

**St Mary's
College,
Middlesbrough**

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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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 Mary's College, Middlesbrough *Northern Region*

Inspected October 2000

St Mary's College, Middlesbrough, is the only Catholic sixth form college in the north east of England. The college has produced a self-assessment report annually since the previous inspection in 1996. All teachers and most support staff were involved in the preparation of the most recent self-assessment report, which was collated by senior staff and validated by governors. Inspectors considered that the report placed insufficient emphasis on poor and declining retention rates and overstated the quality of teaching and learning.

The college provides courses in six of the FEFC's 10 programme areas for 16 to 19 year olds. Provision in the two largest programme areas was inspected. Of the lessons observed, 53% were judged to be good or outstanding, which is considerably less than the national average of 72% for sixth form colleges in 1999-2000. In the programmes inspected, GCE A level pass rates are good. However, retention rates are poor on most courses, and, as a result, the proportion of students starting a course who achieve the qualification is low. Target-setting and action-planning are weak. The language used is vague and there is insufficient monitoring or evaluation of the outcomes. Many teachers fail to take responsibility for improving the quality of provision and raising retention

rates. The tutorial programme and careers guidance for students are of good quality and the progression rate to higher education is high. The college provides a welcoming and attractive environment for students and has significantly improved its accommodation since the previous inspection. The college should: improve the quality of teaching; raise retention rates; improve target-setting and action-planning; establish effective quality assurance arrangements; increase the effectiveness of aspects of learning support; encourage the sharing of good practice among teachers; improve operational planning; and improve some aspects of governance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	3	Support for students	2
English and modern foreign languages	3	General resources	2
Social sciences	3	Quality assurance	4
General humanities	3	Governance	3
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 St Mary's College, Middlesbrough is the only Catholic sixth form college in the north east of England. The college provides full-time courses for school-leavers aged 16 to 19 from the Catholic community. It also welcomes students who are not Catholic but who wish to continue their education in a Christian environment, in line with the college's aim of being a 'Catholic college for the community'.

2 The college is located on a single site in a residential area of Middlesbrough. It recruits about 75% of its students from Middlesbrough. Within a 10-mile radius of the college there are two other sixth form colleges and two tertiary colleges. A tertiary college in Redcar also attracts students from Middlesbrough. The college has close links with eight partner Catholic schools and also has links with several non-Catholic schools in Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. In 1999, the population of the borough of Middlesbrough was estimated at 144,300. The population is forecast to decline by 4.4% by 2011. The population of the Tees Valley is estimated at 656,400 and is predicted to decline by 2.7% over the next 10 years. The unemployment rate in Middlesbrough is 8.4% compared with 3.7% nationally and 8.1% in the Tees Valley area.

3 The senior management team at the college comprises the principal, the vice-principal and the finance manager. There are five teaching departments each managed by a head and three senior tutors who are responsible for the college's tutorial programme, liaison with schools and careers education guidance. In October 2000, the college employed 42 full-time equivalent teachers and 22 full-time equivalent support staff.

4 The college has an open-access admissions policy and offers places to all students for whom an appropriate course can be provided. In recent years, the college has achieved a planned growth in student numbers from 551 in 1997 to

748 in September 2000. The college offers 27 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and mathematics, English and biology at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). There are four vocational courses at advanced level and three at intermediate level. There are no courses at foundation level. An enrichment programme is designed to enhance the personal development of students and consists of support and guidance, careers education, religious education, general studies and musical and sporting activities. Of the total student population, 80% follow GCE A level programmes and 16% follow a combined programme of GCE A level and advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE). A small minority of students follow intermediate courses.

5 The college's mission is to provide 'quality post-16 education in a caring, Christian environment'. A voluntary twice-weekly act of worship is organised by the chaplaincy team. In addition, there are two acts of worship each term that all students are required to attend. Mass is celebrated on holy days in term time and there are other services throughout the year.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 16 October 2000. Before the inspection, inspectors evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college provided its own data on students' achievements for 2000. Inspectors checked the college data against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists from examination boards, and found them generally accurate. In evaluating the retention and examination pass rates of students, inspectors compared them

Context

with benchmarking data derived from all sixth form colleges. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor for a total of 39.5 days. Inspectors observed 47 lessons and examined a range of students' work. The inspection team examined documents provided by the college to support its self-assessment report and held meetings with students, governors, managers, teachers, support staff and others from the community served by the college.

