

Palmer's College

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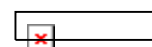
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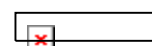
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Basic information about the college

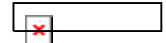


Name of college:	Palmer's College
Type of college:	Sixth form college
Principal:	Peter Fenwick
Address of college:	Chadwell Road
	Grays
	Essex
	RM17 5TD
Telephone number:	01375 370121
Fax number:	01375 385479
Chair of governors:	Paul Smith
Unique reference number:	130682
Name of reporting inspector:	Ian Seath HMI
Dates of inspection:	3-7 March 2003

Part A: Summary

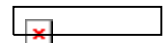


Information about the college



Palmer's College is a sixth form college located on a single site in the Essex town of Grays. It was formed in 1971 by the merger of three local schools. Within the catchment area, several wards are in the highest categories of multiple deprivation, relative to Essex as a whole. The college has a number of partner schools which provide around 70% of each year's entry. The college offers 32 subjects at General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level (GCE AS and GCE A level), five at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), eight for the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE), four for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate, one GNVQ foundation programme and twelve national diploma courses. A range of 'accredited studies' courses is offered as enrichment. In addition, there is a small part-time provision for adults. During 2001/02, 1,481 students aged 16 to 18 and 73 part-time adult students were enrolled at the college. The gender balance is 53% female, and of students 3% have a disability. Students from minority ethnic groups represent 8% of the total, which is a higher proportion than in the local population. The college's mission is that it 'aspires to excellence in the quality of its teaching and support for all students'. The college aims to ensure that, in the pursuit of learning, students are engaged and successful in the achievement of their goals.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the overall quality of provision to be good. Of the eight curriculum areas inspected: one, visual and performing arts and media, was outstanding; six, science, mathematics, business, sport, leisure, travel and tourism, humanities and English and communications, were good; and one, information technology (IT), was satisfactory. The Study Plus centre was judged to provide outstanding support for students.

Key strengths

- support and guidance for students
- management of assessment
- much good teaching
- good resources for teaching and learning
- good pass rates at level 2

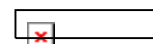
- good pass rates on GCE A-level courses.

What should be improved

- lesson observations and the sharing of good practice
- clarification of strategic objectives
- implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act
- access to buildings for those with restricted mobility
- retention rates on level 2 courses
- areas of unsatisfactory teaching.

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

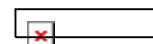


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Mathematics	Good. Much teaching of mathematics is good. Individual support for students inside and outside of class time is very good. The interest of students is not sustained in some GCSE lessons. GCE AS pass rates are below the national average.
Science	Good. Teaching is good. There is a wide portfolio of course provision

	at levels 2 and 3. Student support is effective. Pass rates are good on level 2 and most GCE A2 courses. Pass rates on GCE AS environmental science are poor. In a minority of lessons, teaching is dull and uninspiring and fails to stimulate students.
Business, including foundation	Good. Pass rates are very good for GCE A-level business studies and GNVQ foundation. Retention and pass rates are low for AVCE business. In a small minority of classes, the range of teaching methods is too limited. Students produce good written work. Good monitoring helps to further develop learning. There is inadequate provision of resources for students on vocational courses.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Pass rates are good in GCE A2 computing and GCE AS AVCE information and communications technology (ICT). There are good resources. Learning materials produced for AVCE ICT are good. Pass rates on GCE AS computing declined in 2002. There is insufficient checking of learning in GCE A-level computing lessons. There is a lack of employment-related experience for vocational ICT students.
Humanities	Good. Teaching is good or very good. Teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic about their subjects. Classrooms are well equipped and appropriately decorated, with displays that enhance the learning environment. Pass rates on many courses are good and improving.
Sport, leisure, travel and tourism	Good. Retention and pass rates are high. There is much good teaching. Students make good progress towards their qualifications. There are very good specialist resources to support learning. Students are well motivated and enthusiastic and benefit from good levels of support.
Visual and performing arts and media	Outstanding. Retention and pass rates are very good. In art and media, students make good progress. Students' work is excellent. Their learning is supported by enthusiastic teaching and access to outstanding specialist equipment and facilities.
English and communications	Good. The curriculum area is well led and has high pass rates. There is much enthusiastic and skilful teaching and very good support for students. Students make good progress. In 2002, students achieved above expectations.

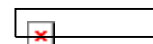
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. The college is well led, and its mission and purpose are clearly stated. Governors, managers and staff are agreed on the college's strategic priorities. The framework for reporting to governors is good. The management style is open and consultative. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Communication is effective. The management of most curriculum areas is good. The college management information system is effective. Arrangements for quality assurance are comprehensive and have led to improvements in accommodation, specialist resources, learning support and students' achievements. Self-assessment is evaluative and covers all of the college's activities. Inspectors agreed with many of the findings given in the self-assessment report, although a few of the strengths cited were no more than average practice. Insufficient attention is given to raising the standards of teaching and learning in a few areas. Managers have carefully planned the college's curriculum to meet the needs of its students and fulfil its mission. The college has achieved its full-time enrolment targets over the last three years. A few courses are available for adults who wish to study part time. The college works closely with the local

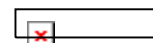
has strong and productive links with its 11 partner schools. Arrangements to provide relevant employment-related experience for students studying for vocational qualifications are insufficiently developed in some areas. The college has a clear policy for equality of opportunity. The proportion of student enrolments from minority ethnic groups, though small, exceeds the proportion in the local community. However, managers have been slow to fully respond to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendments) Act. Staff deployment and accommodation utilisation are carefully monitored by managers. Overall, the college provides good value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



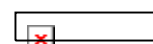
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Within the mission of the college, managers have developed aspects of foundation level programmes to take account of Year 11 school leavers with low attainment. All students are given equal opportunity training during induction. Wall displays in classrooms and corridors promote equality of opportunity. Students are encouraged to undertake voluntary work in the community and the student executive organises fund-raising events. The college accepts students from a catchment with many areas of deprivation. There are 8% of students from minority ethnic groups, which is in excess of the proportion in the local population. Retention rates for this group are higher than for the rest of the student cohort, although achievement is slightly lower. The Study Plus centre has been developed to respond to the needs of individual students and encourage participation without stigmatisation. It offers outstanding learning support and enables many students with learning needs to succeed in mainstream courses. The college offers little specific provision for adults. Appropriate help is provided for students with disabilities and other barriers to learning. Access for students with mobility problems is limited.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support for individual students is outstanding. Pre-admission course guidance is effective in ensuring that students are enrolled on an appropriate type and level of programme. Induction programmes are comprehensive and help students to become familiar with their courses, the college and the support services available. Students are given a questionnaire to identify their career and learning aspirations and preferred learning styles. Students' rights and responsibilities are clearly explained. Subject induction tasks identify additional support needs. All students have a personal tutor. Tutorials are generally very good and students value the support they receive. Attendance is rigorously monitored and absences followed up. A small number of tutorials lacked clear objectives and one-to-one interviews with students were held, unhelpfully, in front of the class. Students are able to obtain support for literacy, numeracy and study skills via the Study Plus centre. There are effective links with outside support agencies. Advice on higher education (HE) progression is good. The college provides a 'gifted and talented' programme for more able students. The college makes effective use of available funding for support. Many students receive financial support from the William Palmer Trust.

Students' views of the college



presented below.

What students like about the college

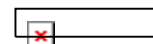
- good tutorial support
- friendly accessible staff
- regular feedback on assessments
- good teaching and academic support
- the variety of teaching styles
- a student executive able to discuss issues with senior management
- good library facilities
- trips and visits
- being treated like adults
- the careers centre
- the Study Plus centre.

What they feel could be improved

- access to computers

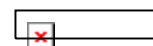
- some cramped accommodation
- canteen prices
- car parking
- the quality of seating in non-teaching areas
- the number of sporting activities
- group tutorials.

Other information

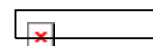


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, 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



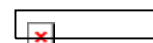
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors



Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	77	18	5
Learning 16-18	79	16	5

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



16 to 18 year olds

1. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18. Of these, most are on GCE A-level courses. Pass rates are high on most courses. In the years 1998 to 2000, retention and pass rates for level 3 qualifications were at or above the average for the sector. Both fell to slightly below the average in 2001. Retention and pass rates for level 2 courses have improved since 1999, and were in the upper quartile for the sector in 2001. However, in 2001/02, overall retention rates on level 2 courses fell significantly. Pass rates for the small number of level 1 students were above the national average for the sector. In 2002, all GNVQ foundation business studies students passed the qualification. The college has good pass rates in key skills tests, and good achievement in key skills overall.

