

# St Dominic's Sixth Form College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**2000-01**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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### College statistics

## Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

## Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## **St Dominic's Sixth Form College** *Greater London Region*

### **Inspected October 2000**

St Dominic's Sixth Form College is situated in the London Borough of Harrow. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with six of the nine grades awarded by the college. The college's Roman Catholic beliefs and values permeate all aspects of its work. Governors and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the college's Roman Catholic mission and to the promotion of Christian values. Since its last inspection, the college has successfully extended its courses to meet the needs of a wider range of learners. The number of students within vocational areas is growing. The introduction of the new post-16 curriculum has been well managed. Standards of teaching and learning have improved significantly since the last inspection. Arrangements for advice, guidance, enrolment and induction for students are outstanding. Tutorial and additional academic support of a very high standard, designed to improve students' achievements, are widely available. Students also benefit from good IT facilities which support teaching and learning effectively. In many areas students' achievements are good or outstanding. Levels of attendance are high. There are comprehensive quality assurance

arrangements and effective systems for staff appraisal and development. The management and governance of the college are good. The college benefits from the range of governors' skills and experience.

The college should improve: the low retention rates for students on many two-year programmes; poor achievement rates on some courses; the standard of some teaching; the overcrowding and inappropriate accommodation in some areas; recreational and social facilities for students; the scope of the enrichment programme; the oversight of some aspects of arrangements for quality assurance; the arrangements for clerking; the use of targets and performance indicators; and the accuracy of retention data used for planning and monitoring purposes.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and sciences	2	Support for students	1
Business	2	General resources	3
English	1	Quality assurance	2
General studies, geography, history and politics	3	Governance	2
		Management	2

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 St Dominic's Sixth Form College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college. It opened in 1979 to provide post-16 education for students from the Catholic high schools in the London Borough of Harrow, but now draws its students from 46 parishes across 14 London boroughs and neighbouring counties. The college has two single-sex partner schools. At the time of the inspection, the college employed 61 members of staff.

2 Over 213,000 people live in Harrow. Around 38% of the local population comprise minority ethnic groups. Service industries dominate the local economy and most businesses in the area have fewer than 25 employees. Most of the population work outside the borough, mainly in central London. The unemployment rate in Harrow in 1999 was low at 2.7% (compared with 4% for Great Britain as a whole). Parts of the borough are significantly less affluent than others.

3 The college has grown steadily since 1979. There are currently 781 full-time students on roll compared with 612 at the time of the last inspection. Approximately one-third come from the two partner schools, one-third from other schools in Harrow and the remainder from schools in other London boroughs and neighbouring counties. In the current year 2000-01, the numbers of male and female students are almost equal. At the time of the inspection, 47% of the students were Roman Catholic, 24% were Hindu and the remainder were from other faiths or Christian denominations. The overall ethnic profile of the college students reflects the cultural diversity of Harrow. Around 95% of students are on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) or advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) programmes. The college also offers general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation and intermediate courses and a small number of evening courses for adults.

4 The college's mission was recently revised following consultation with representatives from all sections of the college community. It states that the college is committed to the personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on Christian values, academic excellence and high-quality pastoral care.

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in October 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and considered information held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college's data on students' achievements for 2000 were checked against primary sources, including class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Data for 1998 and 1999 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR). Provision in three programme areas was inspected together with cross-college provision. Ten inspectors and an auditor carried out the inspection over a total of 46 days. The team included a nominated Roman Catholic inspector. Inspectors observed 53 lessons, examined students' work and a variety of documents, and held meetings with governors, managers, staff and students.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 75% were outstanding or good and 6% were less than satisfactory. The proportion of higher grades is higher than at the last inspection and above the average of 72% for sixth form colleges inspected in 1999-2000. However, the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons was also higher than the 3% national average for sixth form colleges in 1999-2000.

# Context

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	10	21	6	2	0	39
GCSE	1	2	2	0	0	5
GNVQ	2	4	2	1	0	9
Total (No.)	13	27	10	3	0	53
Total (%)	24	51	19	6	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

### Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
St Dominic's Sixth Form College	17.8	89
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

# Curriculum Areas

## Mathematics and Science

### Grade 2

**8 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- the high proportion of A to C grade passes in GCE A level subjects
- the good use of information technology (IT) to promote learning
- the effective development of key skills
- the high standard of individual support for students

#### Weaknesses

- the low retention rate in many GCE A level subjects
- poor achievement in GCE advanced supplementary subjects
- some unsuitable accommodation

9 The college offers full-time courses at GCE A level and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in biology, human biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and further mathematics. The new GCE advanced subsidiary specifications have been introduced this year and recruitment for courses in mathematics and sciences has increased. Course management is effective. Course teams meet regularly and comprehensive records are produced. Appropriately detailed planning has taken place in preparation for the introduction of curriculum 2000. As stated in the college's self-assessment, staff stress the importance of punctuality. The attendance rate, at 93%, was high in lessons observed during the inspection. Science staff have well-established links with a

school in Berlin. Students from each country work on joint curriculum projects and together with their teachers take part in exchange visits. Progression rates to higher education are good.

