

INSPECTION REPORT

Melbourn Village College

Melbourn

LEA area: Cambridgeshire

Unique Reference Number: 110868

School Inspection No: 184611

Headteacher: Mr I R Berry

Reporting inspector: W S Walton

1210

Dates of inspection: 11 – 15 October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708051

Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Comprehensve

Type of control: County

Age range of students: 11 - 16

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: The Moor
Melbourn
Near Royston
Herts
SG8 6EF

Telephone number: 01763 223400

Fax number: 01763 223403

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr A K Smith

Date of previous inspection: December 1994

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
W S Walton, RgI	Special educational needs (SEN)	Attainment and progress Attitudes and behaviour Teaching Leadership and management Efficiency Attendance Welfare and guidance Partnership Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
M Hackney, Lay Inspector		
J N Hedge	Equal opportunities	
D M Green	English	
J Seed	Mathematics	
P Sellwood	Science	Key Stage 4
	Design and technology (DT)	
	Information technology (ICT)	
	Art	
J Webster	Geography	
D Harris	Modern foreign languages	Resources
A Lees	Music	
P Wall	Physical education (PE)	
H Turton	History	Curriculum and assessment
	Religious education (RE_	

The inspection contractor was:

Kenwood Educational Associates
Kenwood Park Road
Sheffield, S7 1NE Telephone: 0114 2553803

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The Registrar
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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MAIN FINDINGS

1 What the college does well

- Enables students to make good progress in almost all subjects and attain overall standards which are better than national averages at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Helps students with SEN to make good progress and achieve success at GCSE.
- Overall standards of teaching are good and a significant proportion is very good.
- Standards of behaviour of the great majority of students and the quality of relationships in the college are good.
- There are good arrangements for the academic and pastoral support and guidance of students.
- Leadership is very effective and the college gives good value for money.
- The experience of students is much enriched by the close partnership between the college and its community.

2 Where the college has weaknesses

- I. Insufficient time is allowed for the study of RE at Key Stage 4.
- II. Arrangements for the school day, and allocation of time for some subjects do not provide the best conditions for learning.
- III. Progress in a few classes is adversely affected by poor attitudes and listening skills among a small minority of students.
- IV. The teaching in a small number of classes does not demonstrate the high levels of academic rigour and challenge found in the best teaching.

This is a good college whose strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of students at the college.

3 How the college has improved since the last inspection

Standards and the quality of provision have improved significantly. Overall standards and those in most subjects at the end of Key Stage 4 have improved, especially in the last three years. Teaching is much better, there is virtually no unsatisfactory teaching and a substantial proportion is very good. Provision for and standards in ICT are much better. A college development cycle has been introduced and there are clear management systems for monitoring and evaluating policies, plans and performance. Clear lines of accountability and communication between senior management and the faculties have been put in place. Working relationships between governors and senior managers are much stronger and governors are more closely involved in planning and policy-making. There has been some improvement in provision for spiritual development but there is still no daily act of collective worship and RE is insufficiently developed at Key Stage 4. Improvements have been made to the accommodation for technology, and to the accessibility and safety of buildings and equipment. The college has in place a strong set of policies and procedures to maintain and

improve standards.

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4 Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1998:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key	K
			<i>well above average</i>	<i>A</i>
			<i>above average</i>	<i>B</i>
Key Stage 3 Tests*	C	E	<i>Average</i>	<i>C</i>
GCSE Examinations*	B	C	<i>below average</i>	<i>D</i>
			<i>well below average</i>	<i>E</i>

*Average scores

Over the three years 1996–98 average scores in Key Stage 3 tests in English, mathematics and science and the proportions of students obtaining 5 or more passes at grades A*-C and A*-G in GCSE were above national averages. The average score in Key Stage 3 tests in 1998 was well below that of schools with a similar proportion of students eligible for free schools meals but the average score in GCSE was in line with similar schools. There was little change in the results of Key Stage 3 tests in English and science in 1999 but results in mathematics improved substantially. GCSE results in 1999 were much better than in 1998. In the three years 1997–99 there has been a very significant upward trend in GCSE performance. Students with SEN make good progress and achieve much success at GCSE. In line with the national picture girls have usually done better than boys at GCSE but in 1999 they performed equally well.