2. Pass rates are consistently very good on GCE A2 courses. In 2002, 97% of all students on these courses achieved a pass. The pass rate was 100% in GCE A2 biology, environmental science, business studies, art and design, media studies, economics, geography, English language and German. Between 1999 and 2000, many students studying for GCE A-level qualifications achieved the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. In 2001/02, the data shows that many students achieved grades well above those predicted.

3. For the years 1998/99 to 2000/01, the percentage of high-grade passes, A and B, on GCE A-level courses was below national averages. However, for GCSE and GNVQ courses it was consistently higher. For 2001/02, achievement of higher grades was at or above national averages on about 80% of courses, although there was some variability overall. For example, in German and government and politics, 18% of students achieved high grades, whereas 43% of students achieved high grades in law and biology. For GCE AS courses, 87% of students achieved a pass in 2001/02.

4. Overall, pass rates on AVCE courses are good. For example, in 2001/02, AVCE media and science students achieved 100% success. Several other AVCE courses had over 90% pass rates. However, the pass rate on AVCE business was poor, at 56%. In 2001/02, pass rates for GCSEs subjects were very good. The majority of students took mathematics and English language and achieved 95% and 97%, respectively. Smaller Italian, social studies and human biology groups achieved 100% pass rates.

5. Over the last three years, the proportion of students progressing to HE has increased, to reach 43% in 2001/02. Of these, the largest proportion went to local universities. In 2001/02, 26% of students went into employment. The destination of 17% of students was unknown to the college.

6. The college has an extensive enrichment programme. All full-time students are expected to participate in a programme of 'accredited studies'. This includes acting, ceramics, journalism and voluntary service, as well as sport and recreation. The college is nationally represented in a number of sports. There is an extensive programme of trips and visits both abroad and within the UK. In the last year, student groups have visited Bolivia, New York, France and Belgium, as well as making

language exchange visits.

7. The gifted and talented group consists of 32 students identified by feeder schools. They benefit from a number of extra development activities including additional academic sessions, training in interview techniques, development of analytical skills and HE familiarisation visits. For this group, the overall attendance for those sessions inspected was 88%.

8. Study Plus is the focus of the college's literacy and numeracy provision. Students are supported through individual and small group sessions. Staff are known as learning consultants, a description which adequately explains their role, in which they act as specialist teachers. Many students use the facility on a drop-in basis, should they feel the need for an immediate response to their academic and emotional issues. The provision has increased steadily over the last three years. In 1999/2000, 583 students were seen. In 2000/01, 605 were seen and in 2001/02, 801 students were seen.

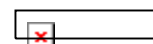
9. Within the Study Plus centre, students achieve high standards set against challenging personal targets following rigorous initial assessment and interview. Students enjoy all the courses, believing that individual target setting of personal goals enables them to work at their own pace. Individual learning plans for English and mathematics students are effective in mapping this achievement against the criteria for their level 2 and 3 courses. Students' work is extensively displayed on classroom walls to celebrate their efforts. Retention rates for students accessing this centre are good; this is due to high levels of personal and academic support and individualised learning targets. Attendance for all students is very good.

10. Overall, students show good motivation to work, and make clear progress towards their goals. They develop a broad range of interpersonal, analytical, and practical skills. For example, in visual and performing arts and media, a group of students worked closely with professional architects to design a giant mural for a local supermarket. In sport, leisure, travel and tourism, students participated in a fundraising trip to Bolivia where they redecorated an orphanage. Students in observed sessions were well behaved.

Adult learners

11. In 2000/01, there were 16 students aged 19 or over at level 2, and 14 at level 3. Pass rates were good for both of these groups, at 94% and 93%, respectively. In 2001/02, there were 73 students aged 19 and over. All of these were enrolled on 10-week taster courses in, for example, web design, ICT, and ceramics. Many of these students progress to the neighbouring general FE college.

Quality of education and training



12. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Of the lessons observed, 78% were good or better and the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was below national averages. The most effective lessons have clear learning objectives that are shared with students. Most teachers demonstrate high levels of knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject or vocational area. Learning activities are carefully structured to meet the needs of students with differing abilities and sequenced so that each task requires newly learned knowledge, understanding and skills to be applied to increasingly complex situations. Theory is well linked to practical work. Classroom learning is often enhanced by work experience, field trips, visiting speakers and research activities. For example, media studies students visited a radio station in New York and 30 foreign language students visited Geneva and Strasbourg.

13. Less effective lessons are characterised by poor planning, the absence of clear learning objectives, activities that fail to meet the needs of all students and poor management of disruptive students in lessons. In a few IT lessons, students were not given structured learning activities to

work through whilst the teacher was checking the progress of individual students. Students talked to each other when the teacher was talking and were not required to listen and learn from their peers' mini-presentations of the results of research.

14. The college is clearly focussed on improving teaching and learning. There have been a number of staff-development events aimed at improving practice. The college operates a lesson observation scheme. Observation records demonstrate clear judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and the standards of attainment. Teachers are given constructive feedback. Each observation results in the teacher and observer agreeing an action plan to improve teaching and learning where necessary. This system is relatively new and as yet there is insufficient evidence of its success in improving standards of teaching and learning.

15. Within the Study Plus centre, teaching is successful in developing skills and knowledge for students on programmes that meet students' needs, interests and aspirations. Students make excellent progress in achieving personal goals. Staff skilfully reduce students' anxieties about their deficits and difficulties by a friendly and sensitive approach, and through their understanding of specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. All sessions observed had a wide variety of strategies to capture and maintain students' interests without any reliance on individual worksheets. In the best sessions, teachers recap and reinforce to focus all the students on what had been achieved.

16. Teaching staff in all curriculum areas are well qualified, with relevant academic or vocational qualifications; 87% of staff have a teaching qualification. The Study Plus centre manager and most centre staff are well qualified and have undertaken basic skills agency training in adult core-curriculum certification. Technical support is good; technicians are well qualified. Other specialist staff have appropriate specialist qualifications and accreditation. Staff development is good and has included training on the common inspection framework, differentiation in teaching and learning, the Disability Discrimination Act, and tutorials. There is a specialist staff ICT training co-ordinator. The sharing of good practice in teaching and learning, however, is not always effective.

17. There are effective measures for the induction of new staff. The college is recognized as an Investor in People. The college has excellent specialist resources in sport, science, design technology, art, media and theatre studies. These are well maintained, with appropriate annual arrangements for safety, inspection, repair and testing. Laboratories and workshops have appropriate arrangements for safe working by both staff and students.

18. The college has a good library resources centre, which is well managed, and provides a pleasant study centre. There is a good range of subject and generic guides for students using the facilities. There are quiet study areas. Surveys show that students appreciate the support they receive from the library resources centre. The Study Plus centre provides additional support for students, though the capacity of the centre is limited.

19. The college has a clear information learning technology (ILT) strategy and an intranet. The college has made significant investment in the provision of ICT since its last inspection. The ratio of personal computers to students is 1:5. There is wireless access to the college network and student email. All staff have access to computers. ICT facilities are well supported and most are within air-conditioned rooms. Most students report easy access to ICT facilities and the Internet and have remote access to the college's intranet.

20. The college grounds are attractive and well maintained. Accommodation is of a very good standard with effective signage. There is a rolling programme of maintenance and repair. Classrooms are well decorated with good displays to enhance the learning environment. The college's sports centre has a wide range of facilities and activities for staff, students and members of the public. The college has recently been successful in a bid of £600,000 for an all-weather pitch.

21. A few college buildings are not accessible to wheelchair users and those with limited physical mobility. In 2002, an audit for disabled access was undertaken. This has informed the college's accommodation strategy. The college has facilities for students with sight impairment, including Braille readers and printers.

22. Assessment is well managed and effective. There are clearly written procedures and standards for vocational and academic assessment practice. Assignment briefs and feedback are based on clear explanations of subject criteria and methods of assessment. Feedback on performance is objective and well defined and includes specific information on strengths as well as on areas for improvement. However, on GCE A-level computing, there was insufficient marked work or feedback to students and little evidence of skills development. Termly reviews are used to review medium-term goals and targets. Students are able to access their grades and learning plans on the college intranet. Internal moderation of grades is well planned and systematically carried out. Students are encouraged to take additional qualifications.