10 Most teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and effective and a wide range of learning activities takes place. In a further mathematics lesson on Newton's laws of motion, small groups of students were asked to find the resultant forces on an object rolling down a slope. The task caught the imagination of the students, who eagerly discussed the options in groups. A representative from each group then presented the findings to the rest of the class, generating further interest and friendly group rivalry. As noted in the college's self-assessment report, IT is used effectively to promote learning. For example, in a physics lesson, the teacher demonstrated the properties of an electrical circuit using laboratory apparatus. Additional work was then carried out, using software which modelled the effects of changing the resistance.

11 The developments of key skills is well integrated with the teaching of each subject and students are encouraged to develop these skills in the context of their specialist subject. During a biology lesson, students working in small groups collected different types of soil animals from samples of leaf litter. The class results were collated and the data used for a key skills assignment which covered the application of number and use of IT. Teachers set homework regularly and expect students to hand it in on time. Students usually receive helpful written feedback. Students benefit from the additional support that they receive from teachers in extra mathematics and science workshops, which are provided three times a week.

12 As recognised in the self-assessment report, achievement on most GCE A level mathematics and science subjects is high. Two-thirds of successful students attained a grade between A and C last year. This



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proportion is above the national average for sixth form colleges. Pass rates for students completing GCE AS courses in one year are poor and significantly below national averages. The overall pass rate for GCSE mathematics at grade C or above had been low for the three years from 1997. In 2000, the grades at C or above rose significantly. Many students are entered for the foundation level paper in GCSE mathematics which restricts achievement to grade D or below. Retention of students on courses at GCE A level in mathematics, biology and physics courses is low and generally below the national average for sixth form colleges.

13 Inspectors found that the self-assessment report gave insufficient emphasis to the issue of

unsuitable accommodation. The science laboratories are generally overcrowded, and in one laboratory it is difficult for all students to observe closely experiments conducted by the teacher. The science preparation rooms are too small. The three science technicians are able to provide good support to the teachers and students. Mathematics and science staff are well qualified and participate in many staff development activities. There is adequate provision of science equipment. Sufficient mathematics and science textbooks are available for students to use in the classrooms and laboratories. In the library there is an adequate stock of books, journals and IT software for science, but not for mathematics.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and science, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE mathematics <sup>1</sup> (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	82	112	90
		Retention (%)	86	83	80
		Achievement (%)	21	14	28
GCE AS mathematics and sciences	3	Number of starters	34	45	63
		Retention (%)	71	64	82
		Achievement (%)	58	56	27
GCE A level mathematics and further mathematics	3	Number of starters	117	97	95
		Retention (%)	68	71	57
		Achievement (%)	94	88	91
GCE A level biology and human biology	3	Number of starters	94	88	77
		Retention (%)	*	*	62
		Achievement (%)	84	93	94
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	65	60	65
		Retention (%)	72	73	80
		Achievement (%)	81	98	84
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	39	27	32
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	81	93	91

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

\*data unreliable

<sup>1</sup>includes students entered for GCSE foundation tier for whom grade D is the highest grade which can be achieved

# Curriculum Areas

## Business

### Grade 2

**14 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- high rates of achievement and retention on GNVQ foundation and GNVQ intermediate courses
- the effective monitoring of students' progress
- well-managed and effectively planned courses
- the successful introduction of new vocational courses

#### Weaknesses

- the poor rate of retention in GCE A level business studies
- the lateness to lessons of some students

15 The college offers an appropriate range of business courses for full-time students aged 16 to 19. These include GNVQ at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, GCE advanced subsidiary and GCE A level business studies. In September the college successfully introduced new AVCE courses and has recruited students to one-year single and two-year full award versions of this qualification. Course design has enabled students from other curriculum areas to combine business studies with their other courses. Provision in business is well managed and resources and staff expertise shared for the benefit of students.

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the standard of most teaching is good. Lessons begin with a reminder of the

learning from the previous session, followed by an explanation of the aims of the current lesson. Effective use is made of IT as a teaching aid and as a learning resource for students. In a lesson examining methods of presenting data, GNVQ foundation students used computers to produce a range of tables, pie charts and graphs. In many lessons, an appropriate variety of effective teaching methods and activities stimulated interest. Recent case study material was used to illustrate concepts. For example, students in a GCE AS business studies lesson made presentations on aspects of the European Monetary Union and then in small groups analysed the case for and against a single currency. In a few lessons teachers did not make sure that students were attentive and understood the material being covered. Although attendance at lessons was high, students frequently arrived late, thus affecting the flow of the lesson and other students' concentration.

