



Carmel College

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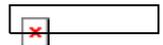
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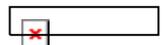
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Basic information about the college

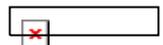


Name of college:	Carmel College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Rob Peacock
Address of college:	Prescot Road St Helens Merseyside WA10 3AG
Telephone number:	01744 452200
Fax number:	01744 452222
Chair of governors:	Monsignor Dalton
Unique reference number:	130489
Name of reporting inspector:	Paul Curry HMI
Dates of inspection:	30 September - 4 October 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

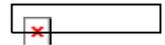


Carmel College is a Catholic sixth form college, located on a single site in St Helens, Merseyside. It was established in 1987 when Catholic secondary education in St Helens was reorganised. Two years later, it was also designated to provide Catholic sixth form education for Warrington. Nearly 50% of the students come from St Helens and about 15% from Warrington. The college also attracts students from Liverpool, Knowsley, Wigan and other parts of Greater Merseyside. There are 4 other sixth form colleges, 5 general further education (FE) colleges and 9 schools with sixth forms within a radius of 15 miles. During the academic year 2000/01, a total of 1,598 full-time equivalent students were enrolled, of whom 91% were aged 16 to 18. The curriculum mainly consists of subjects at General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and GCE Advanced level (GCE A level). Vocational courses are offered in science, information and communications technology (ICT), business, travel and tourism, leisure and recreation and health and social care. The first year of a number of degree programmes is provided in conjunction with the University of Liverpool. Some 200 adults attend the college on part-time courses that are mainly offered at levels 1 and 2. A small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled each year and study for the essential skills award.

The areas of St Helens and Warrington contrast strongly in socio-economic terms. In St Helens, the population is declining and unemployment is rising. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) achievements are below the national average, as measured by the percentage of pupils achieving five or more subjects at grades A* to C. Warrington demonstrates continued economic growth, high qualifications among the workforce and GCSE achievements above the national average.

In 2002, the governors reaffirmed the mission of the college, which is 'to strive to be a centre of educational excellence, opportunity and support, within a caring Christian environment'.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the quality of education to be outstanding in five of the curriculum areas inspected and good in the other three. Standards of teaching and learning are very good. The main strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- high pass rates on GCE A-level courses
- overall, students achieving GCE grades higher than those predicted by their GCSE results
- very good standards of teaching and learning
- comprehensive support for students

- outstanding leadership and management
- thorough monitoring of students' progress.

What should be improved

- volume and organisation of level 2 and adult provision
- arrangements for the promotion and evaluation of Catholic ethos
- group tutorials including religious education.

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

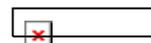
Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

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	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates at advanced level are excellent. Students achieve very high grades relative to their GCSE results. Teaching continually challenges students; assessment is thorough. Support for students is outstanding. The curriculum is effectively organised and managed. Provision for GCSE mathematics is poor.
Sciences	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates at advanced level are high. Teaching is very effective. Learning resources and support for students are very good. In physical education, students achieve below the grades predicted based on their GCSE performance.
Business and leisure	Outstanding. Examination pass rates are excellent. The retention rate is high for GCE A and AS students, but was low for Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) students in 2001/02. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are strongly supported; reviews of their progress and assessment are thorough. The area is well managed.
Computing, information and communications	Good. Pass rates are high and teaching is good. Support for full-time students is comprehensive; progression to higher level courses is

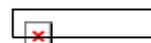
technology	good. Teachers work effectively in teams. Recruitment and retention rates on part-time programmes are declining and achievements at GCE AS are below the grades predicted by GCSE performance.
Visual and performing arts and media	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates are high. Teaching is effective, imaginative and innovative. Students' work is very good. Their progress is effectively monitored; they benefit from a wide and varied enrichment programme. Some resources are inadequate and there is insufficient technician support.
Humanities	Good. Pass and retention rates are high. Good resources are used effectively. Provision in geography is outstanding. Individual support for students is good. In some lessons, students are insufficiently challenged; in general studies and religious studies achievements are below grades predicted by GCSE performance.
Psychology, sociology, health social care	Good. There are high pass and retention rates on GCE A-level courses. Teachers give good support to students in all subjects and group work is effective. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are thorough. Curriculum management for GCE A-level courses is good. The retention rate on vocational programmes and recruitment on the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate programme are declining.
English and modern foreign languages	Outstanding. Retention and pass rates on GCE A-level subjects are excellent. Teaching and resources are very good. Teachers give extensive additional support in all subjects and, in modern foreign languages, sustained use is made of the target language. There are weaknesses in the management of GCSE English and the provision of foreign language courses for adults.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are outstanding. Leaders and managers have clear aims, are purposeful and give effective direction. Levels of achievement at GCE A level are high and standards of teaching and learning are very good. Most curriculum management is excellent. Governors demonstrate a clear understanding of educational issues and monitor the performance of the college closely. Arrangements for assuring the quality of provision in nearly all areas are effective and contribute to high academic standards. The arrangements for promoting and evaluating the Catholic ethos are not always satisfactory.

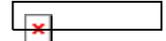
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to social inclusion is good. It meets the educational and social needs of students aged 16 to 18 at level 3 and provides a secure learning environment for students with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers place very effective emphasis on guidance and support for individual students. The college is committed to developing a community where there is mutual respect between students and staff and where the qualities of the individual are valued highly. Equality of opportunity, including racial equality, is satisfactorily promoted. The equal opportunities policy has been updated to reflect recent changes in race equality legislation.

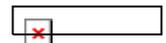
wish to study part time.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students receive intensive academic and personal support throughout their studies. Support structures are coherent and systematic, and staff are sensitive to the different needs of learners. There is a sound framework for individual tutorials. Tutors are effective in ensuring that students' progress is regularly monitored and their academic potential realised. Good careers education and guidance help students to progress to appropriate FE and higher education (HE) programmes or to employment. Effective induction procedures enable students to settle in quickly to their chosen course. The group tutorial programme is not always a successful context for teaching general Catholic religious education.

Students' views of the college



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

What students like about the college

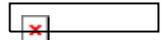
- friendly and helpful staff
- college's high reputation for achievement
- adult atmosphere of mutual respect and trust
- culture of learning and expectation of success
- good learning facilities
- effective individual tutorial support
- good teaching and interesting lessons

- range of enrichment activities
- good careers and induction programmes
- a wide choice of subjects.

What they feel could be improved

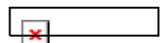
- cost of college food
- transport facilities to and from college
- some cramped accommodation
- lack of excursion and foreign exchange opportunities in some curriculum areas.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the LLSC. The LLSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	82	15	3
19+ and WBL*	75	25	0
Learning 16-18	79	20	1
19+ and WBL*	75	25	0

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

* work-based learning

Achievement and standards

1. As tables 1 and 2 in Part D illustrate, most enrolments at the college are by students aged 16 to 18, who study subjects at GCE AS and A level. Approximately 2% of students aged 16 to 18 study at level 2 and 1% at foundation level. Some 3% of all enrolments are from adults aged 19 and over.

16 to 18 year olds

2. At level 3, for students aged 16 to 18 during the period 1999 to 2001, both retention and pass rates compare favourably with national averages. The retention rate declined in 2000/01 compared with the previous year but, at 92%, was well above the national average of 84% for sixth form colleges. Similarly, the pass rate declined slightly over the three-year period but, at 89% in 2001, was still above the national average at 85%. Some particularly high retention rates for GCE A level were recorded in physical education, visual and performing arts, humanities, English and modern foreign languages. The rates in information and communications technology (ICT) were below the college average, as were those in GCE AS courses in science, mathematics and some humanities subjects. At GCE A level, pass rates were particularly high in science, mathematics, business studies, ICT, leisure and sport, English and modern foreign languages. Those in general studies were below the college average. Using the measure of subjects passed relative to examination entries, the GCE A-level pass rate improved from 92% in 1997 to 95% in 2000, and Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points for each candidate rose from 21.0 to 23.1 over the same period.