23. Effective initial assessment takes place over an extended period. The process is informed by schools and other agencies. Interviews take place early in Year 11. Well-designed diagnostic screening tests are taken in July. During subject induction, the first tasks are designed to diagnose the support needs for each group. Effective support is then provided on a group basis, if the need is general, or individually, for special support. These induction assignments are developed throughout the course. Within the Study Plus centre, effective learning takes place with clearly defined learning outcomes, linked to an individual learning plan and appropriate assessment techniques that build upon students' prior knowledge and skills. These well-developed individual learning plans set realistic personal targets that allow students to track and assess their progress.

24. Parents have regular dialogue with the college through tutors. They get reports by post, and letters to celebrate successes or discuss problems. Achievements are celebrated with awards ceremonies for all levels. Parents' evenings occur twice a year and there are numerous other opportunities for parents to visit the college.

25. The college provides programmes in most academic and general vocational curriculum areas at level 3. The college collaborates with nearby Thurrock College to plan local curriculum provision. This has restricted the college's own curriculum below level 3. The college offers one GNVQ foundation award and four GNVQ intermediate courses. The college also offers vocational secretarial awards, 12 Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas or GNVQ advanced qualifications and 32 GCE AS and A2 subjects. There are a limited number of community education courses.

26. The college intends to widen participation within the framework of its links with Thurrock College. While it has accommodated a small number of asylum seekers and students with physical disabilities, it does not have a specific mission to do so. The college is effective in attracting students from minority ethnic groups. These are well represented amongst the student population.

27. Within the Study Plus centre, provision involves students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Links with other programme areas and external agencies are well developed. All courses match the needs and interests of students. Programmes and courses are effective in engaging and retaining students. There is effective building on prior learning, with initial assessment ensuring that students follow appropriate courses. The college has underdeveloped links with the wider community as yet, but existing provision and approaches could act as a model for future growth.

28. The college has well-developed links with local schools. It enjoys close links with some local businesses, including the involvement of a local retail store in writing business AVCE assignments. However, in a number of curriculum areas, these links do not benefit teaching or students' learning. There are opportunities for students to undertake Open College Network accredited work experience and voluntary work in the local community.

29. The introduction of Curriculum 2000 was generally successful. Students are able to mix vocational and academic awards in their programmes of study. Key skills delivery is managed by a member of staff with responsibility for the co-ordination of a key skill across the college. Key skills form a coherent part of students' programmes of study and are effectively integrated into courses. There is some discrete provision, particularly in ICT. Most key skills teachers have received relevant and up-to-date training in the new curriculum and assessment methods. Students speak highly of their learning in key skills and understand the relevance of key skills to their progression to both employment and to further study. Key skills also provide a vehicle for additional learning support for

students.

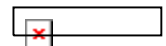
30. Support for students is outstanding. Access to guidance and advice is provided by student supervisors. There is a student 'buddy' system for those who request it. Students' complaints are sensitively and efficiently handled. Students feel that senior staff are approachable. Support is effectively monitored and reviewed. There is a comprehensive induction process. Each potential student is interviewed by a senior teacher during the spring term. The interview is well structured and has clear outcomes. Students' expectations, rights and responsibilities are clearly explained. There is an information day in July, on which students have the opportunity to experience stimulating taster sessions. On this day, they meet the tutor who will support them throughout their studies.

31. Prior to admission, students undergo comprehensive diagnostic screening tests. These generate at least two alternative learning plans. In September, these are refined and final subject choices are made. All programmes begin with a subject induction task designed to identify additional support needs. The subject tutor may refer the student for one-to-one support in the Study Plus facility, if necessary. This facility provides outstanding support for all students, enabling access to level 2 and 3 courses in all other programme areas. This support and intervention is timely and sensitive, without being patronising. Tutorials supplement this process of supporting students with barriers and difficulties. Those who use Study Plus feel that it is a major factor in them remaining at the college. All students feel the college meets their personal and academic needs.

32. Attendance is rigorously monitored in every lesson. Tutors and designated staff act promptly to check absence and lateness. A comprehensive pastoral review was published shortly before the inspection. Inspectors saw some ineffective tutorials in unsuitable rooms. Individual meetings with students in the presence of the whole group were inappropriate or disruptive in some cases.

33. A wide range of careers activities take place, including tutorial discussions, visits, mock interviews and workshops to build CVs and write applications. Suitable vacancies are displayed in the relevant academic department. Careers staff are available during holiday times.

Leadership and management



34. Leadership and management are good. The college is well led and its mission and purpose are clearly stated. Governors, managers and staff are agreed on the college's strategic priorities. The priorities include raising standards of teaching and learning, improving students' attendance at lessons, improving the learning environment and working more effectively with staff and pupils in local schools. The college's strategic plan for the period 2002 to 2005 sets out 11 strategic objectives. Some of these lack measurable outcomes or targets. The operational plan provides an appropriate agenda for action but does not clearly specify expected outcomes. Progress made with the operational plan is reviewed thoroughly at regular meetings between senior and middle managers. The framework for reporting to governors is good. They receive appropriate information on students' achievements, financial forecasts and progress being made towards achieving college priorities.

35. The management style is open and consultative. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Communication is effective. Good use is made of the college's intranet to share information amongst staff. The management of most curriculum areas is good. In many areas, heads of faculties and course leaders regularly review the progress being made with their action plans, and curriculum planning is effective. Quality assurance procedures are closely followed and sharing of good practice is commonly undertaken during team meetings. Students' progress is effectively monitored. In a minority of areas, some aspects of management are less effective. For example, in sport, leisure, travel tourism, targets are set for retention and pass rates, but these are not monitored systematically.

36. The college's management information system is effective. The recent installation of new software has resulted in the late production of some aggregated data on students' prior attainment and pass and retention rates, but managers have successfully used alternative methods to provide these data. Teachers and managers are able to access reports and student information easily through the college's computer network. Students' registration in lessons is undertaken using a computerised register system, which provides up-to-date and comprehensive information on attendance and enrolments. Senior managers and governors scrutinise data carefully at course and student level but they receive insufficient higher level reports to help them analyse and compare overall performance with other colleges.

37. Arrangements for quality assurance are comprehensive and have led to improvements in accommodation, specialist resources, learning support and students' achievements. Managers carefully review the retention and pass rates for each course as information becomes available. Courses that are identified as performing below target are monitored and supported closely by senior managers, often resulting in significant improvements. Inspectors agreed with many of the findings given in the self-assessment report, although a few of the strengths cited were no more than average practice. Insufficient attention is given to raising the standards of teaching and learning in a few areas. In most areas, actions to address the weaknesses identified through self-assessment are effective. However, faculty development plans arising from self-assessment insufficiently address the college's strategic objectives.

38. The college has recently revised its lesson observation scheme. The revised scheme is more comprehensive than the schemes used previously. The new scheme was piloted in 2001/02 and was being fully implemented in the year of this inspection. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new scheme in raising standards of teaching and learning. Managers recognise that further work is required to ensure effective use of the findings of the scheme. Surveys of students' views are undertaken at course, faculty and college level. Managers in some areas have responded well to the results of student surveys and improvements have been made to aspects of the curriculum and to some accommodation.

39. Between 1998/99 and 2001/02, overall retention and pass rates have risen slightly on level 3 courses, remaining broadly in line with national averages over this period. Overall pass rates on level 2 courses have also risen and have been consistently above national averages but, in 2001/02, overall retention rates on level 2 courses fell significantly to below the national average. The number of full-time students has remained reasonably stable over the last three years and the college has achieved its enrolment targets.

40. There are effective arrangements for annually appraising the performance of managers and all teachers. The process includes reviewing progress against previous targets and identifying training priorities. Targets are set for the coming year and are often related to improving retention rates, students' achievements, professional development and the development and introduction of new courses. Staff speak highly of the range of development opportunities available to them, but some find that their workload restricts them from participating in professional development programmes.