17 Students' progress is monitored effectively. This strength was not recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Students are set a minimum target grade based on their prior achievements. Their performance against the target is closely monitored throughout their studies and supportive action is taken where necessary. Students working on their assignments draw heavily on the Internet and college intranet resources to obtain current case studies and information. Assignments are marked thoroughly and returned promptly. Students' work is of a high standard. Schemes of work identify where students are expected to use their key skills and how these skills are to be developed. Students benefit from occasional visits to business organisations. GCE A level students attend a European business conference in Paris. Links with a local supermarket have enabled some students to be briefed on aspects of the retail business. There are no formal arrangements for students on vocational courses to go on work placements to gather information

# Curriculum Areas

and gain experience for their assignments. This weakness was not identified by the college.

18 Student retention and achievement rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses are good. In 1999-2000, 90% of students on the GNVQ foundation gained high grades, well above national averages. Achievement rates on other courses are around the national average. The retention rate on GCE A level business studies has declined and is well below the average for sixth form colleges. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that progression of students on advanced level courses to higher education is a strength. In 1999, 86% of students went on to higher education of whom 43% chose business-related courses.

19 Lessons are taught in dedicated classrooms. Examples of students' work provide wall displays, which help to produce a stimulating environment. However, some rooms are too small for some classes and overcrowding can hinder effective learning. Although students use the Internet and a wide range of business materials on the college intranet, access is insufficient at busy periods. The college is addressing this issue. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced and attend regular updating and training events. Some teachers have recent commercial experience but there are no arrangements for them to keep up to date.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in business, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	*	14	12
		Retention (%)	*	86	83
		Achievement (%)	*	92	100
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	26	19	34
		Retention (%)	100	89	85
		Achievement (%)	88	76	93
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	21	21	30
		Retention (%)	81	81	73
		Achievement (%)	76	76	73
GCE AS business studies	3	Number of starters	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	89
		Achievement (%)	*	*	69
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	41	64	55
		Retention (%)	†	†	64
		Achievement (%)	85	83	94

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

\*course not running

†data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## English

### Grade 1

**20 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment and identified some additional strengths.**

#### Key strengths

- very high standards of teaching and learning
- good achievement at GCE A level
- good use of IT resources
- effective classroom management

#### Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

21 The college offers GCE A level and GCE advanced subsidiary courses in English literature, English language and literature and GCSE English language. Since 1996 the number of students taking these subjects has increased. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the courses are very well planned and well managed. Course reviews are used to examine data on retention and achievement, and to set targets for the future, which are monitored regularly. Students' views are sought regularly. Their comments contribute to course reviews and lead to improvements. The department has good curriculum links with the two main partner schools and provides 'taster' lessons for year 10 students. Departmental staff contribute to enrichment activities in the college, including the college magazine and drama.

22 Students benefit from good personal support from teachers. There is additional academic and key skills support for students through workshops. There is also an imaginative peer-mentoring scheme. Target grades are set for each student, and then

progress and attendance are monitored each half term. Induction to the subject is thorough and enables students to reach decisions on whether they have made a sensible choice. An induction handbook outlines the preparation and reading required for each of the eight induction lessons. During this period students start a reading diary which leads to advice about extending their reading.

23 The college's self-assessment report recognises the standard of the teaching as a strength. Inspectors found that all teaching observed during the inspection was good or outstanding. Lessons are well structured and teaching is lively and challenging. Classroom activities are appropriately varied and help students to develop their understanding of the work. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. They make good use of questions directed at individual students, which develop students' critical thinking. In one class students presented their analysis of a scene from *King Lear* using a variety of methods. One example was 'hot seating' where students interrogated a colleague taking the role of King Lear, in order to gain greater insight into the character. Other methods included a scene reading, a presentation and a tape recording. The department arranges visits by literary and media professionals. At the time of inspection a comedian/comic writer ran a workshop to foster students' original writing for GCE A level coursework. The development of key skills in communications and IT are integrated with the English lessons. Workshop sessions are planned to prepare students for key skills tests.

24 Students reach high standards in their group work and in their presentation skills. Students in a GCSE class worked in small groups to find quotations that would help them to examine the importance of fighting and attitudes to women in a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Each group worked on different parts of the scene to produce material for a shared

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handout. Students worked purposefully and demonstrated good insights into the text. Students achieve good standards in their coursework. They write well and critically, usually on the basis of extensive research. Students meet the high expectations of staff in completing frequent homework, preparatory work, research and wider reading.

25 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that examination achievements at GCE A level are good. The proportion achieving high grade passes is also well above the national average for sixth form colleges. GCSE results in English language were poor in 1999 but the college addressed the weakness and the results in 2000 were in line with the national averages. The retention rate is good in GCSE English language and GCE A level English language and literature. Most students achieve levels of

success which are significantly above those predicted on the basis of their previous performance. Students are encouraged to participate in creative writing competitions. One student's short story was placed on display in the library, following his success in a national competition. Progression to higher education is good.

