher's description of the conditions under which the standard kilogram is kept in Paris prompted a student to initiate a discussion on the need for standardisation. In the less successful theoretical and practical lessons, teachers failed to sufficiently challenge students. For example, students were not required to develop the skill of speculating and testing hypotheses. In one practical lesson, the teacher did not correct a temperature measuring technique.

44. Students are keen to understand and ask questions to extend their knowledge. Students work well together and challenge each other's ideas. However, teachers do not always create opportunities for students to lead and participate in discussions to develop their understanding and their oral skills. Students value the continual encouragement of their teachers and their willingness to help them outside lesson time.

45. Homework is set and marked regularly. Teachers correct errors and give encouraging written feedback to students by explaining what they need to do to reach expected standards. There is little evidence of the use of information technology (IT) in the teaching of science. Coursework in biology is usually word processed. The better examples include tables and complex calculations that are well laid out, although graphs and charts are hand drawn.

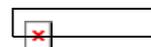
46. Students and staff benefit from very good laboratory accommodation that provides an environment conducive to learning. The rooms are light and airy and have movable workbenches which can be arranged for different uses. One biology laboratory houses a large variety of attractive plants which are useful aids to study. A wild life garden provides a pleasant oasis in an inner city college for studying the reproduction of flowering plants. Scientific equipment is well maintained and in sufficient quantity to enable students to develop practical skills on their own. Staff are well qualified and have relevant teaching experience. There have been vacancies and absences in the staffing for chemistry and physics during the last 18 months, which has disrupted students' learning.

47. When they start the course, students are given target GCE AS or A-level grades which are based on their GCSE scores. Progress charts are used to plot individual student achievement against the target. Each term, teachers review progress individually with students. Students value the constant monitoring of their progress which prompts them to adjust their study habits to improve their performance. Teachers share good practice. Teachers regularly produce additional written reports for parents on their children's progress.

Leadership and management

48. All courses are well managed and teaching staff are working hard to develop common policies throughout the science department. For example, a policy on setting and marking students' homework has been implemented. Science teachers meet frequently and discuss the effectiveness of various teaching and learning activities they have tried. Newly appointed staff understand, and are fully involved, in the college's quality assurance arrangements. Ways to improve retention and pass rates are identified and target rates set. The self-assessment report identifies most strengths and weaknesses, but there is insufficient rigour in the assessment of teaching and learning. The development plan is not consistently linked to weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and completion dates are sometimes not sufficiently precise. The termly meetings between teachers in charge of subjects and their line managers are increasingly focusing on action to achieve improvement and have contributed towards raising standards over the last three years. Good practice is shared within the department. For example, student handbooks for chemistry and physics are being developed based on the one used in biology.

Mathematics and computer studies



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in GCE A-level mathematics
- good subject support for students
- thorough monitoring of students' progress in mathematics
- good use of groupwork in mathematics lessons
- good use of up-to-date ICT in computer studies.

Weaknesses

- very poor retention rates on GCSE mathematics course
- insufficient availability of ICT resources to support students outside scheduled lessons

- insufficient challenge in many computer studies lessons.

Scope of provision

49. GCSE, GCE AS and A-level courses are offered in mathematics and computer studies. The Advanced Extension Award in mathematics was introduced for high achievers in September 2001. Free standing mathematics units were discontinued at that time in the light of poor performance. There is no interim mathematics course for students with GCSE grades below D. In all, 329 students study mathematics courses and 147 study computing and ICT. GCE AS computing was first offered in 2000/01. ICT in GCE AS and half subject GCSE were introduced in September 2001.

Achievement and standards

50. Pass rates on GCE A-level mathematics were substantially above the national average in 2001. Under-performance in 1999/2000 has been remedied and pass rates have returned to previous levels. Overall, students taking GCE A-level mathematics do very well in view of their prior attainment in GCSE. Pass rates at GCE AS are also higher than national averages in 2001. Of those students who complete their GCSE course, more achieve grade C than nationally. Pass rates have improved since 2000 when they were below the national average. However, fewer students finish their GCSE course than is the case in most sixth form colleges. The proportion of those who start the course and who pass has doubled over the last four years, but remains below national averages. Retention rates for 2001/02 have improved. The pass rate for GCE A-level computing is variable and in 2001 is above the national average for general FE colleges, but still 10% below the sixth form college average. Retention for GCE A-level computing is at or above the national average. Current module results for both GCE AS and A-level computing show considerable improvement on 2001 results.

51. In mathematics, students' files are well presented. Low algebra skills are reflected in poorer quality work at both GCE AS and A levels. At GCE AS and A level, students use ICT and specialist mathematical software to support their coursework. Most students are confident in their work in pure mathematics. Students show good understanding of polynomials and integration techniques. Work in statistics demonstrates a solid understanding of concepts of average and dispersion. The best GCSE work in algebra is well laid out which assists students to reach accurate solutions.

52. Students observed in the classroom worked confidently and demonstrated sound practical competence. Their work is of a satisfactory standard, matching those expected at both level 2 and level 3. Students were asked reasons for their late arrival for lessons and staff follow-up student absences with telephone calls to parents.

A sample of retention and pass rates in mathematics and computer studies, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	234	201	207
		% retention	76	82	52
		% pass rate	27	22	54
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	39	35	53
		% retention	77	83	77
		% pass rate	91	79	95

GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	26	40	44
		% retention	81	88	66
		% pass rate	89	45	71

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

53. Teaching is good overall in mathematics and computer studies. In mathematics, the majority of lessons are well planned and well managed. Teachers' good subject knowledge results in confident and effective teaching. An appropriate balance is achieved between making demands on students and helping them. Working relationships between students and teachers are very good. Teachers have high expectations of students. They ensure that students learn topics in a logical sequence and insist that they use correct terminology. The use of regular group work is a feature of lessons. Students' learning is very productive because lessons are well managed and expectations clearly explained.

54. In most computer studies courses, good use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning. Notes and presentations are available on the network and used with on-line exercises to reinforce learning and provide a flexible approach to study. Students progress at their own pace with little demand from teachers to increase it to reach higher standards. Data projectors aid demonstrations and illustrate complex material. Internet and on-line materials are used to good effect. In a number of ICT lessons, the degree of difficulty of tasks set by tutors was insufficient to challenge students. For example, a system flowchart was demonstrated without reference to a practical application. Most courses are well planned with detailed schemes of work. Homework is indicated on the scheme of work displayed in the classroom. Students demonstrate a mature attitude towards checking the homework requirements.

55. Mathematics rooms are well resourced, with access to networked computers in two of the rooms. There are good samples of students' work displayed and rooms contain a wide range of resources. Textbooks, revision guides and student workbooks are provided. The library possesses a wide range of texts and mathematics resources. ICT is used in the 'decision mathematics' module, in statistics coursework and in various pure mathematics topics. There are sufficient computers with up-to-date software in ICT. Technical support is prompt and effective. Some software used by computing students is only available in the computer room. Outside of scheduled hours, students are frustrated because they are unable to use equipment at these times. As a result, students do not gain sufficient expertise of their usage.