3. The 2002 data on achievements prepared by the college, demonstrate that high standards have been maintained. The overall pass rate, including general studies, was 96%. A significant number of subjects recorded 100% pass rates, and in chemistry, history, mathematics, media studies, music and performance studies, the achievement of the higher grades of A to C was over 80%. The retention rate for the second year of the GCE A-level course was uniformly high; most subjects recorded rates of 97% or better. The pass rate for GCE AS subjects averaged 92%; 55% of students achieved the higher grades. Retention rates for GCE AS subjects were nearly all above the college target of 90%, the exceptions being accounting, graphic design, French, music, psychology and physical education.

4. Data, which compare students' results at GCE A level with their previous achievements at GCSE,

show that overall they are achieving higher grades than were predicted on the basis of GCSE results. The extent of such improvement was significant in chemistry, English language, geography, history, music, mathematics and further mathematics. Students of design communication, physical education, religious studies and some of the art options, achieved below their target grades. Data for other subjects show students achieving results in line with predictions made on entry.

5. Results for the AVCE in 2002 were of a high standard with an overall pass rate of 94%. The largest entries were for health and social care where all 22 candidates were successful. Using data to predict AVCE performance from GCSE results, the programmes in dual business, science and travel and tourism achieved particularly high scores. However, scores in single award health and social care, travel and tourism and science demonstrated that performance was below what was predicted. Performance in the precursor GNVQ advanced programmes showed excellent pass rates averaging an excellent 98% with, in 2001, over 80% of successful students achieving the higher grades.

6. The overall retention rate at level 2 declined over the three-year period 1999 to 2001, to a point where it was just above the national average. Achievements were unsatisfactory in 2000, but good overall in 2001. In 2001/02, two GNVQ intermediate programmes were offered in IT and health and social care. Only seven students started the health and social care course, of whom four completed. Pass rates on both programmes were high, although the percentage of high grades in IT was small. At foundation level, both retention and pass rates improved over the three-year period from 1999 to a very high standard in 2001. Pass rates on foundation programmes, for example, were 100% in 2001 and the retention rate was 94%. The results for 2002 showed that 37 of the 44 starters completed the essential skills programme, and successfully completed the goals set in their individual learning plans.

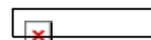
Adult learners

7. The relatively small number of adult learners are enrolled mainly on evening class programmes, most of which are in ICT. Success rates in 2001 were excellent on GCSE courses, although with relatively small numbers of students. Retention rates were only 58% on GCSE courses in 2000. On ICT courses, results have been satisfactory. The 2002 achievements data supplied by the college illustrate a wide range of pass rates, which range from 100% in photography, counselling and criminology, to 29% and 30% at grades A*-C in GCSE biology and mathematics respectively. Pass and retention rates on ICT courses were mostly good in 2002, but some retention rates were poor, for example 50% in GCSE Spanish.

8. Attendance during the inspection was high, averaging 92%. It was highest in social sciences at over 95% and lowest in visual, performing arts and media at 86%. Students arrived punctually to lessons except in ICT where some students were late for early morning classes.

9. Levels of attainment by students in the 153 lessons observed were highest in sciences, mathematics, business and leisure and social sciences. They were also high in visual and performing arts and media, and in English and modern foreign languages. In English and modern foreign languages, students demonstrated well-developed research, critical analysis and problem-solving skills in both oral and written work. In mathematics, the standard of students' work was very high, both in lessons and in homework. Students' work in art was exciting and exploratory, work in textiles was outstanding and, in music, students demonstrated high levels of technical ability. Key skills and personal and learning skills were well developed during lessons, for example in humanities and science where students were constantly helped and encouraged to consolidate and develop their learning. In geography students developed extensive research skills, in particular through the medium of the Internet.

Quality of education and training



10. There was much very good and some excellent teaching. In 81.7% of the lessons observed, teaching was good or better. It was satisfactory in 15.7% and less than satisfactory in the remaining 2.6%. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was confined to group tutorials that focused on general religious education and to one essential skills lesson. Excluding the group tutorials, the profile for teaching was 87.6% good or better, and 11.6% satisfactory. In two curriculum areas, business which includes leisure, and social sciences which include health and social care, all teaching observed was graded good or better. In mathematics, sciences and business and leisure over 70% of teaching was excellent or very good. More than 33% of the lessons in English and modern foreign languages and over 40% in visual and performing arts and social sciences were excellent. The lowest proportion of good or better teaching was in the humanities subjects; there was much good teaching in geography, but some insufficiently challenging teaching in religious studies.

11. Lessons are well planned and take account of learners' needs. Teachers make their learning objectives clear to students and hold their attention. They choose suitable learning activities and organise them well. Students enjoy their studies and make sound progress. Teachers constantly challenge the students and make them think. Many subjects have developed effective learning strategies. Discipline is good, and students recognise that the learning culture of the college enables them to make the most of their abilities. Much teaching is thoughtful and imaginative and encourages a good response from learners. Teachers are knowledgeable and skilful. This awareness of the individual needs of their students is apparent in their lessons. They ask well-considered and apt questions, set appropriate extension tasks, and ensure the resources suit the learning objectives. In lessons on courses in social sciences and health and social care, teachers use group work effectively and apply question and answer techniques that develop the students' capacity to construct coherent arguments that are well supported by evidence.

12. Teachers link theory and practical aspects of their subjects effectively. In arts subjects, assignments are devised to teach theory largely through practical work. In practical ICT lessons, students use resources with skill and confidence, although sometimes tasks were undertaken mechanistically and without sufficient thought. In the most effective lessons, students could apply knowledge and techniques to new situations. Occasionally students were not sufficiently challenged to evaluate and develop their ideas.

13. Most teachers possess graduate level qualifications; 86% have qualified teacher status. Those teaching vocational courses hold relevant assessor and verifier awards. The balance of full-time and part-time teaching staff is appropriate. The college is located in five buildings on a single site owned by the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Rooms are grouped into distinct specialist subject areas. A planned maintenance programme ensures that the buildings are of a uniformly high standard. Good displays of students' work around the college contribute to a welcoming learning environment. Improvements have been made to the estate since the last inspection. They include new buildings to house mathematics, IT and art and design and a centre for media, film and video. The refectory has been refurbished. Additional recreational and study places have been provided for students. There is a new flat and kitchen area for essential skills students. Access for students in wheelchairs is provided in all buildings and, via lifts, to all floors. The main staff work area is overcrowded, as is the refectory at lunchtime.

14. The college's IT resources are good. Targets, which were set to reach a ratio of students to modern computers of 5:1 and staff to computers of 1:1, have been achieved. All teaching staff are provided with their own notebook computer. Desktop computers are all networked and provide access to the Internet. Students find that machines are reliable and consider that access to computers is generally good. The development of the college intranet is recognised by managers as a priority to enable more students and subject teachers to make use of this medium of study. A wide range of books, videos and periodicals is available in the learning resource centre. In many curriculum areas, for example, English and history, the stock is comprehensive. In a minority of areas, for example, ICT and travel and tourism, it is not. This shortcoming is recognised by the college. There are sufficient study spaces including a silent study centre that can accommodate 32 students. The learning resource centre is well managed; opening hours extend into the evenings on four days of the week.

15. There is a coherent college-wide policy for the assessment and monitoring of students' work in all curriculum areas. The policy is implemented consistently and thoroughly evaluated across college through effective quality assurance procedures. External moderators' reports are consistently positive about the quality of students' work and the standards achieved. Many departments undertake detailed analysis of internal assessment through cross-moderation of marking. Teachers share good practice in moderation through peer observations and regular staff development opportunities. All assessed work has a clear marking schedule to inform students of their progress and to help them plan their work effectively. Teachers mark work promptly and provide helpful written comments to assist students. Guidance comments are particularly useful in geography and law.