41. Managers have carefully planned the college's curriculum to meet the needs of its students and its mission. The curriculum mainly comprises GCE AS and A-level and AVCE courses for students aged 16 to 18. Courses leading to GNVQ at intermediate level are also offered and a small number of courses are available at foundation level. A thorough, self-critical curriculum review has been undertaken recently and has been carefully considered by senior managers and governors. A few courses are available for adults who wish to study part time. The college works closely with the nearby FE college to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication of courses. The principals of both colleges are members of each other's boards of governors. Students are able to progress to courses offered at either college. However, the progression opportunities between the colleges are not clearly documented and made available to students. The college has strong and productive links with its 11 partner schools. Teachers from the college work well with the schools and have provided a range of activities for school pupils. The college leads an initiative for more able pupils and students which involves visits to Cambridge University. The college makes some arrangements with local businesses to enhance the curriculum with visiting speakers and involvement in course assessment but, as managers recognise, employer links are insufficiently developed.

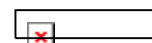
42. Students benefit significantly from the William Palmer College Educational Trust, a local registered charity that aims to provide financial assistance for students studying at the college. The trust owns the grounds and buildings of the college. Trust funds have contributed to improvements in college facilities and accommodation. Financial support is available for those students who need it and bursaries are available for students progressing to HE. Prizes and awards for students' achievements are provided through the trust. The trust contributes towards the cost of students' field trips and visits to theatres, museums and other places of educational interest.

43. The college has a clear policy for equality of opportunity that is reflected through curriculum design, student support strategies and teaching, learning and achievement monitoring procedures. The proportion of student enrolments from minority ethnic groups, though small, significantly exceeds the proportion in the local community. However, managers have been slow to respond fully to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendments) Act. At the time of the inspection, the college's equal opportunities group was revising the equal opportunities policy to fully acknowledge the requirements of the Act.

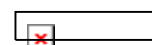
44. Financial management is effective. The college achieved an operating surplus of £60,000 in 2001/02, with income and expenditure reserves of £1.7 million. Budget setting and monitoring are effective. Budget holders receive regular reports on expenditure. Staff deployment and accommodation utilisation are carefully monitored by managers. Taking into account these factors, and the judgements made by inspectors about the quality of the college's provision and the achievements of its students, the college provides good value for money overall.

45. In the Study Plus centre, management and leadership are outstanding and are very effective in raising achievement of students. A clear direction has been set, leading to high-quality support, and this has been communicated well to all staff. Co-ordination of literacy, numeracy and additional support within vocational and discrete areas has resulted in a college-wide strategy to raise the profile of the Study Plus area. All staff have a clear vision of how the provision can be extended and enhanced. Monitoring and evaluation of students' progress is good, although paper-based and cumbersome. The trial of palmtop computers demonstrates creative and innovative ways to improve this.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on level 2 and most GCE A2 courses

- a wide range of provision at level 2 and level 3 to enable progression

- much good teaching
- comprehensive and effective support which improves achievement.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on GCE AS environmental science
- dull and uninspiring teaching in a minority of lessons at level 3.

Scope of provision

46. A wide range of level 3 science subjects is offered to full-time students aged 16 to 18. Biology, chemistry, environmental science, physics and science for public understanding are offered at GCE AS. Biology, chemistry, environmental science and physics are available at GCE A2. There is an AVCE science and a GNVQ intermediate science course, as well as GCSE human biology. There is no level 1 or evening provision.

Achievement and standards

47. Pass rates for GCSE human biology and GNVQ intermediate science have remained above national averages for the last three years. GCE AS pass rates fell below national averages for biology and chemistry in 2001 and 2002. In environmental science, the pass rate has remained well below the national average for the two-year period. Pass rates in GCE A-level physics have improved to above the national average. In 2002, pass rates for GCE A-level biology and environmental science courses were 100%. Although improving, the pass rate for GCE A-level chemistry remains below the national average.

48. In 2002, retention rates on GCSE courses fell slightly, to below the national average. Similarly, the retention rate for GNVQ intermediate science fell below the national average for 2002. On GCE AS environmental science, the retention rate remains well above national average. On physics, chemistry and biology GCE AS courses, it has fallen below. Retention rates are improving in all GCE A2 subjects. Chemistry and biology are well above national averages. The retention rate for GCE A2 environmental science was at the national average for 2002. Attendance and punctuality were very good in all sessions observed.

49. Students show good understanding of scientific concepts. They are able to readily formulate hypotheses and have a good grasp of scientific vocabulary. They are able to communicate using scientific terms and are competent practical workers. In laboratory sessions, students worked purposefully and paid due regard to health and safety procedures.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE human	2	No. of starts	25	20	17

biology		% retention	60	75	71
		% pass rate	100	93	100
GNVQ intermediate science	2	No. of starts	13	18	20
		% retention	69	89	75
		% pass rate	89	88	80
GCE AS biology	3	No. of starts	*	67	76
		% retention	*	91	83
		% pass rate	*	90	73
GCE AS environmental science	3	No. of starts	*	20	22
		% retention	*	100	95
		% pass rate	*	70	62
GCE AS physics	3	No. of starts	*	70	61
		% retention	*	89	82
		% pass rate	*	82	92
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	***	44	45
		% retention **	***	68	98
		% pass rate	***	100	100
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	***	78	39
		% retention **	***	72	100
		% pass rate	***	76	85
GCE A-level environmental science	3	No. of starts	18	20	5
		% retention **	94	75	80
		% pass rate	80	79	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

*** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

50. The teaching of science is good. Sessions are well planned. Many have a variety of clearly specified tasks, which are differentiated to encompass the whole ability range. For example, in a practical class, students undertook project work showing a wide variety of interesting investigations. One student modelled cratering by impacting ball bearings in sand. Another student investigated mediaeval catapult design using computer simulation of the variables involved. In a GNVQ class, students carried out effective practical experiments on soundproofing materials. Teaching was dull and uninspiring in a small minority of lessons. In these, teachers did not extend the more able students and did not give sufficient attention to those of lower ability.

51. Target grades are used by students and staff to evaluate progress in regular assessments. Formal reviews take place under the 'next steps' system. Underachieving students are directed to attend workshops, where their progress is carefully monitored and evaluated. Students seeking help on individual pieces of work are also able to use this resource. One such workshop is staffed on a part-time basis by a teacher from a local 11 to 16 feeder school. This creates effective links and

continuity for students. Students' work is constructively marked with comments for improvement and corrections.

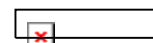
52. Staff are very well qualified. All have first degrees and six have higher degrees. One is currently completing post-graduate certificate of education (PGCE) training and all the others have professional teaching qualifications. Staff update their skills with attendance at moderation and standardisation meetings and attend updates as well as in-service training days.

53. Laboratories are bright working environments and are fit for purpose. Science is well supported by six technicians working from three preparation areas. One physics laboratory has been refurbished. There is much good support for students. One student, who changed course into biology, praised the extra help and time given by a member of staff to bring her up to date. A student for whom English was not his first language had a science staff mentor for curriculum support and the acquisition of scientific English. The library has a good stock and variety of books as well as a varied collection of videos and compact discs. The intranet is being developed as a resource and additional learning material is available to students.

Leadership and management

54. Leadership and management are effective. Weaknesses are being addressed, notably some areas where retention and pass rates could be improved. Good practice is shared and all staff share a common commitment to improve. Communications are good. Students have influenced curriculum development through satisfaction surveys. Operational management is good, and there are well-structured and detailed schemes of work available for all staff. The new classroom observation scheme has yet to fully influence teaching and learning.

Mathematics



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

Strengths

- outstanding pass rates on GCE A-level courses
- much good teaching
- good one-to-one support that helps students to achieve
- a mathematics workshop that provides effective additional subject support
- consistent sharing of good practice.

Weaknesses

- a GCE AS pass rate below the national average
- the interest of students not sustained in some lessons.

Scope of provision

55. The college offers GCSE and GCE AS and A-level courses in mathematics and further mathematics. There are 125 students studying GCE AS mathematics and 46 studying GCE A-level. There are 21 students over the two years of the further mathematics course. Many students take the opportunity to improve their GCSE mathematics grade. The college offers intermediate and foundation level GCSE courses on which there are a total of 264 students.

Achievement and standards

56. Overall pass rates are good. In 2002, retention rates on GCSE mathematics courses were below the national average. The pass rate for GCSE mathematics was 38%, just below the national average, although this includes students who took the foundation tier and so could not obtain grades A* to C. The pass rate for those taking the intermediate tier was at the national average of 40%. Of those students who started the course with a previous grade D, 57% obtained grades A* to C. Value added data shows that students who started the course with grade E or lower improved their performance, on average, by one grade.