56. In GCE A-level mathematics, teachers carefully monitor students' progress towards their target grades and analyse performance. Weekly homework is set and returned to students promptly. Marking is good and procedures to ensure consistency of standards with the subject are good. Staff support students well by giving additional curriculum help in special tuition sessions or in free time. Students value this support. Speakers from HE visit the college. A residential trip to Oxford is valued by Year 13 students and provides intensive revision for final examinations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well within the area. Lessons are timetabled in ground floor rooms as necessary and access to the residential was arranged. Students are held accountable for poor performance. Special tuition sessions and additional homework questions are arranged for the more able learners and Advanced Extension Awards are available. However, there is poor additional support for GCSE mathematics students, who have very low grades at the start of the course.

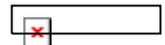
Leadership and management

57. Management of mathematics courses is satisfactory. Mathematics staff work effectively as a team. In frequently held meetings, they share good practice. Minutes of meetings show the emphasis on improving curriculum planning and the requirement to report on the monitoring of students' progress. Self-assessment and the development plan accurately represent, and address,

key strengths and weaknesses within the subject area. Some targets are unrealistic in relation to those achieved or expected: actual retention rates at GCSE are significantly below the target set. The relevance of and content of courses are reviewed each year and students' views are taken into consideration.

58. Management of computing and ICT courses is satisfactory. Tutors work effectively together. Sensible targets are set for pass and retention rates and reviewed on a termly basis. However, the self-assessment development plan lacks detail on how identified targets are to be achieved.

Business studies and economics



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

Strengths

- well-planned and managed provision reflecting a team approach
- high proportion of very good teaching
- outstanding pass rates on the majority of courses
- high retention rates on most courses
- exceptional level of encouragement to students
- close monitoring of progress and attendance
- high quality of assessment and feedback on students' work
- highly motivated and well-focused students.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT in business subjects.

Scope of provision

59. The college's provision in business and economics is outstanding. The courses meet the academic and vocational needs of students in these subject specialisms and there is suitable provision at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Academic subjects are offered in GCSE, GCE AS and A-level business studies and at GCE AS and A-level economics. Vocational courses provide full progression opportunities. These are GNVQ foundation, GNVQ intermediate and the AVCE in business studies for single and double awards.

60. Current numbers enrolled on level 1 courses are 44 (GNVQ foundation). At level 2, there are 54 students on intermediate GNVQ and 19 on GCSE business. At level 3, numbers enrolled are 97 on AVCE, 76 on GCE AS business, 33 on GCE AS economics, 26 GCE A-level economics and 36 GCE A-level business.

61. The foundation course meets a particular college need in providing excellent opportunities for students with little prior attainment to discover and develop their potential.

Achievement and standards

62. There are outstanding pass rates on the majority of academic and vocational courses. A high proportion of students at all levels complete their studies. The examination success of these students is often outstanding. Pass rates on most courses are above national averages. In 2001, 100% pass rates were achieved in GCE AS economics, GCSE business and GNVQ advanced, with significant proportions of high grade passes. The pass rate in 2001 for GNVQ foundation was well above the national average and demonstrated the college's success and commitment in encouraging students at this level to achieve. Many students progress to other levels. For example in 2000/01, 81% of foundation students progressed to intermediate level and 43% of intermediate level students to advanced level. In relation to the ability profile of students on entry, the college does extremely well for these students. Although there has been a slight downturn in examination passes at GCE A level in business and economics to around the national average in 2001, results at GCE AS in these subjects are very good when compared with the national average.

63. Retention rates are high on most courses, reflecting the positive attitude of students and the commitment to their studies. Even the lowest retention is around the national average and in half the courses, the trend in retention is improving. There are active strategies to retain students and those 'at risk' of leaving are identified early, with support and guidance being offered to encourage continuation. Attendance and punctuality are good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business studies, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation	1	No. of starts	35	39	36
		% retention	74	85	80
		% pass rate	96	85	93
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	52	56	37
		% retention	88	84	93
		% pass rate	96	87	84
GCSE business studies	2	No. of starts	24	10	14

		% retention	88	100	86
		% pass rate	86	90	100
GNVQ advanced	3	No. of starts	22	47	53
		% retention	86	74	79
		% pass rate	83	97	100
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	61	60	65
		% retention	74	88	74
		% pass rate	95	88	90
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	32	20	32
		% retention	75	95	78
		% pass rate	96	82	82

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

64. A high proportion of lessons are characterised by very good teaching which places demands on students and promotes their interest and learning. This high quality of teaching is reflected across all courses.

65. Teachers are enthusiastic and are strong advocates for their subjects. Students' interest is sustained through varied and relevant activities that provide the necessary theoretical and real world insights into business and economics. Teachers adopt an interrogative and probing questioning style. This approach constantly checks on students' understanding and requires them to justify their responses and demonstrate their grasp of topics and concepts. A skilful mix of empathy, encouragement and discipline pervades the majority of lessons. This style is appreciated by students who are highly motivated and well-focused learners as a result. High expectations of all students produce consistently good standards of work. Students participate well in lessons and show good development of oral skills. They are often asked to develop and refine their responses further to enhance their powers of expression. Students make presentations to the class on economics or business themes, and draw upon wide ranging sources of investigation. The majority of lessons have a good vocational context enhanced by the use of up-to-date case studies and regular use of relevant website materials. There are good commercial and business links to support learning on the vocational and GCE A-level courses. These include guest speakers from a multi-national electronics company, project work linked to a publishing company, mock interviews using business personnel, and a range of business trips to France, Spain and Italy.

66. Students receive regular and constructive feedback on their marked work. Individual student progress is monitored in detail and reviewed against targets set against predicted scores calculated by the students themselves on entry. Marks are recorded against minimum target grades and students are given considerable encouragement to meet and exceed their targets. Many do. Wall displays are imaginatively used to present achievement against the predicted scores and progress in meeting assignment schedules. The approach is viewed constructively by students and reflects the business discipline pervading within the subject.

67. The curriculum area is generally well resourced. The team of ten staff is very well qualified and their experience and qualifications are closely matched to the needs of the curriculum and local circumstances. A very high proportion have internal verifier awards. Teachers are deployed to widen their versatility and teach across levels on both vocational and academic courses. There is good updating of skills, although there are insufficient opportunities for commercial secondment. Classrooms are well furnished, presenting an attractive atmosphere for learning. Seating arrangements readily permit formal exposition and group work. Overhead projectors and whiteboards are particularly well used to consolidate learning. Students' work reveals much use of

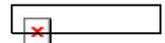
ICT in preparing and presenting their assignments. However, there is little provision of suitable ICT equipment in subject rooms and insufficient direct use of ICT within the teaching and learning of business subjects.

Leadership and management

68. There is clear direction and leadership in the department. The subject head and deputy provide good stewardship to subject teachers. There are well-defined roles and responsibilities. There is effective teamwork and a collaborative approach which openly shares experience and ideas. There is a central focus on raising standards and maximising student achievement and extensive use of data on predicted grades to monitor progress. Agreed criteria on best practice in teaching and learning are applied by the team. A culture of ready acceptance of lesson observation allows peers to learn from each other and disseminate good practice and share learning materials.

69. There are regular meetings and detailed evaluation of subject performance and trends of pass and retention rates. The self-assessment process involves all staff and provides a broadly accurate evaluation of the curriculum area's strengths and weaknesses.