7 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 observed, 53% were judged to be good or outstanding and 11% less than satisfactory. This is poorer than the corresponding national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges and significantly poorer than the national averages for sixth form colleges of 72% and 3%.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	21	14	4	0	43
Other	0	0	3	1	0	4
Total (No)	4	21	17	5	0	47
Total (%)	8	45	36	11	0	100
National average, all colleges inspected 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

8 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 Mary's College, Middlesbrough	13.8	87
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

Science

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in science. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the college overstated the quality of teaching and learning and gave insufficient weight to low retention rates.

Key strengths

- attentive and hard-working students
- students' good speaking and writing skills
- high pass rates in physics and chemistry

Weaknesses

- poor and declining retention rates in GCE A level physics, biology and geology
- poor pass rate in GCSE biology
- some ineffective teaching
- lack of additional help with mathematics

10 The inspection of science included GCE A level courses in biology, physics, chemistry and geology, and GCSE biology. Courses are generally well organised. Schemes of work are adequate. Science students are not provided with any additional support to help them improve their skills in mathematics.

11 The profile of lesson grades awarded is poorer than the national average for sciences. This conflicts with the college's judgement that all the teaching and learning is good or outstanding. Teachers have good working relationships with their students, who are attentive in lessons and ask questions freely. Some teachers make effective use of questioning to check students' understanding. Others fail to include all students in discussions or to test their understanding of the topic sufficiently. In

many lessons, students spend too much time copying notes from the board. Teachers make little use of visual aids or computers to add variety and enrich the students' experience. Some teaching materials are well presented and clear, for example the handbooks for geology and the departmental handbook. However, some handouts are handwritten, poorly presented and difficult to read. Practical work is well organised but students are not encouraged to use computers to analyse their data or prepare their reports. Some of the laboratories become congested when larger groups undertake practical work.

12 Nearly all students are aged 16 to 19 and attend the college full time. They have good speaking and writing skills and are usually able to explain their work clearly. However, some are not able to work easily and accurately with numbers and this impedes their progress, especially in physics and biology. Students who complete their GCE A level courses generally perform well in examinations. In GCE A level chemistry, students perform better than predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades and the pass rate is consistently high. These strengths in chemistry are identified in the self-assessment report. In 1998-99, the pass rate in GCE A level physics improved to above the national average. Pass rates in GCSE and GCE A level biology are declining. Students of GCE A level physics and biology generally perform at the level predicted by their GCSE grades on entry. The overall retention rate in science is declining. In some subjects, the decline is steep. These weaknesses are given insufficient attention in the self-assessment report.

13 The laboratories are situated on the second floor and are inaccessible to students with restricted mobility. Some have been upgraded and provide pleasant working spaces but others are in need of modernisation. There is sufficient scientific equipment but some of it is out of date. There are too few computers in the laboratories. Technical support is good. There

Curriculum Areas

are sufficient books on biology, chemistry and geology in the learning resources centre but too few on physics. Little learning material is available to students on CD-ROM.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE biology	2	Number of starters	20	11	26
		Retention (%)	85	82	69
		Achievement (%)	47	50	22
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	72	52	71
		Retention (%)	69	62	55
		Achievement (%)	100	93	90
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	52	44	51
		Retention (%)	73	82	73
		Achievement (%)	97	100	100
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	32	29	34
		Retention (%)	81	76	53
		Achievement (%)	83	90	100
GCE A level geology	3	Number of starters	12	*	10
		Retention (%)	67	*	40
		Achievement (%)	88	*	100

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

*fewer than 10 students

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 3

14 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) and GCE A level courses in English and foreign languages, and GCSE English. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that the college had overestimated the quality of teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- effective foreign language teaching
- good resources
- high standard of students' coursework

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates in GCE A level English language and literature
- inadequate attention to students' individual learning needs
- poor course documentation

15 The college offers GCE A/AS level courses in English language, English literature, French and German, and GCSE English. There is no English course at pre-GCSE level. All students on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) course in business studies study French. Enrolments for GCE AS courses are buoyant. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that when classes are shared by two teachers, the division of work is clear. Some aspects of curriculum planning and management are poor. Some schemes of work are not up to date and some are incomplete. There was no scheme of work in GCSE English. Lesson planning is insufficiently thorough. Some course documents, such as course logs and student handbooks, are of poor quality. A slow start has been made on the development of students' key skills in preparation for

curriculum 2000. Students take part in foreign exchanges with educational institutions in France and Germany. There are few organised extra-curricular activities for English students, although occasional study days are held on the works of contemporary writers.