16. Several different kinds of assessment of students are in use. Staff, in discussion with students, make effective use of value added data to set demanding targets that help students to make progress. Students have a very clear idea of how they are performing and how they might improve. Parents value the comprehensive progress reports that are produced three times a year. The college gathers information about students' learning styles. This information is not used consistently across all subject areas. Its use is particularly effective in mathematics, business, leisure and tourism. In these curriculum areas, it is used to plan lessons and to promote students' achievements.

17. The college has good provision at advanced level, which enables students to build on their achievements at school. In recent years, it has added GCE A levels in performance studies and law and an AVCE in ICT and expanded the number of art courses. Students are able to choose from 33 GCE AS/A-level subjects and 6 AVCE programmes. There is insufficient provision at level 2. Only two GNVQ intermediate courses and GCSE re-sit courses in English and mathematics are offered. Although the college has marketed a wider range of intermediate courses, they have not recruited successfully. At pre-foundation level, the essential skills course for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attracted 35 students for the 2002/03 academic year. This programme provides good progression opportunities to courses at the local college of FE. The two colleges in St Helens co-operate to try to ensure that provision for students is complementary. Although Carmel College offers an evening programme for adults, enrolments had declined to approximately 100 at the time of the inspection.

18. There is a wide range of enrichment activities that extend students' experience. These include: aromatherapy, art, dance, team sports; and opportunities provided by the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. Many students participate in Young Enterprise, in work experience and in community service. They volunteer to contribute to the work of Catholic Aid for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and to One World Day. Some students 'partner' others with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to help them improve their reading skills. Students benefit from additional activities within their subject, for example theatre visits, residentials, and a study visit to New York.

19. There are good opportunities for all students to develop key skills, as an integrated aspect of their academic or vocational courses. A key skills brochure, provided on entry, sets out the criteria for achievement at the various levels. Each advanced level subject offers one key skill at level 3 and students present appropriate portfolio evidence for assessment as an integral part of their course. Courses and assignments are well planned; attention is paid to students' personal and learning skills and to the development of their confidence.

20. Pre-entry information, advice and guidance for potential students are suitably detailed and impartial. Students learn about the courses through comprehensive marketing materials, visits of college staff to partner schools and consultation evenings. All students are interviewed prior to starting their course. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also offered a place on a link programme for the summer term to help ease the transition from school to college. Advisers from the Greater Merseyside Connexions service are available to help students make informed and suitable choices throughout their time at college. The college has a team of designated liaison officers who co-ordinate the links between the schools and college.

21. Clear entry requirements are identified for all courses. The college has a policy where each year

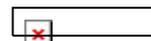
10% of places are offered to students who fall below the normal entry criteria. Induction procedures are well planned and help students to settle quickly into the college and into their subjects. Only 2.5% of students transfer between courses after their induction period. Subject handbooks provide sufficient information about course content, assessment, appeal procedures and arrangements for additional support.

22. Teachers use the results of assessment effectively to identify the additional learning needs of individual students. Such needs are well met through formal and informal systems that include workshops, individual tutorials and extra lessons over lunch times. Students particularly value the wide range of support services available within the college. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective assessment and support through the essential skills award.

23. Students receive excellent support throughout their time at the college. Support services are coherent, systematic and sensitive to the varying needs of students. Effective links are established between staff as they share information about students' abilities and requirements. Individual tutorial support is outstanding. Retention and pass rates are high. The teaching of the general Catholic religious education programme through group tutorials is, however, less effective. Some teachers lack the confidence to cope with the subject matter, which, in turn, reduces students' motivation and commitment. The learning support department has expanded its range of additional support. It offers a welcoming and supportive service that is effectively linked to the group and individual tutorial systems. Staff and students working in the department have benefited from the appointment of learning mentors. Senior staff maintain an overview of all support services.

24. Students' punctuality and attendance are carefully monitored. Information is shared with group tutors promptly and any problems are followed up quickly and carefully. The college offers good careers and education guidance programmes that highlight opportunities in education, training and employment. Programmes include a range of activities, for example HE visits and industry days, and job seekers benefit from a support group.

Leadership and management



25. Leadership and management are outstanding. Leaders and managers have clear aims and give effective direction. Pass rates are high and teaching and learning are very good. Retention and pass rates on advanced courses are consistently high in nearly all curriculum areas. Achievements in the context of the value added are also high. Students generally obtain better GCE A-level grades than have been predicted for them based on their GCSE results. The college has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning beyond the high standards identified at the last inspection.

26. Planning and review processes are well organised and effective. Governors and senior managers meet annually to review the college mission and update the strategic plan. A wide range of information, including curriculum plans and local and national agendas for education, contribute to planning activities. A summary of the plan is circulated to all staff and feedback invited. Teachers have a clear understanding of their role in achieving strategic objectives. The college makes good use of targets when measuring and monitoring performance. Demanding targets are set at college, programme area and individual subject level with the aim of improving student recruitment, attendance, retention and pass rates. Managers address under-performance in subject areas by thoroughly reviewing the organisation and quality of teaching, learning and assessment and by providing professional development opportunities for staff. Students are set achievement targets; those who do not achieve them receive additional support. Programme area managers regularly report to senior managers on the progress made towards meeting targets and strategic objectives. Governors receive reports on such progress twice a year.

27. Most curriculum management is excellent. Programme area teams meet regularly to discuss

student progress and review their courses. Communications are excellent. Most staff value and use the sound data that are provided on recruitment, retention, attendance and achievement to assess students' performance. Arrangements for assuring the quality of provision are good in most areas. Programme area co-ordinators use an appropriate range of information to make judgements on the quality of courses. The range includes analysis of value added data, lesson observation reports and students' views. Reviews are generally thorough and result in suitably detailed action plans for improvement. Progress against action plans is rigorously monitored by programme area co-ordinators. The college uses value added scores effectively to identify patterns in students' performance and to compare their performance in different subject areas. In a small number of cases, for example GCSE English and mathematics, the arrangements for quality assurance are less rigorous. Some specific aspects of curriculum management are unsatisfactory. Students on level 2 courses are not as successful as those on advanced level programmes. Retention rates on intermediate level courses are declining. The college does not meet the requirements for a clear religious education programme. The teaching on this programme is significantly less effective than the teaching of other subjects. Some students consider that religious education lessons have little value for them.

28. The college benefits from a strong and knowledgeable governing body. Governors are appropriately involved in setting the strategic direction for the college. They demonstrate a good understanding of issues in FE and are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum areas of the college. They regularly receive clear reports from senior managers and students, and data on student retention and pass rates. They also receive presentations from college managers on their areas of responsibility. Governors carefully review progress towards meeting strategic objectives and play an active role in self-assessment through the quality assurance committee. They meet regularly with the student council.

29. Staff development and appraisal are generally effective. Staff are appraised annually. The process includes setting targets for performance and identifying staff training needs. Staff performance is evaluated against achievement of previous targets. For many teachers, value added results, data on their students' performance and overall improvement as well as lesson observation reports contribute to their appraisal. In a minority of cases, the process lacks rigour. Arrangements for staff development are good. An annual staff training plan addresses training needs that have been identified as a result of appraisal activities and college development priorities. Systematic evaluation of the plan results in a cost benefit analysis of each staff development activity. This analysis assists in the planning of budget decisions. In a few curriculum areas, links between appraisal and the training plan are weak. The college is accredited as an Investor in People.

30. The college has effective community links. Sound links with partner schools enable the college to plan the curriculum and provide opportunities for key stage 4 pupils to sample and experience vocational education. Links with Liverpool University have led to modules of a degree programme being taught on college premises. A partnership with the local FE college enables students on the essential skills programme to take part in vocational training and progress to full-time courses. The college contributes to the borough of St Helens agenda for basic skills.