57. Pass rates for GCE AS mathematics were below the national average in 2002. However, the cohort included students with a grade C from higher-tier GCSE and those with a grade B from the intermediate tier. For those students who entered the course with a grade B or above from the higher tier, the pass rate was 72%. This is above the national average. Pass rates for GCE A-level mathematics were 100% in 2002. Students' attendance, in the lessons observed, was only 83%, although a number of students were away on approved visits. Most students are punctual, and the few students who arrive late are required to give an explanation.

58. In GCSE classes, students are developing the use of sine, cosine and tangent to solve problems. GCE AS students studying mechanics are able to resolve vectors into their components, but some students lack confidence in their problem-solving skills.

A sample of retention and pass rates in mathematics, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	297	290	282
		% retention	73	85	76
		% pass rate	47	49	38
GCE AS mathematics	3	No. of starts	*	160	161
		% retention	*	86	83
		% pass rate	*	49	59
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	141	148	61
		% retention**	78	83	97

		% pass rate	76	70	100
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

Quality of education and training

59. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge and explanations are clear. In the better lessons, objectives are shared with students at the beginning of the session and students' learning is monitored by the use of targeted questions. In one GCSE lesson, the teacher used a projector and laptop to give a demonstration of orders of rotational symmetry. In a GCE A-level lesson, the teacher used a slinky spring and a simple pendulum to reinforce understanding of simple harmonic motion. Individual problem-solving work fails to sustain the interest of students in some GCSE lessons.

60. There is effective one-to-one support during classes. Students feel able to ask for help outside normal lesson times and comment on the high level of support they receive from mathematics tutors. Extra classes are available for those who require them. Homework is set at least weekly, and marked and returned promptly, although some of the written feedback lacks detail. Students' progress throughout a course is carefully monitored and documented. Targets are set based on students' attainment on entry and reviewed regularly.

61. The mathematics workshop provides effective additional subject support for students. Students retaking any modules attend for two hours a week. The mathematics tutor refers students if they are experiencing difficulty with a particular topic or if a test has highlighted an area of weakness. Other students use the workshop on a drop-in basis. The workshop resources include textbooks, revision guides and targeted work sheets. Mathematics teachers are happy to assist students with any topic. Although GCSE students may use the workshop, few do so. Restricted space limits the number of students who can use the workshop at one time.

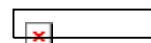
62. The mathematics rooms contain attractive wall displays, which include posters, adverts for appropriate revision guides, posters made by students on topics they have covered and star charts to encourage students' progress. There are also notice boards giving lists of work covered each week by each class. Mathematics resource material is available on the college intranet. Students can use the site to access notes, question papers and mark schemes.

63. Good practice and new ideas are shared. Some GCE AS groups have star charts to encourage and monitor students' learning of some standard proofs. Each year, the college enters the national mathematics competition. There are links with local schools which include shared in-service training.

Leadership and management

64. Mathematics is part of the mathematics and computing faculty. There is strong and effective leadership in the faculty. All courses have a comprehensive scheme of work that is used by the whole team. Resources such as worksheets are shared amongst all teachers. Teamwork is good and regular course meetings are held at which there is consistent, documented sharing of good practice amongst staff. Management responded to poor pass rates for GCE AS mathematics by the introduction of a new two-year GCE AS mathematics course, due to start in September 2003. Student surveys are carried out by staff, but there is no effective system to make use of the information gathered from such surveys.

Business, including foundation



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

Strengths

- very good pass rates on GCE A-level business studies and GNVQ foundation courses
- good standard of students' written work
- effective use of teaching and learning activities to meet the needs of all students in most lessons
- good learning resources
- regular and accurate monitoring of students' progress
- good course management.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- poor pass rate on the AVCE business course
- narrow range of teaching methods in a few lessons
- insufficient employment-related experience for vocational students.

Scope of provision

65. The college offers a range of courses, from foundation to advanced levels. At advanced level,

students may enrol on courses in GCE AS and A-level economics and business studies and AVCE business. At intermediate and foundation levels, the GNVQ is offered. Currently, there are 358 students aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses. The numbers of students on intermediate and foundation level courses are considerably smaller, at 51 and 15, respectively.

66. A good range of business technology modules is available, including text and word processing, legal text processing, audio transcription and business presentations. These are taken up by full-time students enrolled on other programmes. Modules are also combined to form integrated packages, such as a legal secretary's course and a word-processing diploma with office skills. These are designed to be accessible within the full-time course framework. There are 390 students enrolled on business technology courses who are full-time students on other courses at the college.

Achievement and standards

67. Pass rates are generally very good. In 2002, all students on the GCE A-level business studies and economics and GNVQ foundation courses achieved their awards. Although the pass rates for GCE AS business studies and GNVQ intermediate courses have declined, they remain above the national average. Pass rates on the AVCE are below national averages. Retention rates were low, in 2002, for AVCE, GNVQ intermediate and GNVQ foundation courses, with a significant decline from the previous year, particularly for AVCE. However, retention rates on GCE A-level business studies and economics courses both rose over the same period, to above national averages. The retention rate on GCE AS business is below the national average.

68. Students' written work is good on all courses. They generally show confidence in their ability to develop conceptual understanding and to apply their learning to real-world situations. Students on the GNVQ foundation programme answer questions in lessons confidently.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, including foundation, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation business	1	No. of starts	*	15	14
		% retention	*	87	79
		% pass rate	*	62	100
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	54	62	70
		% retention	72	90	76
		% pass rate	82	80	75
GCE AS business	3	No. of starts	*	114	137
		% retention	*	86	85
		% pass rate	*	95	91
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	88	97	70
		% retention**	80	74	94
		% pass rate	90	89	100
GCE A-level economics	3	No. of starts	62	35	22
		% retention**	84	89	95
		% pass rate	71	68	100
AVCE/GNVQ business	3	No. of starts	75	73	91
		% retention	80	74	55
		% pass rate	71	57	70

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

Quality of education and training

69. Teaching is good in most lessons. The majority of lessons are well planned. Teachers use a variety of appropriate learning activities to meet students' needs. In GCE AS and GCE A2 classes, a range of extension materials is used to challenge more able students. There is a clear focus on creating high levels of student involvement in learning activities. In many AVCE classes, assignments and activities are designed to draw on students' interests and experiences. Relationships between students and teachers are good and help promote purposeful learning. Students benefit from well-organised provision and good teaching in business technology. Teachers manage the range of abilities within each class effectively, supporting students in a positive, business-like environment.

70. However, some teaching is less effective. In a few lessons, teaching is dull and fails to create challenging and motivating learning opportunities. The narrow range of teaching methods employed in such lessons fails to meet the needs of all students.

71. Assessment is well planned. Internal verification procedures are rigorous. Assignments are well designed, with clear assessment criteria, and are relevant to the programme of study. Feedback on students' work is detailed and helpful. There is a well-developed student tracking procedure. Students' progress is carefully and accurately monitored and recorded.

72. Students are well supported in their learning at the college, although students on vocational courses do not have sufficient work-related experience. This results in students having insufficient opportunities to relate their learning to real work environments. Some links with business organisations are developing. A range of managers from local businesses witness and respond to presentations of business plans by AVCE students.

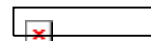
73. Induction is well planned and implemented. Tutorials are used effectively to manage students' learning, set individual targets and monitor progress. Students likely to be at risk are identified at an early stage and appropriate action is taken to provide them with help. Additional learning support is used to good effect within the area. Staff from the Study Plus facility are an integral part of the team that delivers the GNVQ foundation course.

74. Resources are good. Teachers are well qualified, with professional and vocational qualifications. Using their up-to-date knowledge of business, they relate business and economic concepts to work practices. Learning materials are good and tailored to the needs of specific student groups.

Leadership and management

75. Courses are planned and managed well. Team meetings are clearly focussed on improving teaching and learning. Self-assessment is rigorous and self-critical. Action is taken to address any weaknesses identified. Targets to improve retention and pass rates are agreed between course leaders and the head of faculty. Progress towards these is reviewed regularly. Communications between staff in the curriculum area are good. There is a strong team culture with a clear focus on raising standards.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates and high grades on GCE A2 computing in 2002
- good pass rates and high grades on GCE AS and AVCE ICT
- good access to, and effective use of, learning materials on ICT courses
- well-managed ICT courses.