26 Staff are well qualified and undertake regular staff development to keep abreast of developments in their field. The department has produced good IT resources to support independent learning for which they received a Beacon Award. Students will shortly be able to access resources from home through the college intranet. The products of work by groups of students are displayed on the walls, together with some commercially produced materials.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English language (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	56	53	45
		Retention (%)	93	88	88
		Achievement (%)	57	23	55
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	79	69	59
		Retention (%)	83	84	81
		Achievement (%)	100	95	98
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	18	32	34
		Retention (%)	*	86	87
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## General Studies, Geography, History and Politics

### Grade 3

**27 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some weaknesses received insufficient emphasis.**

#### Key strengths

- high retention and achievement rates on the GCE A level general studies course
- effective marking of students' work
- much good course management

#### Weaknesses

- some insufficiently demanding teaching
- poor retention rates on history and geography GCE A level courses
- unsatisfactory levels of achievement on many courses

28 The college offers GCE A level, GCE advanced subsidiary and GCSE courses. Recruitment to GCE A level politics is particularly strong. GCE A level courses in general studies primarily exist to enable students who have dropped other GCE A level courses to build upon some of the knowledge gained in their first year in order to gain additional qualifications. The department also organises help for GCE A level general studies through 'open learning'. This help is for students who are already on a full GCE A level programme, do not have the time to take another fully taught course but want the additional qualification.

29 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most courses are well managed. Subject leaders hold regular team meetings, which are minuted, and produce action points. All course teams set targets for improving rates

of retention and achievement, and monitor student rates of achievement and retention. The course handbooks contain useful information and help students to plan their work effectively. Politics students make regular visits to Parliament as part of the programme and outside speakers are regularly invited to address them. The attendance rate was good during the inspection, averaging 89%. Progression rates to higher education are high. Some departments maintain links with past students, inviting them back to speak to current students.

30 Most teaching is satisfactory. The best lessons were well planned, lively and stimulating and teachers established a good rapport with students. For example, in a politics lesson the students were given a quick quiz to check what they had learnt in the previous sessions. This approach was effective in engaging students' interest and strengthening their learning. However, in many other humanities lessons teachers made insufficient demands on students and often failed to motivate them. There were insufficient opportunities to question or respond to teachers. In unsatisfactory lessons, there was also little stimulation, learning objectives were unclear and teachers did not always check that students were understanding the work. In one lesson the teacher set students a task, but did not explain effectively what they had to do. Students spent much of the lesson trying to clarify the task, and there was little time left at the end of the lesson for review and reflection.

31 The college's intranet site contains a good range of relevant resources for politics and geography. Appropriate websites have been identified and students are encouraged to use them to provide topical material for use in homework and assignments. In these subjects students are also helped to develop their communication and numeracy skills. The self-assessment report failed to note that in other subjects opportunities for developing key skills are less well established. All students have an induction to their subjects, when

# Curriculum Areas

additional learning needs are identified. There are regular workshops and tutorial sessions to support students with their coursework, revision and examination techniques.

32 Student retention rates for geography and history are currently well below national averages. Achievement rates for these subjects are also low. The retention rate on GCE A level general studies is high. Pass rates for GCE A level general studies and the proportion of grades A to C gained on the GCSE general studies course have risen steadily. Results at GCE A level are above the national average for sixth form colleges. Achievement rates on GCE A level politics courses were outstanding in 1998 and 1999 but fell sharply in 2000 to below the national average. The standard of most students' work is satisfactory. Students' participation in class discussions in politics demonstrates a mature understanding of the topics being covered. Teachers set homework and assignments regularly. In most subjects,

teachers return marked work promptly, make appropriate corrections and write helpful comments on how students can improve their work.

33 Teachers are experienced and suitably qualified. Some have extensive experience as subject examiners. They are well informed on developments in their subject areas and participate regularly in staff development activities. Staff are encouraged to build links with other departments to share good practice and collaborate in joint projects. For example, the geography department is working with the chemistry department on a project on water levels in London. At the time of the inspection, the classrooms used for many of the lessons observed were too small which had an adverse impact on teaching and learning. The library has sufficient resources for all of the subjects inspected. The stock of books and other learning materials held by subject teachers is good.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in general studies, geography, history and politics, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE general studies (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	41	17	17
		Retention (%)	90	94	76
		Achievement (%)	46	75	77
GCE A level general studies	3	Number of starters	48	51	38
		Retention (%)	100	90	95
		Achievement (%)	77	83	86
GCE A level geography	3	Number of starters	34	34	46
		Retention (%)	59	*	67
		Achievement (%)	79	76	55
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	34	34	46
		Retention (%)	*	*	67
		Achievement (%)	79	76	55
GCE A level politics	3	Number of starters	88	56	64
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	100	100	73

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

\*data unreliable

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 1

**34 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- good procedures for pre-entry advice, guidance and enrolment
- effective arrangements for supporting students' learning
- outstanding pastoral and tutorial support
- helpful careers guidance and support for students
- good range of activities which reflect the college's Catholic ethos

#### Weaknesses

- slow progress in establishing a full enrichment programme

35 The college's support for students is outstanding. Since the last inspection the college has continued to develop and improve its student support arrangements. Implementation of the college's inclusive learning policy ensures that the individual needs of all students are considered throughout the recruitment, enrolment and induction period. Their needs are subsequently met through an excellent system of pastoral and learning support. Staff involved in all aspects of student support work exceptionally well together and focus on helping students achieve their full potential. Procedures for student support services are thoroughly documented. Students' views are sought regularly, evaluated and acted upon. Students speak highly of the support which they receive. They feel that the college provides a safe and stimulating place in which to study and grow.