31. The promotion of equal opportunities within the college is satisfactory. The profile of student groups is analysed and compared with the community profile. Student pass rates are analysed to identify any relationship between achievement and gender. Opportunities for promoting equality in lessons are identified by teachers in their schemes of work and lesson plans. Lesson observations are used to monitor the impact on students. The college has recently revised its equal opportunities policy and added a policy for promoting racial equality. Arrangements to evaluate the impact of the revised policy in curriculum areas have been agreed but, at the time of the inspection, had not been fully introduced and were not clearly understood by all staff. An action plan for further improvement of evaluation has been developed. It was too early to judge the impact of the revised policy and action plan during the inspection.

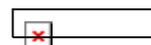
32. Although academic leadership and management are outstanding, there is a lack of clarity in the arrangements for promoting and evaluating Catholic ethos. The college has produced, and regularly reviews, a statement about the nature of its distinctiveness as a Catholic institution. In addition to the positive activities of the chaplaincy, opportunities for spiritual development have been identified

in several aspects of college life including schemes of work, lesson plans, liturgies and charitable voluntary work in local and international communities. Teachers share the responsibility for promoting Catholic ethos, but some are unclear about what this means. The college distinctiveness statement states that Gospel values will be applied in college life, but examples of how this will happen are not sufficiently explicit and detailed to provide clear guidance to staff. There are no clear links between Gospel values and, for example, the procedures of the college on the support offered to students or the wide range of chaplaincy and other activities. The general Catholic religious education programme lacks coherence and contains insufficient religious content. There is no systematic, thorough evaluation of the impact of the activities that have been planned to promote Catholic ethos.

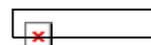
33. Senior managers and governors carefully monitor the college's financial position. Staff understand how departmental budgets are set and the bidding procedures for capital expenditure. The college gives good value for money. Average class sizes are high and students' success rates are excellent in nearly all areas.

34. Self-assessment is generally thorough and soundly linked to the college planning cycle. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found additional strengths and weaknesses that were related to aspects of curriculum management and the promotion and evaluation of Catholic ethos.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Mathematics



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

Strengths

- excellent retention and pass rates
- very high levels of achievement relative to prior GCSE grades
- very good teaching that continually challenges students
- thorough assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- outstanding support for students of all abilities

- effective curriculum organisation and management.

Weaknesses

- poor provision for GCSE mathematics.

Scope of provision

35. The college offers mathematics, statistics and further mathematics courses at GCE AS and A level to full-time students aged 16 to 18. Numbers have risen steadily and, at the time of the inspection, there were over 200 students studying GCE AS mathematics and more than 150 studying GCE A-level mathematics. This group represents the largest number of students in any subject in the college. GCSE mathematics is available to students who have not previously achieved a grade C or better in the subject.

Achievement and standards

36. Pass and retention rates on advanced level mathematics courses are excellent and are consistently well above the national average for sixth form colleges. For example, in GCE AS and A-level mathematics, pass rates have averaged close to 100% over the three years to 2002. The retention rate has also remained high. Results in GCE A-level further mathematics are equally good. The number of students achieving high grades is outstanding: 66% of GCE A-level mathematics students and 52% of GCE AS mathematics students achieved A or B grades in 2002. Students' progress is excellent. Students studying mathematics achieve outcomes significantly better than the grades predicted by their GCSE results. Achievements in GCSE mathematics are more modest. They are slightly above the average for students re-sitting the subject.

37. Students' work is of a very high standard. In the early stages of the GCE AS course teachers place a strong emphasis on the development of basic algebraic skills. Students' solutions to problems are well presented, reflecting the good practice by teachers in their own exposition. In the GCE A-level course students show high levels of fluency when discussing mathematical ideas. In a lesson to find the solutions to inequalities with rational fractions, students showed a high level of skill in algebra and curve sketching. They are also very competent in the use of graphical calculators.

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	**	67	54
		% retention	**	88	80
		% pass rate	**	46	52
GCE A-level further mathematics	3	No. of starts	20	14	8
		% retention	95	100	100
		% pass rate	100	93	100
GCE A-level statistics	3	No. of starts	6	17	9

		% retention	100	94	100
		% pass rate	83	100	89
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	132	137	135
		% retention	93	95	97
		% pass rate	98	99	100

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

** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

38. Teaching is very good. Teachers are energetic. They demand high standards of their students who in turn respond well. The way in which teachers closely question students is excellent and creates a challenging and stimulating environment for learning. For example, in one lesson where calculus was being used to find the equation for the tangent and normal to a curve, the teacher was able to take the class through the solution with all of the mathematics derived from students' responses. Students are encouraged to think mathematically and look beyond routines to find shorter, more elegant solutions to problems. All lessons have a clear aim that is communicated very explicitly to students. The pace of lessons is brisk and substantial amounts of work are covered in each lesson. Students' concentration levels are very high.

39. The assessment of students' work is thorough. Two homework tasks are regularly set each week. They are marked and returned within three days. The work is well annotated; constructive feedback is given on how it can be improved. All work is marked on the same A to E scale so that students know how they are performing. Assignments are carefully planned by the teaching team. Copies of all assignments are provided in a homework booklet and are also on the college intranet. There is very good support for students of all abilities. Teachers monitor students' progress carefully. Grades for homework are listed on the inside covers of their books so that it is easy for the individual student, as well as the teacher, to see the trend in the marks. There is a weekly lunchtime tutorial for GCE AS students with a grade B in intermediate level mathematics and any other students having difficulty with basic algebra. The tutorial is carefully aligned with the topic being taught that week. More able students are given extension work. There are extra tutorials to provide support for coursework and a number of revision tutorials for module examinations and for students preparing for entry to Oxford and Cambridge. Teachers also give students considerable informal support outside lessons.

40. Mathematics rooms are in a new purpose-built block. They are well furnished and have a layout ideal for teaching mathematics. However, some rooms are too small for some of the bigger classes for the academic year 2002/03. Specialist computer rooms can be booked, but this arrangement is not always ideal in mathematics when a teacher may only want to use a computer for a short demonstration at an appropriate point in the lesson. The highly qualified subject staff use their expertise to good effect. They work well as a team and produce good handouts that enhance teaching and learning. All students have a handbook which includes details of all the study resources available to them in the department, in the learning resources centre and on the college intranet.

Leadership and management

41. Leadership of the department is very effective. Organisation is good and teachers and students have a clear sense of purpose. Teachers work together to develop resources; they meet regularly to discuss teaching strategies. Statistics is managed as a separate department. There is sharing of ideas within the mathematics department but, because there is only one statistics teacher, this inhibits a wider sharing of good practice. There is no GCSE mathematics course as part of the normal timetable. A short course is offered for students with a grade D and a one-year course for students with a grade D or E. However, the single lesson a week which is timetabled, does not give

students regular contact with their teacher and is not satisfactory. With the exception of the GCSE course, the college self-assessment process is thorough in mathematics and statistics. Students' performance is carefully monitored and targets are set to seek to ensure that the very good results are maintained.

Sciences



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in all GCE A-level subjects
- most retention rates well above national averages in almost all courses
- very effective teaching
- very good learning resources
- wide-ranging formal and informal support for students.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory performance against predicted grades in GCE A-level physical education.

Scope of provision

42. The college offers an appropriate range of GCE AS and A-level courses in biology, chemistry, physical education and physics to GCSE entrants. It also provides dual and single award AVCEs in science. Over 500 students, almost all of whom were aged 16 to 19, were entered for science subjects at GCE AS and A level in 2001/02. At the time of the inspection, the college made no provision for science at level 2; the only level 2 subject offered in 2001/02, GCSE biology, has been dropped.