Physical education



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on all full-time courses
- much higher grades than expected for GCE A-level physical education
- extensive range of resources
- good support for students
- good management of GCSE and GCE A-level physical education courses.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GCE A-level physical education

- little demand made of students in some lessons
- poor NVQ assessment practices.

Scope of provision

70. The college offers physical education at GCE AS and A level, GCSE physical education and NVQs in sport and recreation at levels 1 and 2. At the time of the inspection, there were 22 students enrolled on GCE A-level courses, there were 30 on GCE AS courses and 7 on GCSE courses. A range of additional qualifications is offered to broaden students' experience, for example, awards in junior sports leaders, community sports leaders, football teaching, fitness instruction and a first aid qualification. NVQ level 1 students also complete a range of college accredited sport performance awards in basketball, tennis, swimming, football, trampoline and athletics. Students have the opportunity to take part in representative team sports and a broad range of sport activities as part of the college's enrichment programme.

Achievement and standards

71. In 2001, pass rates for all courses were well above the national average. In GCE A-level physical education, GCSE physical education and NVQ sport and recreation level 1, all students who completed their course passed. Pass rates on GCE AS physical education when introduced in September 2000 and the NVQ level 2 coaching teaching and instruction, were both well above the national average. For the last two years, 2000 and 2001, GCE A-level physical education students have made very good progress in relation to their level of attainment on entering the college. In 2000, 61% achieved high grades and in 2001, the figure increased to 72%, 25% above the national average for sixth form colleges. In 2001, GCE A-level physical education students were ranked fifth nationally, based on their GCSE grades

72. The retention rates on most courses are slightly above national averages. However, in 2001 a high proportion of GCE A-level physical education students failed to complete their course. Retention rates on this course were significantly worse than the national average. Retention rates on GCE A-level physical education have been poor in two of the last three years. This is a significant weakness. In NVQ sport and recreation, retention rates are significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges.

73. The personal exercise programmes and investigative studies produced for the course work elements of the GCE AS and A-level examinations are of a very high quality. Students' work is well presented and provides clear evidence of extensive research, using a wide range of sources. Students showed a good understanding of key principles associated with training and fitness, skill acquisition and sports psychology. Written work is accurate with appropriate use of technical language and demonstrates the development of analysis, application and evaluation skills.

A sample of retention and pass rates in physical education, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ sport and recreation	1	No. of starts	25	17	13
		% retention	72	65	92
		% pass rate	67	64	100

GCSE physical education	2	No. of starts	15	17	29
		% retention	93	76	79
		% pass rate	100	100	100
NVQ sport and recreation	2	No. of starts	**	**	18
		% retention	**	**	89
		% pass rate	**	**	81
Football teaching certificate (FA)	2	No. of starts	**	**	*23
		% retention	**	**	*100
		% pass rate	**	**	*100
Community sports leaders award	2	No. of starts	23	**	*18
		% retention	78	**	*89
		% pass rate	67	**	*81
GCE A-level physical education	3	No. of starts	30	28	29
		% retention	67	86	66
		% pass rate	87	96	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

* curriculum area data, not ISR data

** data unavailable

Quality of education and training

74. The quality of teaching and learning observed is variable. Teaching was good or better in 63% of lessons. Teaching in one lesson was unsatisfactory. Effective lessons were well planned and purposeful, with clearly defined learning objectives and activities that enabled students to develop their understanding. In contrast, some lessons made little demand on students, with superficial questioning requiring simple responses. Here, students were not encouraged to contribute their own ideas or think for themselves. Homework linked to class work is a regular feature of most lessons. There are schemes of work for all courses, but these vary greatly in quality and level of detail. Some are little more than a list of topics to be covered.

75. College facilities for practical work are insufficient. However, the physical education department has negotiated student access to high quality facilities at local sport and recreation centres. Together with local primary schools and private fitness centres, these facilities provide work placements for NVQ students. The physical education department has two very well-equipped classrooms. There are good stocks of learning materials. There are well-used study areas at the back of each classroom. Each has three networked computers and an extensive range of sport-specific texts, journals, videos, past papers and research articles. Staff are well qualified and include a moderator responsible for consistency of standards in grading students' work and an assistant examiner. They use their expertise well to prepare students for the GCE AS and A-level examinations.

76. There is a clearly defined schedule for assessment of course work for GCSE and GCE A level. Students understand assessment requirements well and teachers mark their work promptly. Feedback is detailed and gives clear guidance on how to improve. The department has a systematic approach to the assessment of GCSE and GCE A-level work. There is a comprehensive revision programme. On some courses, there is an over dependence on the work pack material, for example, on NVQ courses.

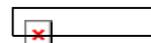
77. Arrangements for the assessment of NVQs are poor. Too much assessment is lesson based and does not take into account activities in a realistic working environment. The co-ordination of assessment planning between the placement provider and the college is poor. Students do not clearly understand the criteria for assessment nor have the criteria been updated in the light of revised standards.

78. There are productive and supportive relationships between staff and students. Most students speak highly of the willingness and commitment of staff to ensure they achieve the best results they possibly can. Staff schedule extra revision sessions, one-to-one subject tutorials and regularly review students' progress. There is a culture of courtesy and mutual respect. Staff have high expectations of their students which they convey through their working relationships.

Leadership and management

79. There is good management of GCSE and GCE A-level physical education courses. A comprehensive calendar has been produced which details assessments, examination submissions, module timings, meetings and cross-college activity. Communication between the team is good. The staff share good practice through joint planning, peer observation, coaching new staff and regular informal meetings. Staff work well as a team, students' progress is reviewed regularly, and the self-assessment process is embedded into the quality assurance cycle of the department. However, the department is not self-critical enough and does not specify priorities in its action planning to remedy weaknesses. Targets in the self-assessment report are vague, do not specify timescales for achievement, nor criteria to measure success. Staff are appraised in line with college requirements and appropriate training and development is identified. Staff make full use of the opportunities available, including postgraduate study and subject updating.

Art and design



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

Strengths

- excellent pass and retention rates on all levels of GNVQ
- excellent pass rates in GCE A-level art
- very good teaching in art
- good integration of theory with practical art work
- availability of materials which encourages all students to participate fully

- enthusiastic and positive students.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates in GCE A-level design and technology
- very poor pass rates in GCSE design.

Scope of provision

80. The art department and the design and technology department offer a full range of GNVQ courses from level 1 to 3. GCSE design is available as well as GCE AS and A-level in both art and design and technology. Life drawing is offered as an enrichment activity to AVCE students in their second year. About 180 students are enrolled on these courses, with approximately 70% of these students undertaking courses at level 3.

Achievement and standards

81. Grades achieved in GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced art and design have been improving over the last three-year period and in 2001, students on all three courses gained pass grades. The percentage of high grades achieved by those who complete their courses has exceeded the sixth form college national averages in all three GNVQ courses for the last two years, and in 2001, all GCE A-level art students obtained a pass rate, a proportion well above the national average.

82. By contrast, results on design courses are very poor. Over the last four years, pass rates on both GCE A-level design and technology and GCSE design have consistently been well below those nationally. Although they improved significantly in 2001, they remain poor. In 2001, GCE A-level design and technology pass rates were some 16% below the national average and GCSE design results were 28% below the national average. In 2001, GCE AS design and technology pass rates were also poor. Only just over half of the students who completed the course obtained pass grades.