16 Relations between teachers and students are productive, and students are attentive in lessons. Teachers give clear expositions, and convey their enthusiasm for the subject. The teaching of GCE A level foreign languages is well planned and effective, and the students appreciate the smooth transition from GCSE. The teachers conduct lessons entirely in the language being studied, including the explanation of grammatical points. Some English lessons are lively and stimulating. In an effective GCE AS English language lesson, the teacher showed an extract from a video recording of 'The Vicar of Dibley' to illustrate features of spoken English. Students completed a grid to analyse the aspects of different characters' speech, and enthusiastically exchanged their ideas. In many English lessons, however, teachers gave students insufficient opportunities to develop and discuss their own ideas. What was intended as a discussion all too often became a lecture. Teachers pay insufficient attention to adapting their teaching methods to cater for students' different learning needs. There is insufficient additional learning support for students, despite the fact that many students leave the GCE A level English courses early because they find the work difficult. Some activities in GCSE lessons are insufficiently demanding. The self-assessment report did not fully acknowledge the weaknesses in teaching and learning.

17 GCE A level pass rates in 2000 were around the national average for sixth form colleges and generally in line with those predicted on the basis of GCSE results. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, retention is unsatisfactory on GCE A level English courses, and was significantly below the national average

Curriculum Areas

in 2000. The retention rate on English literature courses has declined over the last three years. Retention and pass rates for GCSE English have been below the national averages for the last three years. Many students produce written work of a high standard. The best shows the capacity to write well-argued essays drawing on a wide range of evidence. Some students make effective use of information technology (IT) to present their findings.

18 Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced, and knowledgeable about their subjects. Foreign language assistants play a

valuable role in supplementing the work of language teachers. The stock of books and videos for English is well chosen and up to date. Library provision for foreign languages is less extensive. There is a spacious and well-equipped language laboratory which includes three computers and satellite television. Teachers have placed helpful materials for students on the college intranet. Specialist teaching accommodation is of a high standard, and there is a good range of teaching equipment. Relevant displays help to establish a subject identity.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern foreign languages, 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	30	25	44
		Retention (%)	53	76	73
		Achievement (%)	50	42	50
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	40	46	52
		Retention (%)	60	85	65
		Achievement (%)	83	77	94
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	61	32	55
		Retention (%)	82	78	65
		Achievement (%)	98	100	97
GCE A level French and German	3	Number of starters	27	12	16
		Retention (%)	81	58	88
		Achievement (%)	90	86	86

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

Curriculum Areas

Social Sciences

Grade 3

19 The inspectors observed 12 lessons in GCE A level Christian theology, government and politics, psychology and sociology. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that some weaknesses had been understated, or overlooked.

Key strengths

- good pass rates in government and politics
- effective teaching of Christian theology and sociology
- well-managed Christian theology course

Weaknesses

- low retention rates
- some poor teaching
- insufficient written feedback to students

20 The college offers a wide range of advanced level courses in humanities. Recruitment onto GCE AS courses in psychology and sociology has increased dramatically this year. Within each department a course leader manages each subject area. Regular, minuted meetings are held at department level but there are no formal meetings at subject level. The Christian theology course is well managed. However, in some subjects the quality of course documentation and schemes of work is poor, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. The best schemes of work identify the learning activities to be undertaken by students and the outcomes to be achieved. However, those in psychology and government and politics are insufficiently detailed. The analysis and evaluation of students' achievements and retention are ineffective. There is no overall plan to improve the unsatisfactory retention rates. Insufficient use is made of action-planning and target-setting.

21 The profile of grades awarded to lessons is not as good as the national average for sixth form colleges. In some lessons, the teaching is dull and the expected learning outcomes are not made clear to students. Teachers often fail to plan lessons effectively or to take into account the needs of individual students. In all the lessons observed, teachers made insufficient use of questioning to encourage students to contribute their views, and to check their understanding. In psychology and sociology, students receive clear guidance on improving their essay scripts, however, in some subjects, the quality of marking and written feedback to students is poor. Teachers do not provide students with sufficiently detailed comments on how their work could be improved or sufficient guidance on the correcting of spelling, punctuation and grammar. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

22 Students are attentive in lessons. When invited to comment, they are articulate and well informed. Some achieve high standards in written work. In a sociology lesson, students worked enthusiastically in groups to identify the impact of the mass media on individuals. Good use was made of their findings to illustrate different sociological perspectives. In Christian theology, students worked collaboratively to apply the principles of ethical theory to the moral issues concerning conjoined twins. As identified in the self-assessment report, pass rates are consistently above national averages in Christian theology and government and politics. The pass rate for sociology has fluctuated but was above the average for sixth form colleges in 2000. Pass rates for psychology have improved. Retention rates in psychology and Christian theology are poor and declining.