Achievement and standards

43. Achievements in GCE AS and A-level science subjects are high. In 2002, 100% pass rates were

recorded in GCE A-level chemistry and physics and in the same year, pass rates in all GCE AS science subjects were well above national averages for sixth form colleges. The proportion of students achieving high grades in chemistry has been consistently above national averages during the three years to 2002. Pass rates in vocational science subjects have also been good. In both chemistry and vocational programmes, students have consistently achieved much better grades than those predicted from their GCSE results. In GCE A-level physical education, however, grades have been lower than those predicted on GCSE performance. In GCSE biology, the pass rate in 2001/02 was only at the national average and showed a considerable decrease from the previous year. The retention rate on GCE AS and A-level science courses is high; however, on AVCE science only two thirds of starters completed the course in 2001/02.

44. Students produce work of a high standard. Laboratory work is carried out competently and with a clear focus on safety. Written work is clearly presented and experimental reports are usually concise and clear. Students work hard and are keen to contribute in lessons. They answer questions readily and volunteer ideas of their own. At 94%, attendance in lessons was good, and higher than the average for the college as a whole.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	107	104	84
		% retention	94	95	100
		% pass rate	100	100	98
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	72	75	68
		% retention	99	99	97
		% pass rate	100	99	100
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	43	46	51
		% retention	98	98	98
		% pass rate	95	89	100
GCE A-level physical education	3	No. of starts	59	53	54
		% retention	98	98	100
		% pass rate	97	98	96
GNVQ advanced and AVCE science	3	No. of starts	15	11	19
		% retention	100	91	63
		% pass rate	93	100	92

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

Quality of education and training

45. Most teaching is very good, and some is outstanding. Teachers' planning of lessons is very thorough and detailed; they work closely to examination specifications. Lesson plans identify clear aims and objectives that are shared with students. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods and an appropriate mix of activities; they adjust their teaching to the needs of students of differing abilities. In one particularly effective GCE AS physical education lesson, students studying the classification of sports skills moved from the classroom into the sports hall to use the theory they had just learnt analysing skills while practising them. Students are encouraged to contribute to

lessons and they are not afraid to ask for additional help. During lessons, teachers question students skilfully to check that they understand the work.

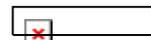
46. Homework is set regularly and returned promptly. Marking is accurate and work is annotated with constructive comments, which help students to improve. Students' progress is monitored effectively. Frequent assignments, tests and practical work allow students to measure their own progress; teachers keep comprehensive records of assessment results. Students receive good individual support during lessons. They are also helped outside normal lesson time, for example before examination periods. Industrial links are also available on AVCE science courses. There is little evidence of any significant industrial updating of teachers' experience. However, teachers are academically well qualified. They show an obvious enthusiasm for their subjects that they transmit to students.

47. Laboratories have good resources; most equipment is modern. There is an efficient and unobtrusive technician service that is much appreciated by students and teachers alike. Technical staff are well qualified, have previous industrial experience and have undertaken recent and relevant opportunities for staff development, including first aid. The capacity of laboratories is too small for some GCE AS classes; any further growth in class sizes could mitigate against safe working practices. The science department, particularly in physics and chemistry, has contributed significantly to the development of the college intranet, which is regularly used to enhance teaching and learning. For example, students can access the intranet from home to undertake extension questions or to gain access to notes of lessons which they might have missed. Teachers often use intranet-based material, such as computer simulations, to augment teaching and learning.

Leadership and management

48. The science curriculum is managed very effectively at both whole department and individual subject level. All staff are expected to contribute to the effectiveness and high standards of the department. All teachers, for example, were involved in the self-assessment process. The resulting report makes good use of data and has led to considerable improvements, such as the rapid development of IT materials. The sharing of good practice is effective within individual science subjects and between the science department as a whole. In biology, for example, collaboration between staff has resulted in the development of some excellent lesson plans, which now form a common resource.

Business and leisure



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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- high retention rates on GCE A-level and AS courses
- very good teaching and learning

- strong support for students
- thorough progress review and assessment
- well-managed curriculum area.

Weaknesses

- low retention rate of AVCE students in 2001/02.

Scope of provision

49. The programme area offers AVCE courses in business, travel and tourism and leisure and recreation; GCE AS and A-level courses in business; and GCE AS and A-level accounting. Students are mainly aged 16 to 19. In travel and tourism, both the single and the double awards are offered, and in leisure and recreation, the single award. The programme area ran the GNVQ in leisure and tourism before the introduction of the AVCE. The GNVQ intermediate in business had been offered, but attracted too few students to sustain it. The college has recently helped to introduce a GCSE in travel and tourism for school pupils aged 14 to 16, in conjunction with a local partner school.

Achievement and standards

50. Pass rates for all courses are well above national averages for sixth form colleges. Most students consistently perform at a level equal to, or higher, than might be expected from their GCSE results. Their retention rate is high for GCE AS and A-level courses. It was low on the AVCE programmes in 2001/02, in contrast to the rate for the GNVQ precursors. However, the proportion of students retained in 2002 for their year 2 courses was much higher than in 2001. The college has responded speedily to the more academic nature of the AVCE qualification by improving pre-course literature and advice, extending the range of learning opportunities and ensuring that all students have appropriate learning support. Progression to HE for all courses is excellent. In 2002, 86% of GCE A-level and 90% of the AVCE students progressed to HE.

51. Students are set challenging targets at induction, based on their GCSE results. They respond well to the high standards set by teachers and demonstrate very good levels of knowledge that they can apply in different contexts. They respond confidently to questioning in lessons and in their assessed work demonstrate a very good understanding of business, leisure and tourism concepts. Homework is set regularly and any work achieving below grade E has to be resubmitted. Emphasis is given to developing examination techniques. Key skills are developed during students' subject lessons and in additional skills development lessons. Attendance in lessons observed by inspectors was close to 90%. Punctuality was excellent.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
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GNVQ advanced/AVCE in business	3	No. of starts	17	19	20
		% retention	100	84	50
		% pass rate	100	100	90
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	51	62	74
		% retention	86	97	96
		% pass rate	84	98	97
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	No. of starts	14	20	*
		% retention	100	75	*
		% pass rate	100	93	*
AVCE travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	*	*	40
		% retention	*	*	55
		% pass rate	*	*	91

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

52. Teaching in all the lessons observed was good or better. In most lessons, it was very good or excellent. Lessons are very well planned. Lesson plans and schemes of work are appropriately detailed and provide good evidence of careful thought and consideration by teachers. In teaching, plans are used sensitively and adjusted to meet the needs of the particular class and individual students. The good working relationships between teachers and students are businesslike, friendly and constructive; this leads to a co-operative and positive atmosphere in the classroom. A wide range of teaching methods and learning activities, including case study analysis and presentations and discussions, engages students and retains their interest and attention. Teachers use well-chosen, topical and relevant examples drawn from contemporary life and commercial practice. For example, each week, GCE A-level business students present business news items, based on their reading of newspaper articles or journals. Many case studies for AVCE students draw upon local developments in business, leisure and tourism. Students enjoy their studies and make good progress. They participate well in discussions, respond readily to questions and are often able to complete tasks with little supervision. They use computers, including accessing the Internet, often and with confidence. They are regularly helped with the development of the higher skills of analysis and evaluation during their lessons. Their learning benefits from a well-developed range of contacts with local businesses, both for work experience and project activities.

53. Teachers are well qualified; many have relevant commercial experience. They take up good opportunities to refresh that experience by spending short periods in industry or commerce. Classrooms are modern, bright and well equipped, and contain good displays of students' work. Students have good access to computers, including laptop computers in some classrooms. Textbooks are up to date and relevant.