36 As identified in the college's self-assessment report, there are strong links with partner schools and other local high schools. Staff from the college visit the schools regularly. Open days and evenings are well attended. All prospective students and their parents are invited to visit the college and meet tutors. Opportunities for students to sample different subjects prior to enrolment are offered through 'taster' days. All students receive good and impartial advice and guidance in their choice of courses. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. The prospectus is well designed and informative. Course handbooks provide useful information about the college, its Roman Catholic values, the courses, and entry criteria. The comprehensive induction programme helps students settle quickly into their courses. Students find the induction enjoyable and useful.

37 Arrangements for meeting the additional learning support needs of students are well managed and effective. A commercial software package is used successfully for initial diagnostic assessment of any student's need for support with literacy and numeracy. Parents and students are informed of the results and students receive well-judged individual support. Personal learning goals are clearly identified, negotiated and agreed with students. The regular use of information about each student's preferred approach to learning has a positive impact on students' attitudes to, and progress in, their work. Subject-specific workshops at the end of each day which last for half an hour provide effective opportunities for students to gain additional help from subject staff. Good use is made of appropriate external agencies for students with specific learning difficulties.

38 Inspectors agreed that the college has an outstanding, well-managed and effective pastoral support system. A team of managers takes responsibility for the tutorial programme and all aspects of student support, including the training of student mentors. The tutorial



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programme provides good personal support and monitoring of students' academic progress. Students are set target grades based on their GCSE scores. A thorough review of students' progress takes place twice a term. Clear and precise actions are identified to help students improve their overall performance. The self-assessment report highlights the help of the careers guidance service. Inspectors agreed that the college provides good support for students going to higher education and employment. This is achieved through its tutorial arrangements and co-operation with the local careers service and employers. Progression to higher level courses is good across all programmes.

39 There are opportunities for support on personal issues from the chaplain and other staff who are members of the pastoral or chaplaincy team and also from a range of external agencies. Students make good use of the various sources of formal and informal personal support that are available in the college. The college's hardship fund is carefully distributed. It mainly assists individual students in the purchase of learning resources or subsidises travel fares to college.

40 There has been slow progress in establishing a strong enrichment programme suitable for the demands of curriculum 2000. Facilities for sport and recreation are inadequate but are planned to be improved through the buildings programme. The structure of the student council has been reshaped to extend opportunities for students to become more involved in college matters.

41 The college makes appropriate provision for collective acts of worship. There is a regular programme of assemblies. These are jointly led by staff and students and provide opportunities for reflection and prayer which are well received by students. Mass is celebrated daily in the college chapel. A significant proportion of students attends voluntary masses which are

prepared by a different group each week. All students take part in the college's general religious education programme, and appreciate the opportunities which it offers to discuss moral issues. An imaginative programme of peer religious education involves second-year volunteers presenting issues covering faith to first-year students. Both Christian students and members of other faiths are able to participate in the catechists programme which this year attracted over 90 students. The chaplain organises retreats with the help of students and staff. The college is strongly committed to fund-raising for charities.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**42 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report, but found that one weakness was given insufficient emphasis.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good IT provision
- a comprehensive accommodation strategy
- near completion of major building programme
- well-managed library

#### **Weaknesses**

- overcrowding of much of the accommodation
- insufficient spaces for private study
- insufficient recreational space for students
- restricted access to some parts of the site for people with disabilities

43 The college occupies an attractive site in Harrow-on-the-Hill. The college was the site of a Dominican convent, and is owned by the Diocese of Westminster. There are three main

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buildings: the former convent school constructed in the early part of the twentieth century; a modern purpose-built three-storey building; and the college chapel and chaplaincy. Whilst the college site is extensive and covers more than 10 acres, most of the land is subject to severe planning restrictions. This means that, with the growth in student numbers, the current accommodation is very overcrowded. In response to the last inspection report the college has produced a comprehensive accommodation strategy. At the time of the inspection, the site was to some extent disrupted by a major building programme which was nearing completion. The new areas, which will be in use from December 2000, include a large computer suite, an improved reception area, a staff room, a private study room for students, some larger classrooms and additional office space.