5 Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	Mathematics, science, ICT, music	Modern languages
Years 10-11	Good	English, science, art, DT	Modern languages
English	Good	----	----
Mathematics	Good	----	----

The quality of teaching is a major strength. There is virtually no unsatisfactory teaching although a small number of teachers make insufficient demands on students in terms of academic challenge and behaviour. Almost three quarters of teaching is at least good and more than one third is very good or excellent. The level of respect shown by teachers for students is outstanding.

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that strengths outweigh any weaknesses

5 6 Other aspects of the college

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Very good around the college and good overall in lessons. Behaviour is good in practical subjects. In almost all cases relationships among students and with staff are very good. Students show respect for people and property. Most students mature markedly as they progress through the college. Some students are poor listeners. A few students, mainly boys in Key Stage 4, behave immaturely in some lessons.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are better than national averages. Levels of unauthorised absence are much lower than in most schools.
Ethos*	The school provides a positive atmosphere and caring environment in which students feel valued but there is a lack of academic rigour in a few classrooms.
Leadership and management	Open, clear sense of direction and effective. Very good co-operation between governors and management.
Curriculum	Broad and balanced though provision for RE at Key Stage 4 inadequate. Need to review timetable arrangements to improve learning in some subjects. Good provision for extra-curricular activities. Good arrangements for assessment of progress.
Pupils with special educational needs	Make good progress socially and academically. Well integrated into the college and very well supported.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good provision overall, particularly for social, moral and cultural development.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Good accommodation although need to refurbish science laboratories. Effective use of resources, especially the library. Good use of ICT but need for more up to date equipment. Effective deployment of all staff.
Value for money	Good value. Efficient use of resources. Improving quality and standards of education.

**Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

5 7 The parents' views of the college

What most parents like about the college

- V. Their children like the college.
- VI. It encourages them to work with it.
- VII. It is easy to approach and handles complaints well.
- VIII. Its values and attitudes have a positive effect on students.
- IX. It offers a good programme of extra-curricular activity.

What some parents are not happy about

- X. Work in Year 7 is insufficiently demanding.
- XI. Homework.

The timing of the inspection at the beginning of the year meant that there was a small response by Year 7 parents to the questionnaire but even so the level of overall response – less than 10% - was disappointing. The great majority of replies and of most parents who attended the meeting with the registered inspector were positive about the provision made by the college. The inspectors support their views. Students make good progress in Year 7 and would do even better if teachers had to spend less time on the development of basic learning skills, particularly listening. There is no consensus among parents about homework. Inspectors found that it was set and marked regularly, it was worthwhile and made reasonable demands on students.

· **KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION**

8 There are no key issues. Although there are no areas of major concern, the governors and senior managers should give attention to the following matters in an action plan in order to raise standards of students' attainments further:

XII. RE should be developed at Key Stage 4 to ensure that all students receive the entitlement envisaged by the Agreed Syllabus for RE; (paragraphs 2, 3, 6, 33, 41, 43, 57, 159)

XIII. arrangements made to eliminate the disruption of lessons by a small number of poorly motivated students, mainly boys in Year 11, should be strengthened. This will entail a review of timetable and curriculum arrangements and classroom management styles; (paragraphs 2, 6, 21, 29, 91, 116, 117, 137)

XIV. the arrangement of the school day and the allocation of time for some subjects should be reviewed to provide better opportunities for learning; (paragraphs 2, 6, 16, 23, 29, 32, 34, 41, 118, 136, 142, 145, 158, 159)

XV. the high levels of academic rigour and challenge found in the best teaching should be extended across the college. (paragraphs 2, 5, 6, 7, 19, 28, 60, 77, 135, 139, 143).