A sample of retention and pass rates in art and design, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation art and design	1	No. of starts	11	15	7
		% retention	82	80	100
		% pass rate	67	83	100
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	41	19	20
		% retention	73	79	95
		% pass rate	73	80	100
GCSE design (non industrial)	2	No. of starts	13	12	21
		% retention	77	83	67

		% pass rate	0	0	36
GCE A-level art studies/fine art	3	No. of starts	29	31	42
		% retention	59	71	71
		% pass rate	60	100	100
GCE A-level design and technology	3	No. of starts	22	21	29
		% retention	86	76	79
		% pass rate	0	53	73
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	No. of starts	14	25	21
		% retention	93	72	86
		% pass rate	64	86	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

83. Much of the teaching in art is very good. All teachers are very well prepared and supply all groups with a wide variety of visual stimuli. Teachers use their own creative skills and knowledge to motivate their students. All courses start with an interesting and lively drawing programme, exploring a range of different materials and techniques. Subsequent project work builds upon this base and further extends the students' skills. Assignments encourage student creativity and give opportunities for a broad choice of starting points. Some assignments are presented creatively. For instance, a graphic design brief for GNVQ advanced art and design based on visual communication was presented in the style of an old-fashioned circus poster. Critical studies work is integrated into all practical project work and covers a wide variety of historical and contemporary artists and designers. All level 2 and level 3 students produce attractive and creative critical studies notebooks, relating their own work to the work of other artists and designers.

84. There are clear introductions to lessons, with a recap on work done in previous sessions and describing the context of forthcoming objectives of lessons, even where the emphasis is on practical work. A GNVQ foundation art and design class in typography commenced with a lively question and answer session on key words and meanings. Other lessons start by students looking at each other's research sheets and brainstorming ideas. In poorer lessons this momentum was not always maintained. The pace of one lesson was slow, with all students working at the rate of the slowest. On another occasion, the teacher gave large amounts of information to the students without asking questions or checking understanding. Other lessons, conversely, are quite rushed. On some occasions, teachers do not give students time to reflect and answer their questions. Most students are very able at discussing their work on a one-to-one basis, but many lack confidence when speaking to the group.

85. Practical lessons have a clearly defined sense of purpose. In a GCE A-level art lesson, introducing the preparatory work for an examination on the theme of 'transformation', students looked at the work of Claes Oldenburg, before 'drawing with scissors' a range of everyday objects. This was then further developed with ink and stick.

86. All teachers, in both departments, continually give positive and supportive feedback to their students. Students are encouraged to work in the studios and workshops in their free periods and after the end of the college day. There is a good rapport between students and teachers, and teachers have high expectations for their students' achievement. At induction, teachers set targets with their students for punctuality, attendance and an anticipated final grade. Marked work is returned promptly and current and anticipated grades are included in the students' folders in the studios.

87. Coursework in design and technology produces a wide variety of finished products using a

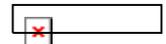
range of materials. Practical work shows a high level of understanding and problem-solving skills in both design and production. In one design and technology lesson, student participation was poor. Powerpoint is used in teaching in this subject. The design and technology teacher and the technician use the college intranet to display examination board information, handouts on materials, for example the resistant properties of wood, and a revision quiz. Although at an early stage, this is working well.

88. Practising artists and designers visit the college to present their work to students. Teachers make excellent use of the resources located near the college, for example, galleries, exhibitions and cutting edge design retail. Art rooms have a range of materials and equipment which teachers encourage students to fully use.

Leadership and management

89. Overall, leadership and management are good. The art staff demonstrate excellent teamwork and share curriculum planning and course organisation. Staff teach across different levels and different programmes. The head of department, who has been in post since September 2001, has put in place several new initiatives, for instance, offering life drawing as an enrichment activity. Her conscientious approach and attention to detail are reflected throughout the team. In a cycle of lesson observations, all staff observe each other's lessons. A newly qualified teacher has weekly meetings with the head of department for support and development. Staff make good use of development opportunities, such as subject-related evening classes, training days with examining bodies and skill sharing in twilight sessions. The staff and some students also attend the teacher education evenings at the Victoria and Albert Museum. There are positive links, and sharing of facilities and resources, with the head of design and technology.

Performing arts



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in media and film studies
- higher than expected grades in GCE A-level media
- good and supportive teaching
- wide range of stimulating enrichment opportunities
- well-resourced theatre studio and media rooms.

Weaknesses

- poor retention and pass rates in music
- poor retention rates in drama and theatre studies
- poor punctuality in some lessons
- lack of professional approach by performing arts students in practical workshops.

Scope of provision

90. GCE AS and A-level courses are available in media studies, film studies, performing arts, drama and theatre studies, and music. GCSE media is the only level 2 course to be offered, with GCSE music having been withdrawn in September 2001. About 290 students are enrolled on these courses. An attractive addition to the curriculum is the opportunity for students to receive free tuition in singing, piano and guitar, and there are currently 12 students who are undertaking these lessons.

Achievement and standards

91. There have been consistently high pass rates in GCE A-level media and film studies and GCSE media over the last three years. The proportion of students achieving high grades is significantly above national averages. In media, students do much better than could be expected of them based on their prior attainment. Pass rates in GCE AS courses are high; in performing arts all students gained a pass grade. Although pass rates in GCE AS music are high, only 11% gained high grades. The pass rate in GCE A-level music is also significantly below national averages, with students not reaching the level predicted based on their GCSE grades. Retention rates across all GCE AS qualifications are good. In drama and theatre studies GCE A level, there has been a steady decline in retention over the past three years, with levels for 2000/01 falling significantly below national averages. However, in the current year, retention rates show a marked improvement.

92. Students' practical and written work is generally of a high standard. Much of the practical work within the subject shows and celebrates the cultural diversity of the students. Portfolios are well organised with a good mix of annotated learning materials, student notes and research. In media and drama lessons, students' contributions are articulate and confident, showing good levels of analytical skills and critical thinking. In GCE A-level drama and theatre studies, students demonstrate high-level improvisation and performance skills when exploring the character of Khlestakov in 'The Government Inspector'. Their good use of space, physical expression and comic timing produced a spontaneous presentation, which was highly entertaining.

A sample of retention and pass rates in performing arts, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE media	2	No. of starts	34	25	25

		% retention	76	80	88
		% pass rate	69	95	88
GCE A-level music	3	No. of starts	8	7	17
		% retention	75	71	76
		% pass rate	80	0	43
GCE A-level drama and theatre studies	3	No. of starts	20	25	20
		% retention	80	72	55
		% pass rate	67	86	90
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	70	76	67
		% retention	74	75	76
		% pass rate	100	96	96

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

93. Teaching is well planned, thorough and clearly related to the requirements of the syllabus. High levels of support for students characterise the predominately good teaching observed. Effective use of questioning in the majority of lessons consolidates and extends students' understanding and knowledge. In the best lessons, interest was captured by imaginative and stimulating tasks, where theory was explored through practical exercises. For example, in one media class, analysing the codes and conventions of game shows and quizzes, students worked in teams, then reported their findings to the rest of the group in a quiz format. In a GCE A-level drama and theatre studies class, looking at the characters and themes in 'A Government Inspector', status was explored through a series of high energy and stimulating games, with the results of the exercises being applied to the theoretical study of the text.