23 Teachers are well qualified. They have relevant degrees and teaching experience. Most teaching takes place in classrooms designated to a particular subject. They contain appropriate displays to reinforce the subject identity and provide a stimulating learning environment.

Curriculum Areas

However, some are too small for some of the groups using them. A well-resourced private study area is provided for Christian theology students. However, the main classroom for this subject is used as a thoroughfare to other classrooms which is distracting for students.

Little has been done to develop or assess students' key skills. Opportunities for key skills assessment have not been identified within schemes of work or assignments. Students and teachers have good access to IT facilities.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in social sciences, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCE A level Christian theology	3	Number of starters	24	25	32
		Retention (%)	92	67	69
		Achievement (%)	100	93	100
GCE A level government and politics	3	Number of starters	13	*	*
		Retention (%)	77	*	*
		Achievement (%)	100	*	*
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	44	31	51
		Retention (%)	61	65	45
		Achievement (%)	80	79	91
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	43	35	35
		Retention (%)	60	68	66
		Achievement (%)	83	85	87

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

*fewer than 10 students

Curriculum Areas

General Humanities

Grade 3

24 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in geography, history, and law at GCE A/AS levels. They agreed with some judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The college overstated the students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good use of learning resources in geography
- broad range of enrichment activities in law
- good student attendance

Weaknesses

- ineffective testing of students' understanding during lessons
- poor retention rates in history and law
- insufficient collaboration between teachers in different subjects

25 Geography, history and law courses are offered at GCE A and AS levels. Communication between staff in these subject areas is weak. The teachers have failed to exploit opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of good practice in areas such as induction, course planning and the improvement of retention. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. In the lessons observed by inspectors, the attendance rate was good, at 88%, and above national averages.

26 The percentage of good or outstanding lessons observed by inspectors was below the national average for sixth form colleges. Schemes of work have been rewritten to take account of modular programmes and curriculum 2000. However, course and lesson planning is weak. Lesson plans were available for only two

of the lessons observed by inspectors. The teachers are clear about the purpose of most lessons, but they rarely explain the aims and objectives to the students. Students work industriously in lessons and display a mature attitude. In some lessons, teachers make insufficient use of questions to probe the extent of students' understanding. When questions are asked, they are often too vague, and directed at the class as a whole, and so produced a muted response from students. Students are given too few opportunities to express and share their ideas in small-group discussions. In geography, teachers have developed a good range of resources, which are used to good effect to meet the learning needs of individuals. For example, photographic slides of local sites were used in one lesson to demonstrate landform development. Teachers make good use of the Internet when giving students reference materials to investigate topics. Law students benefit from an extensive enrichment programme. This includes visits to courts of law, work experience in law-related placements, mock trials and role-play exercises. A variety of visiting speakers, including the police, prison officers and prisoners enhance and re-enforce the law curriculum. This strength was recognised by the college in its assessment of law. Teachers in geography have identified opportunities for developing and assessing students' key skills in number, communication and IT across the curriculum and in course assignments. Students' written work is generally of a good standard. Assignments in history and geography are well marked. However, in law, teachers do not provide students with sufficient comments to enable them to improve their work.

27 The self-assessment report overstates students' achievements. Pass rates at GCE A level are mainly in line with predictions based on GCSE results. Pass rates in 2000 are at or below national averages. In law, the pass rate has risen slightly, but of the 49 students who

Curriculum Areas

started the course in 1998 only 24 gained the qualification in 2000. There has been a decline in the proportion of higher grade passes at GCE A level. For example, in geography they have fallen from 63% in 1999 to 41% in 2000 and in history from 59% to 42%. Retention rates are poor. In geography and history, retention rates have declined over the last four years. Self-assessment has raised awareness of poor retention rates, but action-planning to address the weakness is not well developed.