44 The commitment of the college to its Roman Catholic foundation is apparent throughout the accommodation. The chapel is large and well used both for worship and for some teaching. It has a beautifully decorated ceiling which depicts aspects of Dominican symbolism, and a spectacular stained glass window which shows the 15 mysteries of the Rosary. A range of religious images including crucifixes, religious posters, and a statue of St Dominic are reminders throughout the college of its commitment.

45 Since the last inspection the college has made a number of improvements to accommodation, including new purpose-built accommodation for art and design, several new classrooms, an extension to the library, and the conversion of the hall into a more flexible working environment. Nevertheless, many classrooms and some specialist rooms, such as laboratories, are too small for group sizes, and in some cases this affects the range of activities that can be pursued during lessons. The classroom areas currently under construction are designed to accommodate larger groups,

and will help to alleviate the overcrowding. Even when the new building and modifications are in use, the college's accommodation will only just be sufficient to cater for current numbers of students. Despite efforts to improve access to accommodation for people with disabilities, much of the site remains inaccessible to people with restricted mobility.

46 There is inadequate social space in the college for students. The canteen is too small for the current number of students and staff, and is very crowded at mealtimes. Whilst the college has tennis courts and a small football pitch, most sporting activities take place off-site. The maintenance and security of the site are managed efficiently. Teaching and administrative staff share responsibility for maintaining sensible student behaviour despite the shortage of space. Their effectiveness and the response of students contributes to the safe atmosphere within the college.

47 Management of the library is identified by the college as a significant strength. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. Since the last inspection the bookstock has been improved and is now satisfactory in all curriculum areas. There is a good range of CD-ROMs, video recordings and journals. A mezzanine area houses 20 computers and additional study workstations. There is a comprehensive careers section. The librarian maintains close links with curriculum managers. Useful subject guides help students use the library effectively. The college recognises that although the size of the library has been doubled since the last inspection it is still too small to accommodate all the students who wish to use it. There are also too few study spaces available in the college for students to work on their own or in groups.

48 The college has made considerable investment in IT facilities since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed that the provision of IT is now a strength. There is an IT development committee and a coherent strategy

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for the improvement of information and learning technologies. There are sufficient computers available for the number of students. However, currently most of them are dedicated to timetabled lessons, and there are too few left free for open access use. This situation will be remedied when the new computer suite is opened which is scheduled for December 2000. It is planned to contain 40 computers available for open access use. There is at least one computer in every classroom. Courses with a high IT content are taught in rooms with sufficient computers for each student to work at one. Staff have access to up-to-date computers in offices and staff workrooms. All computers are linked to the college network and have access to the Internet. The college has developed an intranet, which can be used by staff and students. It has much useful general and curriculum information. Staff and students who have their own computers can access the intranet from home.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**49 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, and identified a few additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- effective self-assessment activities
- effective lesson observation
- effective staff appraisal and development arrangements
- thorough monitoring and analysis of students' views

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of some quality assurance activities
- inadequate impact of quality assurance activities on targets for student retention and achievement

50 The college has further developed and improved its quality assurance system since the previous inspection. As recognised in the self-assessment report, quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive. These include: well-established self-assessment procedures; service standards for support services; surveys of the views of students, parents and staff; lesson observation; and staff appraisal and development. Governors, managers and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement. There is a college policy for quality assurance. Handbooks produced for staff provide clear and helpful guidance on implementing quality assurance procedures. Quality assurance processes have contributed to some measurable improvements in aspects of college provision and services. For example, since the previous inspection, there have been significant improvements in the overall standard of teaching and learning. Managers and staff have responded positively to the views of students and their parents. However, there have been few improvements in the overall rates of retention and achievement of students over the last few years. Some initiatives resulting from the outcomes of quality assurance activities have been introduced relatively recently, and their effect has yet to make a measurable impact on targets for retention and achievement. The college did not identify this weakness in its self-assessment report.

51 The college's quality assurance team has management responsibility for the development and monitoring of the college's quality assurance

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arrangements, and reports to the senior management team. Although it has contributed to the improvement in the standard of teaching and learning, the team has not monitored some other quality assurance activities. For example, it has not evaluated the effectiveness of the service standards developed for support areas. The team undertakes thorough inspections of curriculum departments over a four-year cycle, and at the time of the inspection had inspected over half of the college's curriculum provision. Departments are required to respond to internal inspection reports, and the team monitors progress made on their action plans. There are appropriately detailed annual quality review meetings between the director of curriculum, and heads of departments, during which students' performance and the outcomes of lesson observations are carefully reviewed.

52 Inspectors considered that most of the annual self-assessment reports produced by curriculum departments were appropriately self-critical and evaluative. As noted by the college, staff are committed to the process. In contrast, some of the self-assessment reports for cross-college provision are less self-critical and include as particular strengths aspects of provision which are normal practice. The self-assessment process undertaken by curriculum departments uses data on student achievement and retention rates. Effective use is made of students' views and the outcomes of lesson observations in determining self-assessment judgements and subsequent action plans. Support teams have recently begun to assess the quality of their services against performance standards. There are clear links between the self-assessment process and strategic and operational planning.