94. In lessons, teachers emphasised the need for the revision of material in preparation for examinations thoroughly and effectively, although in some media and film studies lessons, a lack of variety in teaching methods led to students losing concentration. In a film studies lesson, when a large group discussed a series of revision questions, a significant number of students either passively observed or completely ignored the activity for much of the time allowed.

95. In performing arts, some students' energy and enthusiasm for their work was marred by a lack of a professional approach in practical lessons by some of their peers. Poor punctuality and absenteeism a week before a practical exam had a detrimental affect on the learning and attainment of the other students in the group. In a dance class, students did not wear appropriate clothing which severely restricted both their range of movement and their involvement in the lesson. In other media and music lessons, poor punctuality adversely affected the learning of all students.

96. Media and film studies have a suite of well-resourced rooms including an iMac suite equipped with a DVD and video playback facility. There is also a new edit suite in which the Media 100 system permits/facilitates digital video editing. The theatre studio provides students with a professional space in which to work, where rehearsals are transformed into immediate performances. Music rooms are in need of some redecoration and a lack of soundproofing reduces the range of instruments which can be taught. Access to all music rooms is via the main teaching space, resulting in interruptions to lessons.

97. Students know how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. In media and performing arts, assignments are well designed. There are clear assessment tasks, which provide a student brief, and identify the key requirements and criteria for assessment. At the beginning of their course, all students receive a course outline which specifies assessment dates and the nature of activity to be checked.

98. Assessment of students' work is thorough, with regular monitoring of progress in audit and assessment evaluation sheets. In lessons, learning is regularly checked and in the best lessons high levels of monitoring individual students' progress is a dominant feature. Formal reports are issued to parents each term, with student self-assessment being included in January and July. These are followed by individual tutorials where personal targets are negotiated and agreed as part of the key skill of improving the students' own learning and performance.

99. All courses include a good range of educational visits and in-house performances. Drama students have had practical workshops at the Theatre Museum on Brecht, Artaud and Brook. The college also has a partnership with the Donmar Warehouse on script writing, which involves a professional playwright working with the students to create a piece which was performed on a West End stage by professional actors. In media, students were involved in additional curriculum work, in partnership with a North Kensington Video and Drama project, for disadvantaged and under represented young people, to produce two five-minute television documentaries.

100. In media and performing arts, students spoke highly of the pre-entry advice and guidance they received. In GCE A-level music, some students had been recruited without having the necessary technical skills or academic application to be successful. Information from the college staff was informative. Students recognised and valued the support that they received from staff whom they described as highly approachable and caring on both curricular and personal issues. Staff are willing to invest large amounts of their own time to support and enhance the learning of all students.

Leadership and management

101. Staff work together effectively and courses are well managed at subject level to meet course and student needs. However, the organisation of the college places management responsibility for performing arts and music, and media and film studies, with two different heads of division. As a result, opportunities for the sharing of good practice and collaboration between the subjects are limited. Within the individual course teams there is a clear sense of identity and the sharing of good practice to improve standards is a strong feature, particularly in media. However, in music, the single member of staff has limited opportunities to collaborate formally with colleagues.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on most courses
- good and outstanding, enthusiastic teaching by well-qualified staff
- motivated students who work well independently and in groups
- good atmosphere for learning

- comprehensive assessment and tracking of students' progress
- courses which reflect the multi-cultural interests of students
- well-managed courses.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many courses
- insufficient checks on students' learning in lessons
- inadequate time given to students to complete lesson tasks
- some poor self-assessment.

Scope of provision

102. There is a broad range of GCE A-level and AS courses and a GCSE course in religious studies. At the start of the year, 227 students were enrolled: of these 73% were in history or religious studies. In 2001, 85% of students who completed GCE AS courses continued to GCE A level. Of these, the highest rate, at 100%, was in religious studies, the lowest, at 56%, was in philosophy. Over half the students currently study GCE AS and 6%, GCSE. Fewer students started GCE AS courses in September 2001 compared with September 2000, with the exception of religious studies, where 53 students enrolled compared with 21 the year before. At the end of this academic year, GCE A-level philosophy is to be discontinued.

Achievement and standards

103. Students achieve well on most courses but there are inconsistencies. For 2001, the results in geography at GCE AS and A levels were well above the national average. The GCE A-level pass rate was 100% and 82% of students achieved a high grade. In politics, of the 92% who passed, 83% obtained a grade A-C, and in history, 86% achieved a high grade. At GCE AS, students in geography and history achieved 100% success. Compared with previous years, the GCE A-level religious studies pass rate was lower and the proportion of high grades remained below the national average. Despite improvement, results in GCE A-level philosophy have been consistently low over three years. GCSE results for religious studies were good but well below the 100% achieved at the time of the previous inspection. Retention rates in 2001 for three of the five subjects at GCE AS

were below the national average, but above that in history and religious studies. At GCSE, retention rates have fallen consistently over the past three years. At GCE A level, there has been a continual decline in history over three years to well below national standards. In politics, the slight recovery in 2000 was reversed in 2001 and in philosophy, retention rates have fallen over three years to 39% in 2001. In the current academic year, the average retention rate across courses is 92%.

104. Many students fulfil their potential and a high proportion of students achieve better than their target grades. For example, at GCE A level, all students in geography and history achieved a grade better than that expected. Students develop good skills in understanding new knowledge. In religious studies and philosophy they learn how to analyse complex issues; in geography they make judgements from a variety of data sources including material from the Internet; and in history and politics they learn to evaluate different sources of opinion. Significant emphasis is placed on the development of investigative and independent study through coursework, particularly in geography and history, where students develop a broad range of skills. Written work is often of good quality and demonstrates an understanding of the course material. Essays in religious studies are well argued and include sound critical evaluations. There is enjoyment in learning and well-sustained motivation. Students work with confidence.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE religious studies (one year)	2	No. of starts	10	12	14
		% retention	100	92	64
		% pass rate	60	45	67
GCE A-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	20	12	19
		% retention	65	75	63
		% pass rate	85	75	92
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	26	32	30
		% retention	85	75	63
		% pass rate	80	62	84
GCE A-level philosophy	3	No. of starts	9	14	23
		% retention	67	58	39
		% pass rate	50	29	67
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	21	40	25
		% retention	76	58	80
		% pass rate	100	100	79
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	16	12	15
		% retention	63	75	80
		% pass rate	86	100	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

105. A high proportion of teaching and learning is good to outstanding. Enthusiastic staff plan structured lessons with clear objectives that are shared with students. In most lessons, teachers employ a suitable variety of methods to stimulate active learning and are successful in involving students in the development of study skills. In a GCE AS theology revision lesson, an imaginative,

pictorial handout depicting various arguments against the connection between religion and morality, stimulated students' interest. History students preparing a key skills communication assignment on oral presentation skills, used video clips of speeches by Hitler and Tony Benn which inspired good discussion. In geography, GCE A-level students were set demanding, decision-making tasks using a mixture of source material about the geographical characteristics of Guernsey. They consolidated their skills by analysing data and in practising examination techniques. Students are well motivated due in part to careful teaching of course programmes which take account of their multi-cultural interests. In history, politics and religious studies, opportunities are used to raise awareness of values which transcend international boundaries, such as tolerance, equality, justice and compassion. In politics, second-year students using the developments in the French presidential election, considered possible implications for UK institutions and relationships with Europe. GCSE religious studies students used the example of abortion to illustrate how different denominations approach moral issues. In some lessons there were common shortcomings. In a small number, teachers were less careful in giving students sufficient time to consider what they were learning and to practise the skills they were developing. There were frequent occasions when the checking of students' learning and the involvement of all students were inadequate. These weaknesses were most evident during questioning which often failed to probe deeply enough to test students' understanding or promote discussion.