Weaknesses

- declining retention and pass rates on GCE AS computing
- unsatisfactory teaching in GCE A-level computing theory classes
- poor assessment practice on GCE A-level computing
- insufficient employment-related experience or industry links for vocational courses.

Scope of provision

76. Students are able to enrol on GCE A-level computing or AVCE ICT single or double award. There are 105 students studying GCE A-level computing and 175 taking AVCE ICT. There is no level 1 or 2 provision.

Achievement and standards

77. Retention and pass rates and the proportion of high grades are good on GCE A2 computing. GCE AS and AVCE ICT have good pass rates. In 2002, GCE AS computing retention and pass rates and high grades declined to well below the national average. There is effective use of comprehensive resource packs. Students produce good work in many practical sessions. Students achieve a good level of competence in the use of computers and in ICT. A high percentage of

computing students progress to university, many applying for computing-related courses.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level computing	3	No. of starts	77	66	67
		% retention *	71	68	97
		% pass rate**	65	80	95
GCE AS computing	3	No. of starts	***	99	82
		% retention	***	89	78
		% pass rate	***	97	73
AVCE ICT	3	No. of starts	***	***	22
		% retention	***	***	***
		% pass rate	***	***	83
AVCE AS (vocational 3-unit qualification)	3	No. of starts	***	***	77
		% retention	***	***	88
		% pass rate	***	***	91

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

** pass rate in 2002 is for GCE A2 computing

*** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

78. Teaching and learning are satisfactory or good in all practical lessons. Students make good progress on coursework with individual support from teachers. There is limited direct questioning or checking of understanding. There is insufficient target setting in practical sessions. Students often work at their own pace, and individual progress is not monitored or recorded. In good practical lessons, an introduction outlined students' tasks for the lesson and their attention was drawn to relevant support material available. In one session, there was good use of critical analysis when students tried to use each other's user guides and gave constructive feedback.

79. There is unsatisfactory teaching in GCE A-level computing theory lessons. In one lesson, there was insufficient activity to occupy the whole group. In a number of observed lessons, students became distracted and did not focus on their work. Attendance in observed GCE A-level computing lessons was low, at 75%; in theory lessons, it was 71%. This contrasted with the 93% attendance in observed ICT lessons.

80. Students' progress is effectively monitored. There is clear feedback on criteria that have not been met on assessments and will form the student's portfolio for the AVCE ICT qualification. Poor assessment practice in GCE A-level computing results in students receiving insufficient feedback on their progress and poor advice on how to improve. There is insufficient setting and marking of work. Questions and exercises completed in class to reinforce theory topics and check understanding are not marked. In ICT, students are led through the development of their portfolio by the resource packs and there is little evidence of skills development, assessment or feedback before commencement of portfolio tasks.

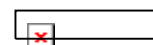
81. Specialist resources are good. There is a good range of learning resources. The hardware and

software in specialist rooms are reliable and fit for purpose. There is air conditioning in all computer rooms. Learning materials are available on paper and electronically, on the intranet. Effective use is made of these resources in lessons. There are comprehensive theory handouts for GCE A-level computing. Library resources are adequate for the curriculum area. The effectiveness of teaching and learning is adversely affected by the layout in one computer room. Trailing wires and processors standing on the floor are a possible hazard. Links between the curriculum and industrial practice are poor.

Leadership and management

82. Leadership and management of IT are satisfactory. Support for new members of the team is effective. Resources are shared and there are good standardisation and moderation procedures and record keeping on the vocational courses. The self-assessment reports do not clearly identify all strengths and weaknesses. Targets for improvement are not always clear. Consequently, there has been little improvement in standards on GCE A-level computing.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- very good teaching
- good pass rates in most subjects
- effective integration of key skills
- thorough assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- well-equipped base rooms.

Weaknesses

- pass rates, below national averages in a few subjects
- poor retention rates on GCE AS and A-level government and politics courses.

Scope of provision

83. The college offers GCE AS and A2 courses in law, politics, psychology and sociology. GCSE subjects are no longer offered. The significant majority of students enrolled on courses are aged 16 to 18 and attend college full time. There is no separate adult provision. There are currently 252 students enrolled on the GCE AS psychology course and 122 on GCE A2 psychology; 118 on GCE AS law and 61 on GCE A2 law; 83 on GCE AS sociology and 41 on GCE A2 sociology; and 19 on GCE AS government and politics and 17 on the GCE A2 course.

Achievement and standards

84. Students' pass rates are good. Most of the students who enrol on courses complete their programmes and achieve their awards. Pass rates for GCSE sociology, GCE AS sociology and psychology and GCE A-level law, psychology and sociology improved and were very good in 2002, with significant numbers of students achieving high grades. However, pass rates on GCE AS government and politics were low in 2001 and 2002.

85. Retention rates on most courses were in line with or above national averages in 2000 and 2001. There was a marked improvement in retention rates on GCE A-level courses in 2002. However, retention rates on the GCE AS government and politics course declined to below the national average. Teachers use value added analyses to set challenging but realistic targets for students to help them to achieve their potential.

86. Standards of written work are good. Many students make confident oral contributions in class. They respond well when directly questioned and frequently draw on their own experiences and observations to make relevant and thoughtful contributions to lessons. In government and politics, every lesson begins with a student giving a brief report on a current news story. This leads to a brief discussion of topical issues before the teacher sets the agenda for the main business of the lesson.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	34	19	8
		% retention	79	68	75
		% pass rate	93	100	100
GCE A-level law	3	No. of starts	77	84	55
		% retention **	73	76	96
		% pass rate	63	81	98
GCE A-level government and politics	3	No. of starts	21	22	19
		% retention **	90	73	89
		% pass rate	72	93	88
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	99	121	111
		% retention **	81	73	99
		% pass rate	67	81	93
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	100	111	63
		% retention **	86	75	94
		% pass rate	81	73	93

GCE AS government and politics	3	No. of starts	*	35	39
		% retention **	*	89	77
		% pass rate	*	81	80
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	*	164	177
		% retention **	*	87	87
		% pass rate	*	94	95

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

Quality of education and training

87. The quality of teaching is very good. Very few lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. Carefully prepared schemes of work and detailed lesson plans incorporate a variety of learning activities to reinforce learning effectively. In a GCE AS psychology lesson, students considered the behaviour of animals and humans when asleep. The teacher organised the involvement of each student in the practical activity, showing an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each individual. There was useful consolidation of learning using a worksheet that students completed without referring to notes. Students then compiled a spidergram comparing and contrasting animal and human behaviour. Students' progress is regularly monitored. In the weaker lessons, students made few contributions to the lessons and showed poor recall of previously covered work

88. Key skills are effectively integrated within subjects. In a GCE AS law class, the students applied learning about criminal law by staging a mock trial around a fictional case of a man who had infected his girlfriend with AIDS. One student took the role of judge, there were two barristers on each side, the defendant and witnesses, and the rest of class constituted the jury. Articulate arguments were presented, the judge summed up and the jury considered its verdict. They engaged in animated debate demonstrating that they both understood and could apply the law. Throughout this exercise, the teacher assessed and recorded students' communication skills.

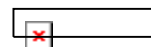
89. The assessment and monitoring of students' work is thorough. Detailed subject and topic outlines make clear to students what is required of them and assessments are regular and appropriate. Teachers mark assignments and tests with care and give students effective guidance on how to improve their grades. Students are aware of the progress they are making. In some written work, teachers do not correct basic errors in grammar and spelling.

90. Staff are well qualified and enthusiastic about their subjects. Humanities teaching takes place in well-equipped and appropriately decorated subject base rooms, which have attractive and lively wall displays. Few classrooms have computers, but students and staff confirm they have adequate access to ICT resources in the library. Students are well supplied with textbooks and other paper-based resources.

Leadership and management

91. The humanities faculty is well led and managed. There are regular faculty and department meetings to review provision and share good practice. Self-assessment reports and development plans are produced each year and are effective in bringing about improvements in students' performance. Careful review of key skills development and assessment strategies has resulted in the effective integration of key skills within subjects. It is not yet clear how the classroom-observation scheme is used to make judgements on the quality of provision and the effectiveness of college policies.