53 All students receive a 'student planner' that contains a copy of the college's charter and complaints procedure. The charter provides clear statements of entitlements, and the extent of the college's compliance with these are monitored and analysed annually through

surveys of students' views. Complaints that are brought to the attention of staff, managers and the principal are dealt with effectively. The principal produces a report for governors, which summarises the complaints received and actions taken to resolve them.

54 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are well-documented and effective procedures for staff appraisal and staff development. All staff are appraised by their line manager. For teachers, the process is influenced by the outcomes of lesson observations. Each teacher is observed at least once during an academic year. Staff speak highly of the opportunities for training and development. Training needs are identified through appraisal and the self-assessment process, and are linked to the achievement of strategic objectives. There are appropriate arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers. New staff are helped to develop their skills in teaching aspects of religious and moral education. The college arranges in-house training events, which have included training on curriculum 2000, development of key skills, and IT. In 1999-2000, the college's staff development budget was approximately 0.9% of the college's payroll expenditure.

## Governance

### *Grade 2*

**55 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated. Two additional weaknesses were identified.**

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## Key strengths

- the governors' commitment to the mission and the Roman Catholic ethos of the college
- the wide range of skills and experience of governors
- effective arrangements for the conduct of corporation and committee business
- the effective monitoring of college resources
- good involvement in the strategic planning process

## Weaknesses

- inadequate resources for clerking
- underdeveloped evaluation of the board's performance
- insufficient development of some of the board's systems and procedures

56 Governors provide firm support for the college's Roman Catholic beliefs and values. This strength is noted in the self-assessment report. Staff are aware of and value this commitment. The governors recognise the significant increase in the proportion of students at the college from other faiths and were fully involved in the revision of the mission statement that reflected this change.

57 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. There are some elements of best practice recommended by the FEFC which have not yet been fully implemented.

58 The governing body has a membership of 19, which was redetermined under the revised instrument of government which came into operation in September 2000. Of these, 12 are foundation governors appointed by the Archbishop of the Diocese of Westminster. The remainder comprise two staff governors, one student, one parent governor, one local authority nominee, one co-opted governor and the principal. The governing body currently has 20 members, including the representative from the local training and enterprise council (TEC) who was appointed under the previous instrument and remains a governor until the expiry of his term of office.

59 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that members bring a broad range of personal, financial and spiritual strengths to the college. The chair is the parish priest who is well known both in the community and the college. Members have a good knowledge of the local community and the context in which the college operates. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings over the last 12 months is good, averaging over 80%. The arrangements for the conduct of business are effective. Meetings are well organised and the distribution of agendas and minutes is timely. It is not clear from the minutes of the board of governors that resolutions or decisions are always the result of open and considered debate. There is a code of conduct and a register of interests. Governors do not formally sign the register on an annual basis unless there have been changes since the previous year. Governing body activities are reported in the college newsletter. The clerk to the governing body is the college personnel officer; governors are aware of the potential conflict of interest that could arise. The resources currently allocated for clerking are inadequate. Governors are seeking to appoint an independent clerk on an enhanced basis so that the full range of clerking functions can be carried out effectively.

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60 The governing body has five established committees: appeals; remuneration; audit; finance and general purposes; and catholicity and curriculum. A search committee has also been set up recently. The finance and general purposes committee closely scrutinises the management accounts and has staffing issues within its remit. The governors have set clear financial objectives for the college, and monitor progress against these and other targets in the strategic plan. The audit committee monitors the work of the internal and external auditors effectively and prepares an annual report on its work for the governing body. The catholicity and curriculum committee effectively monitors the Roman Catholic ethos of the college and reviews student rates of retention and achievement. Committees are required to produce annual reports for the full governing body. Since the last inspection some progress has been made in involving governors in curriculum matters but fully effective contact with curriculum areas has not yet been developed. The governors are considering ways in which this situation could be improved. Some governors have agreed to take a particular interest in equal opportunities, IT or special needs.

61 Governors are closely involved in strategic planning. Members review strategy at an annual training day. They receive regular updates on draft college targets together with departmental and cross-college self-assessment reports. The finance and general purposes committee contributes to the development of the draft strategic plan and budget before its approval by the governing body. College targets for student recruitment, retention and achievement are approved and monitored by the governing body.

62 The lack of a formal skills audit of board members was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, as was the need to develop further induction and training for governors. At present new members receive a

collection of relevant papers but there is no formal induction programme or mentoring arrangement. Training events take place but there is no overall training plan. The responsibility for governor training has recently been transferred from the catholicity and curriculum committee to the newly established search committee. Although governors have completed self-assessments, they do not evaluate their own performance against agreed criteria or targets.

