

Northwood College Newsletter



September 2004

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This year (2004), we are delighted that our results have exceeded our previous record by a clear margin. Once again, our A-E pass rate is 100% but our A and B pass rate this year is 87%. This is an outstanding performance and we are very proud of our girls' achievements. Eighteen girls (39%) gained straight A grades and 38 (83%) received nothing less than a B in their A Level subjects. As parents will know, the most significant criterion at A Level is the number of entries achieving one of the top two grades i.e. the A-B%.

The A level results for all subjects were extremely good, but it was particularly pleasing to see that 21 (84%) of our Mathematics candidates gained Grade A and a further 2 (8%) gained a Grade B. In Biology 22 (85%) and in Chemistry 21 (84%) of our candidates gained an A or a B grade. In Classics, History and Greek, all entries were graded 'A'.

These wonderful results mean that 39 (88%) of our A Level candidates have gained places at their first choice universities and 3 at their second choice. Five girls are taking a gap year.

We congratulate our girls on their success. Whatever might be said of grade inflation it still requires a great deal of ability, hard work and good teaching to achieve the highest grades at A Level. Our aims at Northwood College are to equip girls with the independence of thought, initiative, confidence and skills to enable them to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. These girls are a testament to the College's success in realising its aims. We wish the

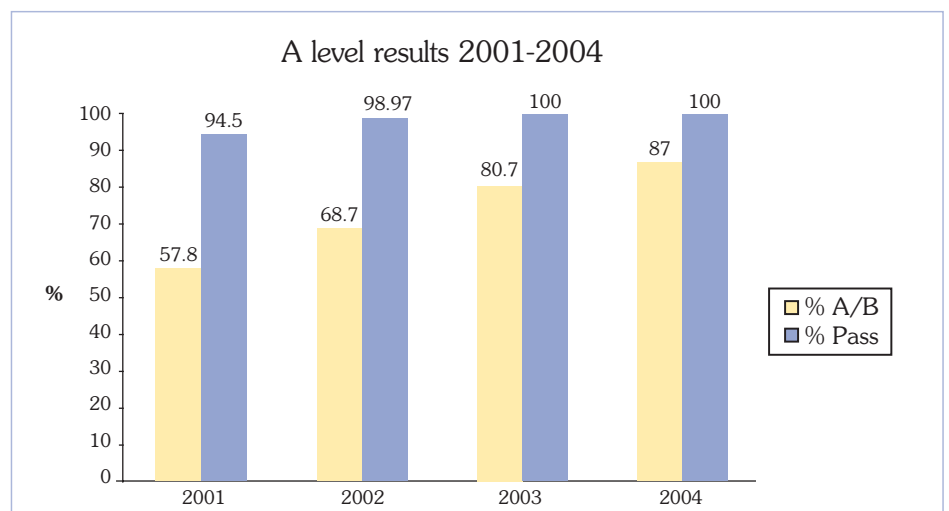
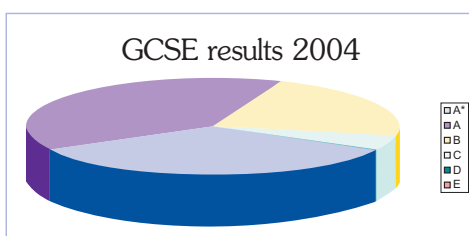
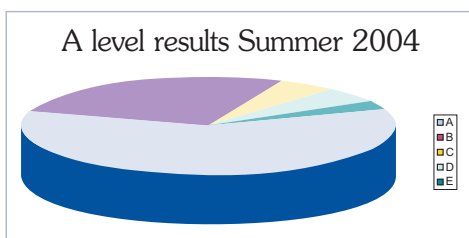
girls well and look forward to hearing of their fulfilling and successful lives.

Of course, we must also mention the very good GCSE results gained by our girls this summer (2004). Our overall pass rate was 99.6% with 33.6% of all passes graded at A* and 72.8% at A* and A.