54. Students' assessment and monitoring of progress are integral to their work and courses. Students are aware of the importance of the regular assessment by teachers, which is well planned and effective. Assessment tasks are demanding and often use topics particularly relevant to students. Most assessments are marked in a way that helps students to understand what they need to do to make further progress. Teachers use the outcomes of assessment to improve their teaching and to monitor the progress of students. In addition to the formal reviews of students' progress, including the use of target grades for potential examination achievement, teachers in the programme area frequently monitor the work and progress of students informally, and take

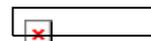
appropriate steps to help them.

55. Students are guided and supported particularly well throughout their programmes. Teachers give freely of their time. Students receive specialist advice from subject teachers, particularly for the AVCE programmes, prior to joining their courses. Induction, which is thorough and helpful, sees the start of that close attention to personal support, which is a hallmark of the area's work with students. It is also an opportunity for students to learn about their first assignments and assessment activities and to sample 'tasters' of the subject or course that they have chosen. Teachers make effective use of assessment of students' preferred learning styles to help improve teaching and learning. They apply the conclusions in their lessons when, for example, deciding where students should sit in class, or which activity group students should join, to help support each other. Students receive good advice on careers and HE opportunities. Teachers in leisure and tourism use their knowledge of the industry to advise students effectively.

Leadership and management

56. The curriculum is well organised and managed. There is a clear organisational structure. Regular team meetings, both formal and informal, are held between the heads of department and the programme area co-ordinator. All meetings are minuted. Self-assessment is thorough and good use is made of detailed common data sheets that contain students' previous and current achievements, and their retention and attendance profiles. This work is complemented by reports from the student focus group and a student perception questionnaire. There is a strong commitment to building on what has already been achieved in the programme area and to improving standards. This approach has led to a change in teaching styles to a more student-centred approach and to an emphasis on sharing materials and strategies between teachers. In addition to internal inspection requirements, there is a programme of observations for new and existing teachers, including peer observation. During annual staff appraisals objectives are reviewed and staff development needs identified.

Computing, information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- consistently high pass rates
- good teaching
- comprehensive support for full-time students
- good progression rates to higher level courses

- effective team work.

Weaknesses

- declining recruitment and retention rates on part-time provision
- achievement of GCE AS students below predicted grades.

Scope of provision

57. The main provision is at advanced level. The college also offers daytime courses at other levels in computing and ICT. In 2000, the GNVQ intermediate in ICT was added to the course portfolio and, in 2001, the AVCE dual award in ICT. At the time of the inspection, some 300 students were enrolled on courses in this curriculum area, reflecting a rapid growth in full-time enrolments during recent years. Twilight and evening courses are offered and include computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), the European computer driving licence (ECDL) and GCE A-level ICT. In this area of part-time provision, enrolments in 2002 have declined compared with previous years. The college also offers first-year modules for a degree course, run in conjunction with Liverpool University.

Achievement and standards

58. Students achieve consistently high pass rates at all levels. They are well above the national benchmarks for sixth form colleges. The percentage of high grades achieved on GCE AS ICT courses is relatively low. Overall, these students have not been achieving the grades predicted by their GCSE results. Their retention rates on courses at level 1 and 2 has decreased over the three years to 2002, as well as on part-time courses; it is now below national benchmark figures. Many students enrolled on GCE A-level courses progress to HE to continue with their computing or ICT studies.

59. Students apply themselves well to practical and theoretical tasks both during lessons and in their written work. They reach good standards. Their verbal communication skills are enhanced by skilfully directed questioning from teachers; many students are articulate in discussing their work. Although attendance was good in daytime provision, students were often late for lessons, especially first thing in the morning.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
CLAIT	1	No. of starts	73	56	34
		% retention	92	88	74
		% pass rate	79	73	80
GNVQ intermediate ICT	2	No. of starts	*	16	17
		% retention	*	94	82

		% pass rate	*	100	93
ECDL	2	No. of starts	17	51	49
		% retention	88	86	73
		% pass rate	87	95	69
GCE A-level IT, ICT, and computing	3	No. of starts	71	53	101
		% retention	87	91	97
		% pass rate	97	100	94

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

60. Most teaching is good; some is very good. Teachers begin lessons by outlining the intended content, which includes reviewing previous work. There is clear evidence of students applying the techniques that they had already learned to new situations. Students use the resources in practical classes with skill and confidence. In the most effective lessons, the range of students' needs is anticipated and catered for in the teaching styles adopted. In one practical lesson, the teacher distributed worksheets on implementing a database, and included additional clues and guidance on some of the sheets for the less capable students. Occasionally, students mechanically follow steps to produce the required result without developing a sufficient understanding of concepts or processes.

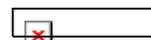
61. Teachers' use of general classrooms and/or specialist computer suites is determined by the learning activities and length of lessons. Specialist resources such as data projectors enhance students' learning. There are many informative displays of students' work and articles from the media. The computer network holds useful teaching and learning material but the use of the college intranet is underdeveloped. Many of the books in the learning resources centre have outlived their usefulness, but students may borrow books from within the department.

62. Students' progress reviews include consideration of their records on attendance, punctuality and the submission of work. Current and expected achievement grades are discussed and the tutors' comments and recommendations are recorded. The department carefully monitors the completion of students' examination projects. Regular meetings with students, both formal and informal, help to resolve any problems. Work experience is integrated into full-time vocational programmes. Teachers are well qualified and some have recent and relevant industrial or commercial experience. They support students well and provide additional revision classes during lunchtimes and at other times of the day.

Leadership and management

63. Small teams of staff lead their own specialisms within three departments: GCE AS/A-level computing and ICT; AVCE and GNVQ intermediate ICT; and evening classes. They work well together, sharing materials, and collaborating to enhance teaching skills and to disseminate good practice. Regular team meetings are used effectively to discuss students' progress and assure the quality of courses. The self-assessment process is a shared undertaking involving all staff.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- good retention rates
- high quality of students' work
- effective, imaginative and innovative teaching
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- wide and varied enrichment programme.

Weaknesses

- some inadequate resources
- insufficient specialist technician support.

Scope of provision

64. The college offers courses in visual arts, performing arts, media and music. A full range of GCE AS and A levels is offered in art and design including fine art, textiles, three-dimensional design, photography, graphic design, and design technology. Other GCE AS or A-level courses are available in media studies, music, music technology and performance studies. The college also provides the foundation diploma in art and design. There is no adult or pre-level 3 provision other than life drawing for existing students. At the time of the inspection, some 450 students were enrolled across the curriculum area; over half were studying art and design.

Achievement and standards

65. Pass rates on nearly all courses are high and above national averages for sixth form colleges. For example, in GCE A-level fine art, textiles, design technology, media studies, music, music

technology and performance studies, all completing students were successful in 2002, as were those studying the foundation diploma. Of the 11 GCE AS subjects, 5 also recorded 100% pass rates in the same year. In music, students' grades at GCE A level are higher than those predicted from GCSE results, but they are lower in fine art and graphics. Retention rates are above national averages on most courses. There is excellent progression from foundation art and design to HE courses. Class attendance during the inspection week was 86%, which was relatively low when compared with the college average.

66. The standard of students' work is excellent. Artwork is exciting and experimental; there is a proper focus on exploratory research and creative sketchbooks. Practical work in textiles is outstanding. Media students show high levels of analytical ability. Performing arts work is presented confidently and many music students show good technical ability. Students work well both on their own, and in groups.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Foundation diploma in art	3	No. of starts	23	31	24
		% retention	87	94	92
		% pass rate	100	93	100
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	42	43	31
		% retention	84	84	97
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level performance studies	3	No. of starts	18	14	24
		% retention	83	100	96
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

67. Teaching is effective, imaginative and innovative. Of the teaching observed across all subject areas, most was good or better; almost half of the lessons were outstanding. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods and activities which hold students' interest and attention. Assignments are challenging, imaginative and designed to produce a good range of diverse creative outcomes. In art and design subjects, students are encouraged to try out experimental methods of drawing or make use of unusual materials and techniques. Textiles work is particularly vibrant and sophisticated and students use a wide variety of different fabrics. A few art classes were too large which affected the amount of individual guidance which teachers could give. In media studies, students performed well on group tasks, presented their work confidently in a whole class plenary and made good use of different visual aids. Music lessons are carefully planned and cover examination requirements systematically. Some teaching of music theory, however, was unimaginative. In performing arts, good links were made between theory and practical elements as part of a carefully structured approach to learning.