106. There are good resources and teaching materials that are used effectively. Staff are well qualified and knowledgeable in their specialist fields. Subjects are accommodated in comfortable, spacious, well-equipped rooms. Wall displays support learning. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the ready availability of room-based resources. With the exception of geography, the development of ICT as a classroom resource is not promoted. Although each teaching area is connected to the college intranet, classroom provision of computers is inadequate. In geography, there are four additional computers that are used effectively in lessons and for assignments, and an extensive collection of material on the intranet is periodically updated. History is also developing good intranet sites. Photocopied handouts for use in class and in private study are of a high quality. There are good materials and books in the adequately stocked library.

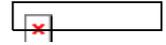
107. In all subjects, there is a developing culture of continuous assessment and monitoring of students' work. Each subject team, from induction onwards, responds to underachievement after evaluating students' performance against individual minimum target grades. There are detailed monitoring systems in all subjects and, in particular, in religious studies and geography. Inherent in this monitoring and assessment is teachers' readiness to provide appropriate individual guidance. Assignments are set regularly, marked constructively and returned quickly. There is reasonable consistency of marking in subject teams, but some differences in quality between subjects. History and politics effectively use a cover sheet for marked work that provides opportunity for more detailed comment and dialogue.

108. Good levels of additional support and guidance as part of the course programme are provided. Although additional workshop sessions are no longer timetabled, since 1999/2001, staff continue to provide them in their free time. As well as providing remedial help, more demanding tasks are given to the more able. Students speak highly of staff support and guidance. In all subjects, students are encouraged to seek help when required and feel proud of their attainments.

Leadership and management

109. Subject leaders enjoy a significant measure of autonomy. They manage the planning, resourcing and delivering of their courses effectively. Subject staff are involved in these activities and there is mutual support and common understanding of agreed goals. Lines of communication are clear. Meetings are used to monitor progress. Subject course reviews, lesson observations and student feedback are part of self-appraisal. There is some analysis of performance indicator data. The quality of this process and use of data vary between subject areas. Some inconsistencies occur and development plans do not always include issues arising from the self-assessment report. Good departmental records are kept but there is no common system.

Social sciences



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

Strengths

- good pass rates in GCE AS and GCSE sociology
- good teaching in sociology
- good quality learning materials
- strong commitment to equal opportunities.

Weaknesses

- declining pass rates at GCE A level
- low retention rates in psychology
- insufficiently rigorous checking of students' written work
- insufficient attention to evaluating and improving performance.

Scope of provision

110. GCE A-level courses are offered in psychology and sociology. Both subjects are popular, with around 300 students currently studying the subjects at GCE AS or A level. There is also a GCSE sociology course which attracts around 30 students a year. There is no provision in psychology at this level.

Achievement and standards

111. Achievements in social sciences are inconsistent. At GCE A level in the last three years, many students have achieved higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their results in GCSE. However, over the same period of time, the proportion of students who complete courses has declined. In psychology, only 55% of students who started the course in 1999 completed it in 2001. Of those who did finish, nearly 25% failed the examination. Pass and retention rates at GCE A level in 2001 were below the national average.

112. In the new GCE AS qualification, pass rates were very high in sociology. However, in psychology many students failed to complete the course. The small group of students following the GCSE sociology course ending in 2001 achieved outstanding results, with only one student failing to achieve at least a grade C.

113. The standard of students' work is mixed. A minority of students produce written work that is analytical and evaluative and approaches social scientific ideas in some depth. Orally, in both psychology and sociology, students display a competent grasp of basic concepts and methodologies. There are some imaginative coursework projects in sociology. Students are able to apply their sociological knowledge and understanding to a wide range of contemporary issues. For example, students produced enterprising pieces of research on subjects such as the influence of rap music on the values of black youth, and an analysis of changing attitudes towards homosexuality.

114. However, many students are not achieving work of a sufficiently high standard for GCE A-level courses. Both the least able and the most able students are not challenged sufficiently. In psychology in particular, able students do not develop higher level evaluative skills, and teachers' expectations of less able students' potential are too low.

A sample of retention and pass rates in social sciences, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE social sciences	2	No. of starts	22	25	24
		% retention	77	84	67
		% pass rate	76	62	94
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	66	68	70
		% retention	72	75	70
		% pass rate	94	89	82
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	65	51	88
		% retention	72	71	55
		% pass rate	81	77	77

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

115. Overall, teaching in social sciences is satisfactory. Schemes of work are thorough and coherent, identifying subject content, teaching methods and assessment strategies. A particular strength in course planning and in teaching is the sensitivity paid to equal opportunities issues. Much emphasis is placed on the need to recognise, respect and celebrate the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the student through both subject content and teaching approach. For example, teaching in both the sociology of the family and of religion is designed to promote the view that different family units and religious beliefs are of equal value. From the range of topics that can be studied in social science subjects, options are carefully chosen to reflect the interests of the students. In sociology, for example, the modules chosen are the most relevant to students from a

culturally diverse inner city community.

116. Much teaching in sociology is good. Lessons are well prepared and students are expected to be able to think critically about a range of sociological issues. Contemporary materials are used well to bring the subject to life and ensure that students see sociology as a living discipline. For example, in one lesson, students applied their sociological knowledge successfully to interpret the influence of a range of social policies on family life. Students are encouraged to develop their interpretative and analytical skills, matching expected course requirements, and to understand their own biographies in the light of sociological insights. In some sociology lessons, time was wasted because students were given too long to write answers to straightforward questions.

117. In psychology, teaching was less stimulating than sociology, though competent. In revision lessons, the pace of learning was slow because students spent too long working on their own on tasks that could have been tackled in advance of the lesson. For example, students outlined the aims and procedures of studies that were already available in their earlier notes. Good emphasis was placed on the need to acquire the skills necessary for success in examinations. However, able students were not urged to evaluate psychological research methodologies and findings beyond a superficial level. As a result, such students were not sufficiently challenged in lessons.

118. Students' overall progress is monitored carefully. Students are set target grades on the basis of their GCSE results, and their progress towards these targets is regularly reviewed. Sociology coursework is particularly well managed. However, students' written work is not marked sufficiently thoroughly and they are not given enough advice on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. As a consequence, students' written arguments are often not supported by reliable social scientific evidence. Students are given regular homework, but inadequate checks are made to ensure that the work has been completed.

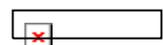
119. Overall, resources in social sciences are satisfactory. Handouts, revision guides and course documentation are of a good standard, and students are given a wide range of paper-based material to help them to understand the subjects and consolidate their knowledge. For example, course handbooks in both subjects contain good advice on study skills, and detailed revision guides are produced for each module. The range of resources used in teaching is narrow, with little use of audio visual aids or ICT. Students do not develop good independent research skills. There is little use of relevant Internet sites, and there is no subject-specific software. There is a good range of contemporary texts available to students in the library.