28 As mentioned in the self-assessment report, the humanities subjects have designated classrooms that are attractive and appropriate. Most rooms are spacious and have good resources. There are appropriate wall displays that help to create a purposeful learning environment. Staff are well qualified in their specialist subjects. Liaison between history and law teachers and the staff in the learning resources centre is weak.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in general humanities, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCE A level geography	3	Number of starters	49	35	43
		Retention (%)	88	83	81
		Achievement (%)	90	100	89
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	68	30	57
		Retention (%)	85	70	72
		Achievement (%)	81	95	90
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters	29	*	49
		Retention (%)	69	*	61
		Achievement (%)	72	*	80

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

*data unreliable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

29 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective liaison programme with partner and secondary schools
- well-organised careers education and guidance
- high progression rate to higher education
- effective chaplaincy team

Weaknesses

- insufficient provision of learning support
- slow development of a college-wide key skills programme

30 The college has an effective liaison programme with its Catholic partner schools and local secondary schools. There is an annual cycle of events in each school which college staff attend, including parents evenings, year 10 conferences and college information evenings for year 11 pupils. The publicity materials used for these events are attractive and well designed and pupils value the help and advice they receive. There are good curricular initiatives between the college and the schools, notably in science, modern languages and art.

31 All prospective students are interviewed by senior tutors who provide them with good impartial guidance. On entry to the college, every full-time student is assigned to a personal tutor and is timetabled for two tutorials each week. The college has clear standards relating to what is to be achieved in tutorials. Tutors and senior staff provide effective pastoral support and guidance during early tutorials.

At induction, students are introduced to the college charter, college facilities and the opportunities for sport, recreation and prayer. There are also induction arrangements for each subject, but the college has not set standards for these and in some subjects they are ineffective. The college has introduced diagnostic testing for all new students and has identified a small number of students with specific learning needs. However, the subject-based learning support is inadequate. This weakness is not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

32 Students speak positively about their tutors and tutorials. The tutorials observed by inspectors were relevant to students' needs although some took place in cramped, overheated rooms. Tutors record students' progress effectively. Students attend regularly and contribute to their own progress reviews. Every student undertakes a core programme of religious education, which contributes to their personal, spiritual and moral development. The college has planned, and is beginning to implement, a programme of key skills development but the programme is not as advanced as it should be. Some teachers have identified opportunities for students to develop key skills within their subject programmes, but others have not.

33 Many students are aware of, and support, the work of charities and aid agencies. Appropriate stress is placed on the importance of good relationships across the college. The chaplaincy team of priests, staff and students is well known and its members are seen regularly around the college. As noted in the self-assessment report, they make an important contribution to the Catholic ethos of the college. Provision is made for weekly prayer and worship for students and staff, but is seen as the sole responsibility of the chaplaincy. Other staff make relatively little contribution to the Catholic life of the college. There are few religious signs and symbols around the college and little attempt has been made to create an overtly Catholic environment.

Cross-college Provision

34 The college provides good assistance and advice to students on welfare issues.

Administrative staff, tutors and senior staff handle enquiries sensitively and efficiently. There is no trained counsellor on the staff, but students are referred to appropriate external agencies when necessary. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that such referrals are effective.

35 Careers education is well planned. A high proportion of students gain accreditation for their careers work. Applications for higher education are well managed and supported through the tutorial system. The college is a nationally approved Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) centre for electronic application system training. Students submit their applications early and all use the college on-line facilities. In 1999, over 87% of those who applied progressed to higher education. A significant proportion of students undertake work placements related to their intended careers, for example in the medical, legal and teaching professions. The college offers a number of voluntary enrichment activities such as sports and musical activities. There are some examples of good enrichment activities within subjects such as geography and law.

General Resources

Grade 2

36 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They also identified further strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-maintained accommodation
- good IT facilities
- well-managed, high-quality learning resource centre

Weaknesses

- poor access to some specialist accommodation for those with restricted mobility
- inadequate control of heating and ventilation

37 Most of the college's accommodation is in 1960s flat-roofed buildings or more recent additions. The single site is surrounded on two sides by well-maintained playing fields. External signs to the site are good but those inside the college are less effective. Car parking facilities are extensive and well lit. The college does not have a formal estate management strategy. Nevertheless, it has developed and significantly improved its accommodation since the previous inspection. For example, it has recently expanded and tastefully decorated the dining and students' social areas. It has also established modern sports science facilities. Most of the accommodation is well decorated and maintained. Friendly and helpful staff operate the well-placed reception area.

38 The college's property development and maintenance programme takes account of the priorities identified in an extensive survey and maintenance report provided by external consultants in 1998. However, the college has not updated this plan annually as recommended in the consultants' report. Poor monitoring of routine maintenance work undermines much of the good work achieved by the college. The ambience of the main hall, which is used for acts of worship and parents evenings, is spoilt by the storage of materials near the entrance and outside. The well-placed chaplaincy room is uninviting. To get to the college's attractive and peaceful chapel it is necessary to pass through a security barrier in the learning resource centre, which inhibits some potential users. Whilst the college has taken action to improve its use of space, much excess accommodation remains. Some classrooms are too small for the number of students allocated to

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them, whilst other rooms remain empty. There is a lack of storage space, and many areas are cluttered with materials and equipment. The control of heating and ventilation in some rooms is poor. A few classrooms can only be entered through other rooms.