68. Students' progress is assessed and monitored effectively. Assessment is fair and regular, and consistent with examination requirements. Grading is mostly accurate, although sometimes over generous in fine art and graphic design. Marking is suitably detailed and students are clearly briefed about ways in which they might improve their performance. Helpful checklists and coursework action plans are well used by students in product design classes. These enable students to check and record their own progress every week with their tutor, and clarify exactly what they need to do for the next lesson.

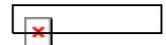
69. There is a wide and varied enrichment programme that includes life drawing, lunchtime performances and a range of peripatetic instrumental teaching. A partnership with a neighbouring college leads to joint performance opportunities and the sharing of good practice. The good artwork displayed throughout the college is not credited with the artist's name or the course; an opportunity to recognise the success of individual students is missed.

70. Physical resources in art and design and performance studies are very good. However, some resources are inadequate. Music rooms are small and cramped. There are only two practice rooms and soundproofing to the recording studio is inadequate. There is insufficient video editing space and technical equipment requires updating. Foundation students lack enough space in which to develop work individually and independently. There is a general lack of storage space in art and design and poor ventilation in the design technology classrooms. Technician support is inadequate. Teachers' time is used on technical tasks such as rigging lighting or sorting out computer problems. The library stock is insufficient in art and design, but adequate in other subjects. Staff are academically well qualified, but do not all hold a professional teaching qualification.

Leadership and management

71. Course management is good. Subjects are thoroughly monitored and evaluated by course leaders. Management information contributes to analysis and action planning. Target setting is an established aspect of courses; staff development opportunities for full-time and part-time teachers occur regularly.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- high retention rates on all courses
- effective use of good resources
- outstanding provision in geography
- good individual support for students.

Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge to students in a significant number of lessons
- students' performance below predicted grades in general studies and religious studies.

Scope of provision

72. The college provides GCE AS and A-level courses in an appropriate range of humanities subjects. At the time of the inspection, some 400 students were studying geography, history, law and religious studies; over a third had chosen geography. The inspection covered these four subjects and also considered achievements in GCE A-level general studies.

Achievement and standards

73. There are high pass rates throughout the humanities area. On most courses, results are consistently above national averages for sixth form colleges. In 2001 and 2002, both geography and history achieved GCE A-level pass rates at or close to 100%. In law, the GCE AS pass rate was 100% in 2002. The retention rate on most courses is consistently high. The proportion of high grades at GCE A level is below national averages for sixth form colleges in history and religious studies. In general studies and religious studies, students perform below levels predicted by their GCSE grades. By contrast value added achievements in geography are outstanding; they are also good in history.

74. The standard of most students' work is high. In geography and law, students displayed a particularly good grasp of relevant concepts and language. In history, students demonstrated skilful selection of materials and an understanding of bias when evaluating evidence. Students were able to develop extensive research skills, including use of the Internet in geography. In one GCE AS lesson, for example, students used a variety of research sources including the Internet, CD-ROM material, newspapers and journals to evaluate the cause and effect of recent flooding across the globe. In history, students used a poster presentation on the careers of Nazi leaders to develop research, communication and selection skills. In law, during a debate on the issue of vetting juries, students demonstrated a good understanding of legal language and case law. Attendance at lessons was good at 92%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	88	42	56
		% retention	99	100	100
		% pass rate	98	98	100
GCE A-level history	3	No. of starts	55	50	31
		% retention	96	98	97
		% pass rate	98	98	100
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	22	16	13
		% retention	100	94	100
		% pass rates	91	87	92

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

Quality of education and training

75. Two thirds of teaching was good or better; the remaining third was satisfactory. In geography, lessons were conducted at an energetic pace and included some excellent use of PowerPoint presentations and Internet resources. The learning materials produced in geography and law were particularly informative and enabled students to develop extension work. They were tailored to meet the needs of different individual students and made extensive reference to different web sites for further study. In history, effective question and answer techniques and carefully structured tasks helped to consolidate learning. In some lessons, particularly those for religious studies, students were not sufficiently challenged. Opportunities were missed to develop or extend specialist vocabulary and to provoke discussion and debate within the topic being covered. In these lessons, learning materials were unimaginative.

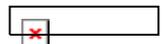
76. The assessment of students' work in all subjects is thorough. Targets are set and monitored. Programmes and revised targets are set for those students who are not performing to expected levels. The marking of students' work is thorough and includes constructive suggestions for improvement. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities; for example, field trips in geography and a visit to an international United Nations conference in law. Visiting lecturers from universities in the region are regularly invited to make presentations to students. Preparation for progression to university is excellent in geography; nearly half of the students taking the subject progressed to degree courses in the subject in 2002.

77. Working relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students, particularly those with additional needs, are well supported through individual tutorial sessions. For example, in a one-to-one tutorial for a student with Asperger's Syndrome, a programme of work was carefully planned and was sufficiently flexible to meet the particular needs of the individual.

Leadership and management

78. Courses are managed effectively across the area. The management of geography is excellent. Extensive analysis of students' achievement data, effective target setting and a programme of lesson observations all contribute to continuous improvement. There is a growing awareness of the need to develop the dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning. Staff appraisal is well established and supported by staff.

Psychology, sociology, health social care



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

Strengths

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

- effective use of group work in teaching

- thorough assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- comprehensive subject specific support
- good curriculum management of GCE A-level courses.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on vocational programmes
- low recruitment on the GNVQ intermediate programme.

Scope of provision

79. Teachers ensure that the provision of courses is responsive to the needs of advanced level students. At the time of the inspection, there were 435 students enrolled on GCE AS and A-level and AVCE courses. An introduction to criminology evening class, the only provision for adults, attracted 18 students for the academic year 2002/03. Low numbers of students have been recruited on to the GNVQ intermediate programme over the three years to 2002; most progress successfully to advanced vocational study.

Achievement and standards

80. Pass rates for GCE A-level psychology and sociology have improved and are now above national averages for sixth form colleges; those for GCE AS psychology and sociology are close to national figures. The percentage of high grades on these courses is improving. All completing students have been successful on intermediate and advanced vocational programmes during the three years to 2002. However, there has been a trend of declining retention rates at both levels to a point where the rate is unsatisfactory. By contrast, the retention rate on GCE A-level courses is good. On these courses, students achieve grades that are in line with predictions based on their previous GCSE results.

81. The standards reached by students on level 3 courses are good or better. In GCE AS and A-level social sciences, students' arguments were based on sound evidence and presented with confidence; the use of technical language was accurate. On the advanced vocational programme, students were able to work independently, gathering information from a variety of sources and presenting it succinctly in both written and oral work. Students are often ambitious and many progress successfully to HE from advanced courses. Attendance in the lessons observed was high at 95%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in psychology, sociology, health and social care, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	**	8	7
		% retention	**	88	57
		% pass rate	**	100	100
GNVQ advanced/ AVCE health and social care	3	No. of starts	17	15	40
		% retention	100	60	58
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	78	90	80
		% retention	95	91	100
		% pass rate	80	88	96
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	37	50	51
		% retention	95	88	98
		% pass rate	88	81	94

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

** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

82. Teaching is good or better. Lessons were well planned and structured to provide a wide and appropriate range of activities, which motivated and sustained the interest of students. Most teachers use group work effectively. They monitor the discussions in each group carefully and, when appropriate, ask challenging questions, to stimulate further debate. At the end of the discussions, each group is required to summarise key points as part of a whole class plenary. Often the outcomes of group work are developed into lively, colourful posters that are displayed in the classroom and used as a learning resource. Less articulate students are supported effectively in question and answer sessions where teachers encouraged them to explore and develop their ideas. Key skills are explicitly developed in subject or vocational teaching and students value the resulting additional qualifications. Students on vocational courses also value the range of work experience opportunities and the visiting speakers from the local health, care and education services.