Sport, leisure, travel and tourism



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

Strengths

- very good pass rates on the GCE A-level sports, games and recreation course and the national diploma in travel and tourism
- good retention rates on most courses
- good progress made by students in lessons
- high standards of written and practical work
- much good teaching
- very good sports facilities.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course
- poor retention rates on AVCE courses
- insufficient employment-related relevant experience.

Scope of provision

92. The college offers a wide range of advanced level courses. These include GCE AS and GCE A2 sport, games and recreation, AVCE leisure and recreation and travel and tourism, and the BTEC

national diploma in applied science. The only provision at intermediate level is the GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism course. Additional qualifications offered to students include the welcome host and the air cabin crew certificates.

93. The 148 full-time students enrolled on courses are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

94. Pass rates are generally good. All the students who completed the GCE A-level sports, games and recreation in 2002 achieved their awards. The proportion of students who achieved the BTEC national diploma in the same year was above the national average. GCE AS students were less successful, with 81% achieving the qualification, compared with a national average of 88%. Achievements are good on all the additional qualifications, including the sport coaching awards. There have been significant improvements in the pass rate for the GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism course since 2001, but it remains below the national average.

95. Most retention rates are above national averages. In 2002, the retention rate on the BTEC national diploma course improved significantly to 86%, well above the national average. However, the retention rate for the AVCE leisure and recreation course was significantly low in 2002.

96. The standard of students' written work is high. A complex assignment on fitness testing and training was completed to a very high standard. Some written work is poorly presented. Students demonstrate high levels of practical skills. Some have been successful in progressing to county level sport in cricket, swimming, athletics and football. During the 2001/02 academic year, three students represented the college in national level judo, netball and cycling events.

A sample of retention and pass rates in sport, leisure, travel and tourism, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE AS sports, games and recreation	3	No. of starts	*	72	71
		% retention	*	85	89
		% pass rate	*	84	81
GCE A-level sports, games and recreation	3	No. of starts	77	65	40
		% retention **	88	80	95
		% pass rate	89	93	100
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	41	40	44
		% retention	73	90	80
		% pass rate	67	31	71
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	No. of starts	23	26	*
		% retention	78	77	*
		% pass rate	93	80	*
BTEC national diploma in advanced science	3	No. of starts	*	15	22
		% retention	*	53	86
		% pass rate	*	88	94
AVCE travel and tourism (double award)	3	No. of starts	*	*	21
		% retention	*	*	57
		% pass rate	*	*	92

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

Quality of education and training

97. There is much good teaching. Students make good progress in lessons. Teachers make effective use of their own and students' knowledge and experience of the sport and travel industries to link theory to practice. Sport and travel examples taken from the media and from industry are also used effectively to reinforce learning and apply theory to practical situations. In one good lesson, all students contributed to a group discussion. They used their own experiences of travel to illustrate learning points. In another lesson, students applied theoretical knowledge when planning a sports coaching session for local primary school children. The good rapport between staff and students motivates students to achieve their potential in practical skills development. Some lessons do not allow for the effective evaluation of practical activities. In a few lessons, students are insufficiently challenged.

98. Teachers effectively review students' progress each term and set targets for individual students to help them to improve their work and progress to the next stage of learning. Assessments are well planned, effectively linking the practical and theoretical aspects of students' courses. Most students receive comprehensive, constructive feedback to help them make improvements. In a few cases, feedback is not specific enough to be helpful.

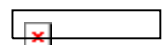
99. Resources for sports courses are very good. The sports hall provides opportunities for a range of activities, which include squash, basketball and football. Students have access to the college's well-equipped fitness suite and swimming pool. Many courses have good-quality base rooms. There are good resources to facilitate students' learning on all courses in this area in the library and in teaching rooms. A few rooms are too small for the group size and inappropriate for group work.

100. Students speak positively about induction and the initial guidance and ongoing support they receive from teachers and tutors. Leisure and travel students benefit from trips abroad and from visits to UK tourist destinations and attractions. Staff in the faculty recently organised fundraising to support a college trip to Bolivia; 18 students redecorated a Bolivian orphanage and explored the more inhospitable parts of the country. Links with industry are not sufficiently developed.

Leadership and management

101. Leadership and management are good. Courses are effectively managed and reviewed. Communications are good. Course handbooks are well written and provide students with clear information about their courses. The internal verification process is well organised and clearly meets the needs of awarding bodies. Key skills are effectively integrated into course assignments. The self-assessment process is generally rigorous. Some targets identified in the development plan are not sufficiently specific and measurable.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- very good retention and pass rates
- very good value added in art and media
- the outstanding standard of students' work
- dynamic and enthusiastic teaching which motivates students
- outstanding facilities and specialist equipment.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on GCE AS fine art in 2002.

Scope of provision

102. Art, design, media and performing arts courses are managed by three different faculties in the college. There is a wide range of courses available at level 3. In art and design, students can study fine art, graphic design and photography at GCE AS and A2. In performing arts and media, the college offers GCE AS dance and courses in film studies, media studies, theatre studies and music at GCE AS and A2. Vocational courses include a national diploma in performing arts and AVCE media, communication and production. Short courses are available in radio and video production and nationally recognised acting courses from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

Achievement and standards

103. Pass rates are very good. On the national diploma in performing arts, pass rates have been at 100% for two out of the last three years. The percentage of high grades achieved by students has been considerably above the national average during the same period. Pass rates on GCE A2 theatre studies have been above the national average for the last three years. In 2002, GCE A2 media and AVCE media had pass rates at 100%. GCE AS media has had pass rates above the national average for the last two years, at 98%. In 2002, both GCE A2 fine art and photography courses had 100% pass rates. However, at 60%, GCE AS fine art was considerably below the national average.

104. Retention rates are very good. On the national diploma in performing arts, retention rates have been above the national average for the last three years. In 2002, the retention rate on GCE A2 theatre studies was 100%. GCE AS media had a retention rate of 92% in the same year, with 129 students having started the programme. Retention rates for GCE AS and A2 fine art were significantly above the national average in 2002.

105. In art, design and media, students make significantly more progress on their courses than their previous achievement would suggest. The quality of practical work in art and performing arts is

outstanding. In art and design, students develop a very good range of skills including objective drawing, basic design, colour theory, application and sketchbook work. Students are confident and develop critical skills that enable them to evaluate their own work and the work of others effectively. In the best lessons, students are inspired by creative and well-structured tasks that encourage critical reflection between theory and practice. For example, in a fine art session, one student skilfully discussed the aesthetic qualities of David Hockney's *joiner* photographs and made direct references to the compositional style to inform his own work. Performing arts and dance students demonstrate a very good range and standard of practical work. In one GCE AS lesson, creative lighting and sound effects were used skilfully to highlight the contorted features of a character who was experiencing bullying and child abuse.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
National diploma in performing arts	3	No. of starts	24	23	20
		% retention	88	87	85
		% pass rate	100	100	82
AVCE media	3	No. of starts	22	*	23
		% retention	77	*	100
		% pass rate	80	*	100
GCE A2 theatre	3	No. of starts	47	58	29
		% retention	83	71	100
		% pass rate	94	94	97
GCE A2 fine art	3	No. of starts	41	36	20
		% retention	83	75	90
		% pass rate	93	92	100
GCE AS media	3	No. of starts	*	113	129
		% retention	*	87	92
		% pass rate	*	98	98
GCE AS fine art	3	No. of starts	*	43	41
		% retention	*	88	98
		% pass rate	*	84	60

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

106. The standard of teaching and learning is high. Lessons are well planned with comprehensive schemes of work. Teachers ensure that the purpose of each lesson is clear and build on students' previous experiences. Teachers know their students well and are careful to include them all in discussions and to ensure that all are achieving their potential. Assessment and feedback are constructive and sensitive to individual students' needs. In the best lessons, there is a lively, informed exchange of ideas amongst the students. For example, in one media lesson, the teacher's knowledge and passion for the subject allowed for the development and extension of ideas beyond those initially being explored. The students consumed their learning with enthusiasm, resulting in significant progress in applying knowledge and understanding. Teachers adopt a wide range of

teaching and learning strategies. In one dance lesson, students were asked to analyse their individual performances on video. The teacher was aware of different students' needs and learning styles and skilfully elicited their intelligent, articulate and persuasive comments.