39 The previous inspection report identified poor access and facilities for people with restricted mobility. This weakness remains. As noted in the self-assessment report, much of the accommodation, including the learning resource centre, all science laboratories and the languages rooms are located on upper floors that can only be reached by staircases and are inaccessible to wheelchair users.

40 The college has increased its stock of up-to-date, high-specification computers, in line with its information and learning technology strategy, approved by governors in April 2000. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is good at 6:1. Staff are making increasing use of digital cameras and other IT resources to develop learning materials. The college has engaged additional information and learning technology support staff and changed the roles of other support staff to improve the co-ordination of information and learning technology resources across the college. Nevertheless, there have been delays in getting some equipment operational. For example, most computers were only connected to the Internet immediately before the inspection. There are few multimedia facilities. The college's intranet is being developed by enthusiastic staff but much remains to be done.

41 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the learning resource centre is well managed and of high quality. It comprises a well-stocked library, a good range of computers that students and teachers can book, and substantial study areas for students. The adjacent careers area has good resources. The purchase of books is effectively organised. The computerised library management information system has detailed records of all paper-based

and other learning resources. The learning resource centre provides an effective helpdesk for all students and staff. There is no computer users' group and the monitoring of hardware and software use is insufficient.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

42 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-documented self-assessment process
- good examination pass rates
- effective staff development arrangements

Weaknesses

- teachers' lack of understanding of the quality assurance system
- poor and inconsistent target-setting
- ineffective action-planning
- failure of the quality assurance arrangements to improve the quality of teaching

43 The quality assurance system is based on the annual self-assessment process. This is co-ordinated by the vice-principal who is assisted by members of the curriculum committee. All teachers and most support staff are involved in writing contributory reports. These are combined into departmental reports, which are in turn aggregated by senior staff into a college-wide report. Moderation of the grades awarded is carried out by the principal, vice-principal, heads of department, and members of the governor's quality committee. This process is well documented. Each subject team completes a series of forms based on students' achievements, teaching and learning,

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curriculum organisation and management, and liaison activities. A number of these incorporate performance data supplied from the college management information system.

44 The quality assurance system is not well understood by staff. They are unable to describe clearly the methods they use to measure and improve the quality of provision. Heads of department feel they have little input into the grading of cross-college functions such as quality assurance, management and support for students. Inspectors agreed with the college that the setting and achieving of targets is not effective. In 1999, between 40% and 45% of all targets in subject areas were not achieved. Action points in subject reports and aggregated reports are not specific enough to allow managers to monitor progress towards their completion or to evaluate their effectiveness.

45 Most of the support services are included in the self-assessment process. The learning resource centre and the student support team have set some standards and performance indicators. The self-assessment report for student support identifies 38 quantifiable indicators. In other support areas such as maintenance, catering and general administration there are few performance indicators.

46 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the overall pass rate for students who complete their courses has improved and is now good. The pass rate of 94%, is 10 percentage points above the national average for sixth form colleges. The average points score of students taking two or more GCE A level subjects has increased year-on-year from 16.4 to 17.9 in the last three years. GCE A level pass grades have also improved when compared with predictions based on students' entry qualifications. However, over the same time period retention rates have declined. In 1997, the retention rate for long courses at level 3, which includes full-time GCE A levels, was 83%, but by 1999 this had declined to 59%. This

means that the number of students succeeding when compared with those enrolling on courses is poor and is below the national average for sixth form colleges.

47 Inspectors agreed with the college that external verification reports for GNVQ courses are good. Weaknesses identified by the external verifiers are rectified before their next visit. Internal verification is effective. The head of department samples marked work to ensure that teachers' marking is consistent.

48 Heads of department observe lessons as part of the self-assessment process. Students have the opportunity to complete a form giving their views of the same lessons. The students' views are taken into account in assessing the lesson and in feeding back to the teacher. The findings from the lesson observations are not collated to improve the quality of teaching within or across departments. Opportunities for sharing good practice are missed. Most teachers, and some heads of department, feel that the lesson observation programme brings no benefits. The findings make little contribution to the self-assessment report. The self-assessment of the teaching and learning in some subjects draws on the findings of only one lesson observation. Of the lessons observed by inspectors, only 53% were graded as good or outstanding. This represents a decline since the last inspection and is significantly below the national average for sixth form colleges of 72% as quoted in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*.