In 22 (92%) subjects the pass rate (A*-C) was 100% and in Latin all entries were graded at A*, while in English and PE no girls gained less than an A grade. In Mathematics, 79 (98%) of candidates gained Grades A*-B. 40 (49%) of our candidates gained 8 or 9 GCSE's all of which were graded A* and A.

We congratulate all our candidates on their success and look forward to working with so many of them as they continue their academic studies at Northwood College.

It is lovely to be able to report such academic successes, but it is important to remember that Northwood College offers so much more in the education it provides. Sporting and creative talents are nurtured and we are very excited about the imminent opening of our new Performing Arts Centre which will enhance our extra-curricular provision so spectacularly.



Developing a ‘Thinking School’: Northwood College Pupils to Gain a Critical Advantage

This September sees the launch of Northwood College’s new Advanced Cognitive Development Programme. This combines courses in areas such as critical thinking, learning styles and philosophy, with an approach to developing higher order thinking skills in all subjects throughout the curriculum. This initiative is being developed and pioneered by every teacher in the school. The Head Mistress, Ruth Mercer says, “This new approach to teaching and learning will provide our pupils with the very best chance of maximising their academic potential.”

Jane Simister, the programme’s director, explains: “Of course pupils already think while they are at school but we want our pupils to be independent, creative individuals, who display initiative and motivation and who are tenacious and willing to take risks.”

A major strength of this initiative lies in its continuity throughout the school. Younger pupils will participate in weekly thinking skills lessons. ‘Philosophy for Children’ discussion groups will take place, during which pupils will be encouraged to debate moral and philosophical topics to help them develop the confidence to express their own ideas, while improving their listening, speaking and decision-making skills. Year 7 pupils will take part in a course in mind mapping skills, to improve their note-taking, essay writing and revision, and enhance their understanding of all their subjects. The very highly regarded ‘Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education’ programme will be taught to Y7-9 pupils, while students in Year 10 will learn to evaluate different kinds of reasoning, to identify persuasive devices and to construct logical arguments. In the Sixth Form, discussion groups will be held for those considering a career in Law or Medicine, to help prepare them for the new entrance papers that are being planned by top universities.

At the same time, teachers throughout the school are developing lessons that encourage skills such as questioning, hypothesising, interpreting and prioritising information, challenging and evaluating what is discovered and making decisions within the subjects. Darren Jensen, Head of Science, points out that “students achieve the best grades when they develop thinking skills that allow a deeper understanding of the concepts. This enables them to apply their knowledge to situations presented in examinations.”

Events and visits are being arranged to extend further the impact of the programme. The highly praised ‘Happy Puzzle Company’ visited the Junior School. An assortment of fun, interactive, hands-on learning experiences taught pupils to persevere, work together in teams and solve problems by approaching them from different perspectives. Links with the local community will also be developed: in February, Northwood College will be hosting the National Association for Gifted Children’s Creative and Critical Thinking Workshop, which will be open to the most able pupils from Northwood College and other local schools.

Early initiatives have been met with a very positive response from pupils. “I thought the Thinking was brilliant because my mind was on everything in all the activities as we had to think a lot!” wrote one Year 4 pupil, while a pupil in Year 5 observed, “I thought that the day was really fun and it really made my brain work very hard”.

The government and leaders in educational theory are paying a growing interest to the importance of teaching thinking skills as a vital part of pupils’ education. Several universities, including UCL and Bristol, are planning to follow Cambridge’s lead in setting entrance papers in certain subjects that include a thinking skills element. According to a recent Radio 4 poll, the public are also starting to recognise the value of developing thinking skills in schools – with philosophy being voted the subject that most people felt should be added to the school curriculum.

Jane Simister offers a further comment on the programme: “In schools, education can become like fast food. There is such pressure to deliver grades that teachers, pupils and parents are sometimes in danger of expecting a curriculum where knowledge is spoon-fed in bite-size chunks and which satisfies that immediate grade-hunger. But what we are seeing is that this isn’t enough to turn students into ‘healthy’ citizens of the future. To prepare our students for an unpredictable and constantly changing world, it is vital that we help them develop the skills of logical, critical and creative thought.”



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