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**63 Inspectors agreed with some strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that others were overstated. Additional weaknesses were identified.**

#### Key strengths

- an effective management structure
- an open and consultative management style
- high staff morale and commitment to the college mission
- effective monitoring of teaching and learning
- an effective strategic planning process

#### Weaknesses

- the lack of clear targets and timescales in some operational areas
- some inaccuracies in measuring, recording and reporting retention rates

64 The college is well managed. Managers effectively promote Roman Catholic beliefs and values, which permeate all aspects of college life and help to provide a real sense of community. The senior management team meets weekly and regularly includes other managers as

# Cross-college Provision

determined by the agenda. Course management is generally good. A variety of other groups and teams report to senior managers on a regular basis. The academic and administrative structures are well understood by staff and there are clear job descriptions and service standards. Staff understand their own roles and responsibilities and those of their colleagues. Staff strongly support the college mission and morale is high.

65 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the management style is open and consultative; teamwork and consensus are valued. Senior staff make themselves readily available to all colleagues; this approach is appreciated by the staff. Communications have improved significantly since the last inspection. The principal holds a weekly staff briefing and a summary is circulated to all staff. Full staff meetings are held twice a term, and there are regular team meetings. The use of electronic mail is growing and all staff and governors can access the college intranet from home.

66 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college is in a strong financial position. Management accounts are prepared monthly for senior management and governors. Accounts are presented to each meeting of the governing body's finance and general purposes committee, and to each meeting of the governing body. The college has an experienced finance manager and a finance director who was appointed a short while before the inspection. The format of the management accounts has been improved to give a clearer presentation. Inspectors considered that the college's financial regulations did not fully address all aspects of financial control, though these were under review at the time of the inspection. The college's computerised accounting system is unable to produce management reports at the required speed. This shortcoming has hindered the timely availability of financial information.

67 The strategic planning process is well organised and well recorded. All staff and governors are involved in its development and review. The strategic plan dates from 1997 and has been updated annually. Departments are required to carry out annual self-assessment reports and establish targets for improvement which contribute to the operational plan. These plans are uneven in quality but substantially meet the needs of the college. There is a full review of the achievement of each year's strategic objectives prior to the setting of new targets. The use of performance indicators in the college is at an early stage and the lack of clear quantifiable targets and timescales in some areas makes it difficult to monitor progress effectively. The staff are consulted fully on the first draft of the strategic plan before it is submitted to the finance and general purposes committee of the corporation.

68 The college has a good reputation in the local community and has effective links with other educational providers which helps to ensure progression from school to further and higher education and to work. The college is a partner in a local consortium of colleges. College staff regularly attend TEC events and groups sponsored by the local education authority (LEA). The college is a member of the local lifelong learning partnership.

69 The self-assessment report identified problems in the use of the management information system as a weakness. Subsequent action has partly addressed this issue. Computer-generated reports are now able to provide student information and produce data on student retention and achievement. The system remains slow and is being reviewed as part of the search to find a new system that can integrate timetabling, personnel and admission functions. However, insufficient attention has been paid to recording and monitoring accurately the data on student retention for two-year courses. This weakness has led to an inaccurate record of student retention rates at the college.

# Cross-college Provision

70 The equal opportunities policy for students has been constructed within the context of the mission statement. Departments are required to produce annual reports on the promotion of equal opportunities in teaching and learning. An equal opportunities policy for staff is being developed. The gender and ethnic origins of staff are monitored.

## Conclusions

71 Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment provided a good basis for the inspection. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths had been overstated, particularly in cross-college areas. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

72 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.



# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (October 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	100
19-24 years	0
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (October 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	1
Level 2 (intermediate)	4
Level 3 (advanced)	95
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Level (not specified)	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (October 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	334	4	42
Business	61	0	8
Art and design	32	4	5
Humanities	354	6	45
Total	781	14	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 6% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	29	7	0	36
Supporting direct learning contact	6	1	0	7
Other support	18	0	0	18
Total	53	8	0	61

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£2,102,000	£2,273,000	£2,427,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.71	£17.64	£17.49
Payroll as a proportion of income	71%	65%	66%
Achievement of funding target	104%	107%	102%
Diversity of income	9%	9%	8%
Operating surplus	£200,000	£299,000	£200,000*

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college audited accounts (1999), college (2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college audited accounts (1999), college (2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college audited accounts (1999), college (2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college audited accounts (1999), college (2000)

\*projected surplus

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	22	339	375	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	91	96	93	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	75	88	88	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Number of starters	431	432	339	1	0	1
	Retention (%)	89	85	83	100	n/a	100
	Achievement (%)	90	81	84	100	n/a	100
3	Number of starters	1,210	1,287	2,022	6	0	4
	Retention (%)	*	*	76	100	n/a	100
	Achievement (%)	87	88	82	25	n/a	100
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Short courses	Number of starters	95	96	32	1	15	83
	Retention (%)	94	93	100	100	100	100
	Achievement (%)	78	86	100	100	27	84
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	667	1,322	733	1	0	4
	Retention (%)	97	96	95	100	n/a	100
	Achievement (%)	85	78	98	100	n/a	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

\*data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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