49 There are effective staff development arrangements. Appraisal interviews are carried out by line managers and are used to ascertain the professional development needs of staff. Most staff have been appraised at least once. Alongside this, the principal surveys all staff annually to determine individual developmental needs, the needs of departments and those of the college as a whole. From this information a college staff development plan is formulated and

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publicised in a staff development bulletin. All staff spoke positively of the process and the support given to them when they apply to attend professional development events. New staff are well supported through a carefully considered induction programme which includes a formal mentoring system.

Governance

Grade 3

50 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found that some strengths had been overstated and identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good working relationships between governors and senior managers
- effective involvement in self-assessment
- good attendance at governing body and committee meetings
- strong commitment to the college's mission

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of targets to assess governing body performance
- insufficient training for governors
- lack of curriculum links
- some areas of non-compliance with best practice

51 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The governing body substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibility under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

52 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors play a

key role in determining the strategic direction of the college. The governing body is committed to retaining the distinctive nature of the college as a designated Catholic sixth form institution for students aged 16 to 19 years. Governors contribute to the strategic planning process by considering and approving the three-year strategic plan and the college operating statement. They have a clear view of the college's mission.

53 The governing body has a membership of 17. There were two vacancies at the time of the inspection. The governing body has efficiently fulfilled the requirements of the revised governing body structure. The governors have a range of experience and expertise that benefits the college. Induction for newly appointed governors has recently been formalised. However, there is no systematic identification of governors' training needs. Governor training is identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. It mainly consists of briefings by the clerk, managers and by the chair following attendance at external governance events. The college is discussing the content and relevance of the FEFC governor training modules with the Catholic Education Service.

54 The governing body has met six times in the last 12 months. The conduct of the meetings is governed by detailed standing orders, which are revised as necessary and have recently been updated. However, the governing body has yet to introduce a formal, annual review of its decision-making procedures. Members participate well in the conduct of business. The clerk, who is also the college finance manager, has a recently updated job description. Average attendance at governing body and committee meetings in the last year has been good at 85%, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. There are committees for finance and general purposes, audit, remuneration, health and safety, and quality assurance and the curriculum. The committees' terms of reference are appropriate

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and their reporting arrangements to the governing body are good.

55 The finance and general purposes committee monitors the college's financial position through receipt of the quarterly management accounts. The accounts are also presented to the governing body. Members of the committee do not receive any financial information between meetings, which is not in accordance with best practice. Governors have been made fully aware of the likely adverse impact of audit adjustments on the out-turn for 1999-2000 and the proposed measures to counter a potentially significant financial downturn in 2000-01. The clerking of the audit committee, by the finance manager, is contrary to the guidance in Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. Furthermore, the chair of the committee, who is a qualified chartered accountant, attends meetings of the finance and general purposes committee, sometimes acting in an advisory role. This practice could compromise the independence of the audit committee. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

56 Governing body agendas, minutes and papers are available for public scrutiny. The governing body has adopted a code of conduct, a code of ethics and a 'whistleblowing' procedure, but has yet to formally determine confidentiality criteria in line with the Nolan recommendations. Governors and members of the senior management team complete declarations of interest, which are updated annually. The register of interests is also publicly available.

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a close working relationship between governors and senior managers. The chairs of the governing body and its committees maintain regular contact with senior managers. All governors are involved in the self-assessment of their own performance. Each governor completes a detailed questionnaire and the responses are collated for the self-

assessment report on governance. However, the governors have not identified any targets to help them evaluate their performance. The quality assurance and curriculum committee receives self-assessment presentations from heads of department annually. These presentations are an integral part of the self-assessment validation process. The governing body approves the college's self-assessment report. Governors have no links with the curriculum areas, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 3

58 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report but found that others had been overstated. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- open and consultative management style
- good staff awareness of, and support for, the college's mission
- effective links with external partners
- good communications

Weaknesses

- aspects of operational planning
- insufficient attention to poor retention rates
- no monitoring or reporting on equal opportunities
- some inadequate curriculum management

59 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that staff understand and support the college's mission. The senior management team holds regular staff briefings to reinforce understanding of the mission and

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the distinctive Catholic nature of the college. The college enjoys a high reputation in the community and in its partner schools. It teaches adults on a course leading to the Catholic certificate in religious studies on behalf of the Diocese of Middlesbrough. The senior management team, comprising the principal, vice-principal and finance manager, have an open and approachable management style, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Communication throughout the college is good. A weekly bulletin and regular meetings help to keep staff informed. The programme of meetings was recently reviewed and a new framework introduced in September 2000. Staff have welcomed this change. There is an annual published schedule of meetings and key college activities.