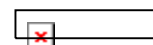
107. Resources are of a very high standard. Accommodation is appropriately furnished. In art and design, ICT facilities are used effectively and students have access to a well-equipped photographic darkroom, digital cameras and well-lit painting and design studios. There is good technician support in media and performing arts and the media suite includes a new digital video-editing studio. Classrooms are well maintained but some of the accommodation is cramped. In one media lesson, the teacher was unable to engage the students effectively in group work owing to limited space. There are excellent facilities and equipment for performing arts, including a well-equipped theatre with raked seating, practice rooms, ample storage space and a large and interesting collection of historical costumes. Teachers and technical staff are well qualified, make effective use of their experience and work effectively as a team. They have a friendly, professional relationship with the students and their collective expertise provides students with a broadly based and valuable resource. Students have opportunities to undertake live projects. For example, a group of art and design students worked closely with professional architects to design a giant mural for a local supermarket. There is a well-established tradition of popular and successful theatrical and dance productions, which the performing arts department has maintained in collaboration with local schools and the wider community.

108. Assessment is thorough and teachers provide regular and supportive feedback that enables students to improve their performance. Individual progress is well monitored and recorded. Formal assessment is fair and work is marked accurately. Well-developed teamwork ensures that teachers apply national standards and assessment criteria accurately. Students speak highly of the support they receive, especially when they need help with individual problems. They find the staff friendly and approachable. The tutorial system is successful and most students feel they are counselled effectively about progression opportunities.

Leadership and management

109. The curriculum area is well managed. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities and fulfil them professionally. Course leaders are committed to quality improvement. There is strong leadership which encourages open and critical debate and gives effective support. There is very good overall co-ordination, planning and evaluation at curriculum level and lines of communication between staff and managers are clear. There are regular meetings at departmental and course team level. Quality assurance and self-assessment procedures are good. There is evidence of comprehensive planning and the effective use of the self-assessment process. Where self-assessment has identified areas of weakness, appropriate action has been taken to address these.

English and communications



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

Strengths

- much enthusiastic and skilful teaching

- high pass rates on most courses

- good progress made by students
- very effective support for students.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of ICT in teaching
- insufficiently clear learning objectives in a minority of lessons.

Scope of provision

110. The English and communications faculty offers an appropriate range of courses. There are 210 students enrolled on GCE AS and A2 English literature and English language courses; 68 students are enrolled on GCE AS and A2 communication studies courses and 163 students are enrolled on the GCSE English course. The latter is offered as a re-sit course to students who want to achieve A* to C pass grades.

Achievement and standards

111. Standards achieved in most GCE AS and A2 examinations are high. Pass rates have improved since 1999/2000. In 2002, students on GCE A2 courses achieved well above the expected grades predicted using their qualifications on entry. The proportion of students achieving grades A* to C on GCSE English courses has been well above the national average for the last two years. Retention rates on most courses are around the national average. Attendance is good.

112. Students of all ability levels make good progress in lessons. The knowledge, skills and understanding they demonstrate orally and in their written work are well above average. On advanced level English language courses, students demonstrate knowledge of the technical terms and concepts of linguistics and are able to apply them to the analysis of a range of texts. Students achieve good standards in critical writing using the language and concepts of literary criticism. In a particularly good essay, a student used her understanding of the genre of tragedy to analyse the noble and weak qualities of Shakespeare's tragic hero, Othello. Good teaching inspires students to work with concentration and sustained effort. Most students on GCSE courses are successful in achieving their aim of an A* to C pass grade. A few students are easily distracted in lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English and communications, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE English language	2	No. of starts	200	197	217
		% retention	72	84	77
		% pass rate (A to C)	55	69	73
GCE AS English	3	No. of starts	*	167	163
		% retention	*	92	87

		% pass rate	*	95	96
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	177	173	108
		% retention **	84	83	98
		% pass rate	96	92	98
GCE AS English language	3	No. of starts	*	105	110
		% retention	*	86	86
		% pass rate	*	89	92
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	89	103	67
		% retention **	82	83	94
		% pass rate	94	80	100
GCE AS communication studies	3	No. of starts	*	46	55
		% retention	*	74	82
		% pass rate	*	74	91

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

** retention rates for GCE AS/A2 courses in 2002 are in-year, whereas GCE A level relates to two years

Quality of education and training

113. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers know their subject very well and communicate to students their interest and enthusiasm. In a lesson on Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the teacher expertly brought the play to life: he set the play in its historical context, drawing parallels between 16th century religious conflicts and religious conflicts of present times; reminded students of the structure of 16th century theatres; prompted students to consider how invisibility might be realised on stage; and chanted the Latin phrases of the Pope's attendants in the play. Teachers make very good use of questions to promote and to check learning. For example, they use questions to structure the analysis of poems, quick-fire questions to recall learning and a series of open questions to promote close analysis of texts. Lessons are generally well managed. However, in a minority of cases, learning objectives are too broad. This results in a lack of focus to students' learning. Teachers adapt their lessons to the needs of students.

114. Students work effectively on their own, in pairs and in small groups and as a whole class. Students develop their skills, responding to and analysing texts using the concepts and the technical language of literary and linguistic study and of communication studies. In a lesson that was starting students off on a project in communication studies, they were able to recall, as a whole class, the key terms and concepts of semiotic analysis and then worked in groups, with great energy and enthusiasm, applying these concepts to designing a display on the theme of images and their meanings. Most GCSE students become competent in making an informed, personal response to texts, writing for a variety of purposes and audiences.

115. Teachers and tutors support students well. Teachers give detailed written and oral feedback to students on their marked work. Feedback is constructive and tells students clearly how they can improve. Progress is reviewed through personal tutorials. GCE AS and A2 students have target grades based on their GCSE scores, and their progress is reviewed against these. Students are able to attend additional sessions for individual learning support. Courses are enriched by trips, visits to the theatre and visiting speakers.

116. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. The English classrooms have attractive displays of students' work and other material. The library has a good range of book resources, although a

wider range of books on literary theory is needed to meet course specifications. Teachers have begun to establish an English and communications site on the college intranet and make web-based resources available. There is, however, insufficient use of ICT in teaching to provide opportunities to students for research and independent learning.

Leadership and management

117. The leadership and management of English and communications is good. Pass rates have improved and are high. Teachers in the English and communications team work well together. Course teams meet regularly to review their courses and discuss students' progress. However, schemes of work for courses are insufficiently detailed. They contain too little information on the scheduling, resourcing and range of learning activities. Self-assessment reports are evaluative and accurate. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made by the course team. Areas for improvements are identified and action is taken to address weaknesses.

Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2001/02

Level	16-18	19+
	%	%
1	0	42
2	11	30
3	88	22
4/5	0	0
Other	0	5
Total	99	99

Source: provided by the college in Spring 2003

Note: figures have been rounded, hence percentage totals do not equal 100

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2001/02

Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments
			%
Science and mathematics	236	6	15

English, languages and communications	218	1	14
Information and communication technology	64	4	4
Engineering	16	0	1
Business	280	28	20
Hospitality, leisure, sport and travel	149	0	10
Health and community care	53	9	4
Art and design, media and performing arts	204	1	13
Humanities	275	24	19
Basic education	0	0	0
Total	1,495	73	100

Source: provided by the college in Spring 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
1	Starters excluding transfers	264	11	*	*	*	*
	Retention rate (%)	78	64	*	*	*	*
	National average (%)	80	81	83	70	74	74
	Pass rate (%)	100	71	*	*	*	*
	National average (%)	62	70	66	61	65	66
2	Starters excluding transfers	1090	3655	3021	*	11	16
	Retention rate (%)	82	81	87	*	91	100
	National average (%)	80	81	81	71	75	74
	Pass rate (%)	90	96	97	*	100	94
	National average (%)	81	79	83	68	68	67
3	Starters excluding transfers	2041	2511	4749	11	17	19
	Retention rate (%)	80	80	82	100	82	84
	National average (%)	78	80	84	65	70	71
	Pass rate (%)	86	85	84	88	100	93
	National average (%)	85	85	85	61	63	66

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

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 1999 to 2001: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1999 to 2002: College ISR.

** too few students to provide a valid calculation*

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)	78	16	5	105
Level 2 (intermediate)	75	21	3	28
Level 1 (foundation)	100	0	0	4
Other sessions	60	40	0	5
Totals	77	18	5	142

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