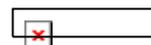
83. Teachers prepare good materials for use in group activities. They are devised to meet the needs of students with differing abilities. In the early part of a course, for example, less able students will be given more prompts on their worksheets to help them complete the different tasks, whilst more able students will have extension activities to complete. Extensive use is made of the Internet and intranet as learning resources. Classroom accommodation is satisfactory, but no screens are provided for overhead projectors. Staff are well qualified and, where relevant, keep their vocational skills and knowledge updated.

84. Students' progress is assessed thoroughly and fairly and monitored and tracked rigorously. They receive detailed feedback on their assessed work, and constructive guidance on what they need to do to improve their performance. Subject specific support for students is excellent. Teachers run scheduled revision tutorials on specific topics and give informal advice willingly outside lessons. Students are well informed about their choice of courses before they join the college and have the opportunity to visit the college and curriculum area on 'taster' days. The induction programme is thorough. Student handbooks for each subject or vocational course are comprehensive and all students are interviewed when they change course.

Leadership and management

85. Most leadership and management at course level is good. There are comprehensive policies on teaching and learning, assessment and internal verification, and equal opportunities. Good practice is shared effectively across the curriculum area. Teachers of GCE A-level subjects make sound use of performance data and other information from, for example, student focus groups to evaluate performance and promote improvements. In health and social care, however, planning to address declining retention and recruitment rates at intermediate level has not been successful.

English and modern foreign languages



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

Strengths

- excellent retention and pass rates in GCE A-level subjects
- very good teaching
- very good resources
- extensive additional subject-specific support
- sustained use of the target language in modern foreign languages.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory management of GCSE English and adult foreign language provision.

Scope of provision

86. Almost all courses are for 16-18 full-time students and include GCE AS and A levels in English language, English literature, combined language and literature, French, German and Spanish. There are courses in the evenings for re-sit students in GCSE English and programmes in foreign languages for adults. Spanish is also offered as part of the college enrichment programme and on the AVCE in travel and tourism.

Achievement and standards

87. Achievements on advanced courses are consistently well above national averages for sixth form colleges. For example, in 2002, the combined language and literature programme had retention and pass rates which were, respectively, 16% and 8% above national figures. The pass rate on GCE AS Spanish was also well above the national average. Data comparing GCE A-level performance with students' prior GCSE grades shows some excellent results are achieved in English language. Outcomes were also good in French, German and the combined language and literature course. In contrast to these high achievements, the pass rate for GCSE English language is below the national average.

88. The standard of students' work is generally very good. In GCE A-level foreign language classes, most students use the target language spontaneously in oral and written work. In English classes, there was much evidence of the development of analytical skills and the mastery of technical vocabulary.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English and modern foreign languages, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level combined language and literature	3	No. of starts	18	29	32
		% retention	94	97	97
		% pass rate	100	86	100
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	53	63	60
		% retention	100	94	97
		% pass rate	92	86	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	74	62	60
		% retention	96	98	95
		% pass rate	99	98	95
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	49	37	23
		% retention	96	95	96
		% pass rate	94	91	95

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

Quality of education and training

89. Most teaching is good or better; two thirds of lessons were judged to be very good or outstanding. Teachers plan imaginative and stimulating activities. They have high expectations of their students in terms of their work rate in lessons. Classroom management is effective in promoting a wide range of learning activities. In one GCE A-level English language lesson, the teacher took students through the process of editorial writing for radio. A tape was played of a range of advertisements. The students identified key features such as the use of accents, music, persuasive techniques and sound effects before writing copy for their own radio advertisements. In modern foreign languages, students are expected to justify their views and explain grammatical structures through the medium of the target language. In one GCE A-level Spanish lesson, students were able to use complex structures and vocabulary during a role play activity in which some of them played the part of criminals and others acted as judges by pronouncing sentence. Teachers focus on the individual needs of students through targeted questions, extension tasks or differentiated resource materials. They handle discussion skilfully and clarify students' responses by making clear notes and developing models on the whiteboard. In a few lessons, the teaching lacked sufficient sense of purpose and failed to engage the interest of students.

90. Resources in the curriculum area are good. Staff are well qualified. Learning resources, including those in ICT, are available in a dedicated foreign languages centre as well as the college library. A range of good study packs and worksheets are produced by teachers. One pack, for example, on the topic of language acquisition, contained articles, transcripts and exam papers. There are well-established links for foreign language students in France and Germany, although not in Spain. In English a range of external visits is used to enhance students' learning experience.

91. Students' progress is closely monitored and appropriate action to help them to improve is taken where needed. Students appreciate the additional tutorial support they receive, both as individuals and in group sessions. The group activities, in particular, help to clarify issues and consolidate learning. Towards the end of the academic year they are used to refine examination techniques. Assessment in this curriculum area is carried out rigorously and used constructively in students' reviews to set targets. Homework is set regularly and comments by teachers are usually suitably detailed and helpful. In a few cases, written feedback is limited to a very brief comment with no recommendations for further study. Moderator reports in all the subjects are thorough and there are frequent meetings to undertake standardisation procedures.

Leadership and management

92. The advanced level curriculum is well managed. Teaching teams set and achieve demanding targets; they effectively assure the quality of provision to maintain high standards. Management is less effective for GCSE English and adult foreign language programmes. Full-time courses are reviewed thoroughly; the part-time evening GCSE English course is not. The take-up of foreign language courses for adults is unsatisfactory.

Part D: College data

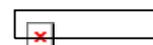
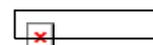


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	1	1
2	2	6
3	97	14
4/5	0	39
Other	0	40
Total	100	100



Source: Provided by the college in 2002.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	884	0	19
Land based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering , technology and manufacture	0	0	0
Business administration, management and professional	228	0	5
Information and communications technology	238	64	6
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	151	0	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	26	27	1
Visual and performing arts and media	421	23	9
Humanities	2,091	0	45
English, languages and communication	505	21	11
Foundation programmes	35	2	1
Total	4,579	137	100

Source: Provided by the college in 2002.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Course)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1998/	1999/	2000/	1998/	1999/	2000/
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
1	Starters excluding transfers	64	35	43	183	173	128
	Retention rate (%)	88	80	95	89	85	79
	National average (%)	80	81	83	70	74	74

	Pass rate (%)	93	80	100	85	79	71
	National average (%)	62	70	66	61	65	66
2	Starters excluding transfers	643	613	87	36	69	98
	Retention rate (%)	94	89	82	75	72	86
	National average (%)	80	81	81	71	75	74
	Pass rate (%)	95	77	93	73	75	92
	National average (%)	81	79	83	68	68	67
3	Starters excluding transfers	2,956	3,015	4,192	15	27	25
	Retention rate (%)	91	95	92	80	78	88
	National average (%)	78	80	84	65	70	71
	Pass rate (%)	92	91	89	92	100	68
	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 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

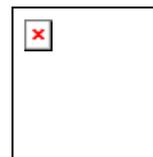
2. College rates for 1997/8-1998/9: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000

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

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	82	16	2	136
Level 2 (intermediate) Level 1 (foundation) Other sessions	82	12	6	17
Totals	82	16	2	153

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