60 The college produced a clear strategic plan for 2000 to 2003, which included a review of its previous plan and an operating statement for 2000-01. Departments are not required to produce their own plans, relying instead on the action points set out in departmental self-assessment reports. In the absence of detailed departmental operational plans, the college has no systematic means of monitoring progress towards some of its objectives. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The college does not have an accommodation strategy. Managers and teachers do not give sufficient attention to the poor and declining retention rates.

61 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has produced small historical cost surpluses in each of the years 1995-96 to 1999-2000. Latest forecasts for 2000-01, based on lower than expected enrolment numbers, indicate a potential operating deficit, rather than the near breakeven position originally budgeted. Senior managers are fully aware of the measures required to eliminate this deficit and these measures are to be reflected in a revised budget

for the year. As noted in the self-assessment report, internal and external audit reports indicate that the college has sound systems of internal control. The finance manager has a professional accountancy qualification. Management accounts are only produced quarterly. Whilst they include a detailed commentary and year-end forecast, they do not contain a rolling 12-month cashflow statement. These reporting arrangements are not in accordance with best practice. Budgets for textbooks and consumables are delegated to subject leaders and others who receive timely reports of actual and committed expenditure against budget. The college's financial regulations are comprehensive. Most data returns to the FEFC are submitted in accordance with required deadlines.

62 Management of the curriculum is generally weak. For example, in some departments schemes of work and lesson plans are not completed. Although heads of department meet their course leaders, these meetings do not result in action plans to improve performance. Staff are efficiently deployed. All academic staff, including the principal and vice-principal, teach. Many teachers have additional responsibility posts. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Some support staff say they do not feel valued by teachers.

63 As indicated in the self-assessment report, the college has productive links with a range of external partners including close and well-managed links with the eight partner Catholic schools. The college has good links with Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and is a member of the Tees Valley Lifelong Learning Partnership. The principal is an active member of the Association of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges and the Diocese of Middlesbrough Catholic Association of Secondary Heads. He is also on the executive committee of the national forum for Catholic further and higher education.

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64 There is a clear health and safety policy. The health and safety committee monitors health and safety practices effectively throughout the college and reports to a governors' subcommittee. However, the college has not given sufficient attention to monitoring or reporting on equal opportunities, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Equal opportunities issues are not adequately covered in the college's strategic plan. The equal opportunities policy refers only to students and does not specify monitoring or reporting arrangements.

Conclusions

65 The college produced its fifth self-assessment report prior to the inspection. The report contained judgements supported by a variety of evidence. However, the judgements were not linked to the quality statements in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The college makes appropriate use of performance indicators and some support areas have measurable standards against which to monitor and review their performance. Target-setting is ineffective. Lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those awarded by the college and well below the national average for sixth form colleges. Inspectors agreed with two curriculum grades awarded by the college and awarded lower grades in two other areas. Lower grades were also awarded in three of the five aspects of cross-college provision. One was lower by three grades.

66 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	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	4
Level 3 (advanced)	96
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	220	1	32
Business	53	0	8
Hotel and catering	32	0	5
Health and community care	28	0	4
Art and design	50	0	7
Humanities	296	0	44
Total	679	1	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 27% 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	41	1	0	42
Supporting direct learning contact	6	0	0	6
Other support	16	0	0	16
Total	63	1	0	64

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£1,825,000	£1,911,000	£2,087,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.84	£18.63*	£18.15
Payroll as a proportion of income	73%	70%	68%
Achievement of funding target	96%	101%	98%
Diversity of income	4%	6%	7%
Operating surplus	£38,000	£75,000	£5,000

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

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

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

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

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

Operating surplus – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	7	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	71	100	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	100	100	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Number of starters	257	176	226	2	3	1
	Retention (%)	77	69	62	50	3	100
	Achievement (%)	52	98	91	100	100	100
3	Number of starters	1,060	2,086*	1,859*	6	3	n/a
	Retention (%)	83	62	59	83	67	n/a
	Achievement (%)	87	92	94	100	50	n/a
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	5	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	0	100	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	945	314	n/a	4	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	43	79	n/a	75	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	98	n/a	n/a	100	n/a	n/a

Source: ISR

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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