120. Students value the high levels of support they receive in social sciences. Teachers give freely of their time both inside and outside the classroom to help students with academic and personal problems.

Leadership and management

121. Staff in social sciences work well together and there is a good team spirit. Courses are well organised. Performance data are analysed thoroughly at course level, and realistic departmental targets are set with teachers' involvement. However, quality assurance processes are not sufficiently thorough. Weaknesses in social science provision are not adequately identified, and as a consequence, strategies to remedy them are not developed. For example, little analysis has been undertaken to explain the reasons why students leave, and clear measures to improve retention have not been implemented. High staff turnover over the last two years has had an adverse impact on the quality of social science provision and standards achieved.

English language and literature



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

Strengths

- very good teaching in most classes
- very good pass rates on all courses
- very thorough and effective support for students
- very good learning resources and accommodation
- good student written work and oral contributions in class
- well-managed courses and curriculum area.

Weaknesses

- some low retention rates, especially at GCSE.

Scope of provision

122. English courses consist of GCSE English, GCE AS and GCE A-level in English literature and English language and literature. Currently, just over 300 students take these courses, 40% of whom take GCSE.

Achievement and standards

123. English students achieve well on all courses. Between 1999 and 2001, pass rates on both GCE A-level courses were well above the national average for sixth form colleges. In 2001, every student who completed the two GCE A-level courses passed. A high proportion of those students achieved high grades (A-C) especially in English literature. The high pass rates were sustained in the first GCE AS results in 2001 with 100% success in English language and literature and 97% success at English literature according to data provided by the college. Analysis of the results of individual students in relation to their earlier GCSE achievements show that a very high proportion did better than might be expected in their GCE A-level courses. In some cases, the improvements are very substantial. At GCSE, the A-C pass rate improved from 49% in 1999 to 75% in 2001. This is significantly higher than the national average for sixth form colleges. The retention rate on this course fell during this period to 66%, below the national average for sixth form colleges. The

retention rate on GCE A-level English literature was consistently below that for sixth form colleges in each of these years, and below in 1999 and 2001 in GCE A-level English language and literature.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English language and literature, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	213	179	155
		% retention	77	69	66
		% pass rate	49	65	75
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	29	30	34
		% retention	69	83	74
		% pass rate	85	100	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	78	91	82
		% retention	77	74	74
		% pass rate	100	95	100

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

Quality of education and training

124. Most teaching is very good. It is confident and purposeful. Teachers have established clear expectations of the levels of commitment which students should have. During the inspection, much teaching was focused on the needs of external assessment in the near future. This approach restricted the variety of teaching styles seen in the lessons observed. The very detailed schemes of work for GCE A-level courses demonstrated that earlier in the year, very imaginative approaches and use of resources had been used to stimulate interest and establish the context for authors and works studied. The introductory classes for studying the poetry of Carole Anne Duffy used Beatles film and music to establish the atmosphere of the 1960s.

125. In most lessons observed during the inspection, teachers successfully involved students in active revision. There were many examples of students working very effectively in small groups. Often, each group prepared a different aspect of an overall topic. Coverage of the whole topic was achieved through feedback from the groups with the teacher ensuring there was a coherent final product. These sessions were skilfully managed so that most students contributed significantly. In most lessons there were regular perceptive and well-articulated contributions from students. There was a strong sense of students and teachers working effectively together, with teachers ensuring that students remained focused on the allocated task. In several lessons, individual students clearly gained confidence. Some, who were initially hesitant, progressed to make important contributions.

126. Teachers provide students with high quality handouts. For instance, students studying 'Dr Faustus' as a GCE A-level text, had a very helpful revision guide that established a clear process for effective revision and outlined key topics and themes. Students' files contained many examples of photocopied articles that gave insights into the authors and texts being studied in English literature, or guidelines prepared by staff for analysing language in the English language and literature course.

127. Students' written work benefits from the good teaching and support material. Many essays are well informed, have a clear structure, and use good evidence to support ideas. The tasks set match expected course requirements and offer a variety of challenges reflecting the varying ability of students. Work is marked carefully, applying the assessment criteria used for external examinations. Most marked work contains comments to help students improve. Students' grades on these assignments are compared to the target grade established for each of them on the basis of

their GCSE results. This latter is used to measure improvements achieved or needed.

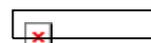
128. Staff support students well in a number of ways. They are aware of the needs of individual students and offer empathetic help in lessons. Additionally, they make time to speak to students with difficulties and offer them extra help outside lessons. Students acknowledge and value this support. A programme of extra revision classes was well advertised and attended.

129. Teachers and students benefit from very good resources. Staff are well qualified and experienced. English courses are taught in a suite of rooms, which are well furnished and equipped. Display material in each room creates a strong subject identity, and some includes information to help students to learn. The library has a good stock of relevant books. The centre has a good range of journals, some of which provide critical insights into relevant authors and their works. There is good access to the Internet and subject and library staff provide lists of useful websites and guidance for their use. A useful range of study materials is being developed on the college intranet site. English teachers and library staff liaise effectively to develop learning resources. There are good enrichment opportunities, including a theatre visit for all literature students at the beginning of the course, and visits to the Imperial War Museum for students studying war literature.

Leadership and management

130. The provision is very well managed. The head of department works closely with his staff in helping to develop the way courses are resourced and taught. Individual courses are managed efficiently by subject leaders. The whole team works well together sharing good practice, ideas and resources. Great emphasis is placed on this teamwork, and using the different skills and interests within the team to serve the needs of students. There are very good schemes of work for the GCE A-level courses. They give clear and explicit indications of the use of resources and teaching methods at each point of the course. There is a clear policy for assessment. Minutes of formal meetings show they are thorough and productive. Retention and pass rates are monitored carefully, and good use is made in monitoring results to ascertain how individuals and groups of students have performed. By analysing results carefully and by taking account of students' views, the department has made adjustments to course content and delivery. The department sets realistic targets for improvement. The self-assessment report addresses most key issues, but does not always provide sufficiently detailed evidence and action plans.

Modern foreign languages



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

Strengths

- high pass rates and many high grades in GCE A-level Spanish, Portuguese and Italian
- very good value added performance in Spanish and good value added in other GCE A-level languages
- strong subject and personal support

- extensive and very effective use of handouts and supplementary materials
- strong ethos of using the target language at all opportunities
- appropriate range of languages reflecting local needs.

Weaknesses

- some poor pass and retention rates in GCE A-level French
- insufficient challenge in a significant minority of lessons
- limited opportunities for students to use ICT and multimedia resources
- lack of rigour in self-assessment.

Scope of provision

131. The college offers GCE A-level courses in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. The college is the largest provider nationally of GCE A-level Portuguese. Both Italian and Portuguese courses are provided in collaboration with the respective consulates. Students can also work towards a qualification in business language in French and Spanish. These courses can be studied at both levels 2 and 3. Around 140 students follow language courses at the college.

Achievement and standards

132. Pass rates on GCE A-level Spanish, Italian and Spanish are consistently good. A large proportion of students on these courses also gets high grades. In these subjects, more students finish their GCE A-level course than is seen nationally. In Spanish, students get significantly better grades than those predicted on the basis of their overall performance at GCSE. In one of the two methods used by the college to analyse how well its students do in view of their prior attainment, students of GCE A-level Spanish at St. Charles College out-performed all other colleges using the same system in 2001. In other languages, students' performance is also generally above national average, given the GCSEs they start their course with. Many students have come from families who speak the language they are studying. This only partially explains the students' success at GCE A level: the requirements of GCE A-level language courses cannot be met solely by good day-to-day oral competence.

133. On GCE A-level French, pass rates and the proportion of high grades have varied over recent

years. For the last two years, they have been below national averages. While the pass rates may have risen in 2001, only half the students who started the course actually completed it. The college also offers courses leading to qualifications in French and Spanish for use in business. Pass and retention rates on these courses are not consistently above average and sometimes below average.

134. In students' files, work is mostly well organised by topics, grammar and vocabulary. Students' assignments show that they generally have a good level of knowledge and have made at least the progress expected over the course. Weaker students in the second year of advanced courses, continue to experience difficulties in their written work, often showing inaccurate verb endings, agreements and tenses.

135. The attainment of most students observed in lessons matches at least national expectations, and in most lessons, it is above and even outstanding. In one Spanish lesson, students displayed exceptional fluency, range of expression, appropriate use of register and exemplary use of recently learned vocabulary and expressions for giving advice. Many had parents who were Spanish speakers. However, this is not always the case. In a role play about anorexia, one girl's impassioned plea as to why she should lose yet more weight, was met with the calm, detached advice from her clearly, 'highly experienced' doctor. The students' convincing dramatic skills were surpassed only by their ability to re-use vocabulary, structures and linguistic functions, such as giving advice, in a new context and in a sensitive, natural and convincing manner. The 'doctor' had been learning Spanish from scratch for only two years. Students also had to select pictures from magazines to illustrate contributory factors to anorexia. They ably demonstrated their linguistic control and powers of expression to develop argument and convince the class as to the justification of their choice. By contrast, for example, on a business language course, students' ability to communicate was restricted and they did not know basic words such as 'happy'.

A sample of retention and pass rates in modern foreign languages, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
RSA intermediate business Spanish	2	No. of starts	*	17	11
		% retention	*	93	55
		% pass rate	*	91	83
RSA intermediate business French	2	No. of starts	*	14	8
		% retention	*	93	88
		% pass rate	*	87	57
GCE A-level Portuguese	3	No. of starts	15	22	12
		% retention	80	86	83
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level Italian	3	No. of starts	8	*	2
		% retention	63	*	100
		% pass rate	100	*	100
GCE A-level Spanish	3	No. of starts	31	33	27
		% retention	74	67	74
		% pass rate	91	100	100
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	31	25	24
		% retention	71	80	50
		% pass rate	90	47	83

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

* data unavailable

Quality of education and training

136. The teaching in about 70% of lessons was good or better. In around 25% of lessons the teaching was satisfactory. In one lesson it was unsatisfactory. Where lessons are very good, teachers have very high expectations and make demands of their students, both linguistically and conceptually. There is a strong ethos of using the target language in and outside the classroom, in all documentation and schemes of work. In one lesson, students were required to reflect on and explain the meaning of 'productivity' in a business context. In these more successful lessons, teachers take account of the different levels of ability of their students. In a reading exercise about alternatives to prison, the teacher had prepared different tasks to reflect the different levels of attainment in the class. To develop the skills needed for scan reading, both in examinations and in life, a teacher made effective use of a bleeping timer to make students concentrate on the task in hand. In another lesson, the teacher made students justify and explain their views on why young people found adolescence a difficult time. Students responded well to the challenge, offering lengthy replies using subordinate clauses, appropriate idiom, register and recently learned vocabulary. Most students are hardworking, attentive, respectful and punctual. Teachers expect their students to arrive on time and they do.

137. Less successful lessons do not place enough demands on students. In a minority of cases the teacher spoke too much and worked much harder than the students. There were lengthy periods where the teacher slowly asked individuals in turn, with the result that many students did little in the time available. In a small minority of lessons, teachers were content with a superficial response and did not require students to explain or justify their views. In one non-advanced lesson, the teacher's lengthy explanations in the foreign language about verb endings, pronouns and roots of verbs were not helpful. Students listened dutifully but understood little or nothing.

138. Most resources in modern foreign languages are good. Teachers make extensive and very effective use of handouts and supplementary materials to help students to learn. The language resource base provides a wide range of cassettes, videos and printed resource materials for staff and students alike. Accommodation is good and rooms are well decorated with posters and materials, which raise awareness and help students to learn. However, there are limited opportunities for students to use ICT and multimedia resources in language learning.

139. Teachers' use of assessment is at least satisfactory. Written work is set each week and marked promptly. In Spanish, students assess their own competence and progress in the subject. Homework is often carefully designed to consolidate and extend class work. Feedback is constructive and students know what to do to improve. Lesson time is sometimes productively devoted to following up common errors and helping individuals to focus on their own weaknesses.

140. Language courses meet the needs of young people in local communities well. Students are encouraged to do work experience in European countries or to make visits abroad. However, no extended trips abroad, exchanges or work experience are organised by the college. A very small minority of students make their own arrangements and other students have Spanish, Portuguese or French speaking parents. Subject and personal help provided by all teachers is very good. Effective drop-in language surgeries provide effective support on a weekly basis.

Leadership and management

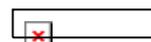
141. Staff work well together and informally share ideas for improving teaching and learning on a regular basis. There is a good team spirit. Subject heads and all staff are dedicated professionals, who support their students very well. Schemes of work vary greatly in their level of demand, rigour and detail. This inconsistency is reflected in the quality of teaching of the different languages and in students' retention and pass rates across the languages. The self-assessment report is not self-

critical enough. It fails to identify reasons why standards have not always matched expectations, nor provides sufficiently detailed action plans to bring about improvements.

Part D: College data



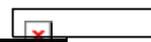
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	3	0
2	20	5
3	54	90
Other	23	5
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in 2002

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	558	12	15
Agriculture	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering	0	0	0
Business	397	10	11
Hotel and catering	58	2	2
Health and community care	159	1	4
Art and design	499	2	14
Humanities	1,924	13	52
Basic education	60	0	2
Total	3,655	40	100

Source: Provided by the college in 2002

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
		1	Starters excluding transfers	366	273	203	3
	Retention rate (%)	88	75	83	*	100	*
	National average (%)	78	81	82	73	70	74
	Pass rate (%)	67	62	71	*	33	*
	National average (%)	70	70	77	*	75	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,680	1,597	1,575	14	22	17
	Retention rate (%)	81	82	84	86	100	94
	National average (%)	79	79	82	70	71	75
	Pass rate (%)	55	69	65	33	91	81
	National average (%)	83	85	82	77	78	78
3	Starters excluding transfers	968	938	1,005	3	8	9
	Retention rate (%)	83	74	77	*	63	89
	National average (%)	78	78	80	63	65	69
	Pass rate (%)	86	83	82	*	100	38
	National average (%)	86	85	85	70	72	74

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

** numbers too low to provide a valid calculation*

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1999/2000: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000

3. College rates for 1999/2000: provided by the college in spring 2001.

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)	70	28	2	106
Level 2 (intermediate)	78	15	7	27
Level 1 (foundation)	83	17	0	6
Totals	72	25	3	139

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