· **INTRODUCTION**

· **Characteristics of the college**

9 Melbourn Village College has a mixed comprehensive population of students aged 11–16. It is smaller than the average comprehensive school and numbers on roll have fallen significantly since the last inspection. The change occurred mainly because of falling numbers in the contributing primary schools but there was also some drift towards neighbouring former grant maintained schools. GCSE examination results have shown a very significant upward trend over the last three years, numbers in primary schools are increasing and the college confidently predicts that its numbers will increase over the next few years. The college serves a wide rural area and receives most of its students from eight surrounding schools. Many students travel in special buses. Most students come from middle class backgrounds and the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. There are very few students from ethnic minority groups. The proportion of students judged to have special educational needs (SEN) is above the national average although the proportion with statements of SEN is in line with the national average. Overall the standards of attainment of students entering the college are in the range normally expected of 11 year olds. About 85% of students continue in education Post 16, which is a little below that at the time of the last inspection, but the proportion of students entering full-time employment has more than doubled. The present warden has been recently appointed. The college offers a wide and popular community education programme which attracts about 1,000 students each week.

10 The college aims to provide all students with full access to a broad and balanced education which will motivate and challenge them to achieve their full potential and prepare them for life beyond college.

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11 Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	59	61	120

• National Curriculum Test		English	Mathematics	Science
Results				
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	40	36	40
	Girls	48	35	39
	Total	88	71	79
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	75 (70)	60 (85)	67 (85)
	National	65 (57)	60 (60)	56 (60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	44 (36)	41 (53)	30 (53)
	National	35 (23)	36 (37)	27 (29)
• Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	33	37	38
	Girls	45	34	34
	Total	78	71	72
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	66 (79)	60 (81)	61 (86)
	National	62 (59)	64 (63)	62 (61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	39 (47)	37 (49)	28 (49)
	National	31 (28)	37 (37)	31 (29)

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Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	78	65	143

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils	Boys	35	69	75
Achieving	Girls	44	64	64
Standard specified	Total	79	133	139
Percentage achieving	School	55 (50)	93 (89.7)	97 (99)
Standard specified	National	44.6 (43.3)	89.8 (88.5)	95.2 (94)

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Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:			%
	Authorised	School	7.2
	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.2
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

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-
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Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	22
	Permanent	1

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• Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	34
	Satisfactory or better	97
	Less than satisfactory	3

· **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

· **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

· **Attainment and progress**

12 Overall standards of attainment are better than reported at the last inspection.

13 Standards in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1999, the results of standardised tests over recent years and observations of the work of the present Year 7 indicate that overall level of attainment on entry to the college is close to the national average for eleven year olds. There is little difference between the overall attainments of boys and girls.

14 Students make good progress at Key Stage 3. Over the three years 1996-98 average scores in national tests taken at the end of the key stage were well above national averages in English, mathematics and science. Boys did better than girls in mathematics, the position was reversed in English and there was little difference between them in science. In 1998 results in English were better than national averages and in line with those of similar schools measured against the proportion of students entitled to free school meals. In mathematics and science results were close to national averages and well below those of similar schools. The standards reached in 1999 were close to those of 1998 in English and science but improved considerably in mathematics. Teacher assessments against standardised criteria show that the majority of students reached the expected national standard in ICT, DT, music and modern languages and that more than 80% reached the standard in geography and history this year.

15 Good progress is maintained through Key Stage 4. Standards in GCSE declined after 1993 but that trend has been arrested and reversed. GCSE results show a very significant upward trend over the three years 1997 – 99. The average points score of students in 1998 was better than the national average and in line with that of similar schools. Results in 1999 were much better than those of 1998. In previous years girls have outperformed boys in GCSE but there was no difference between them in 1999. The marked improvement in results between 1998 and 1999 was due to the better results obtained by boys. In 1998 the proportion of students attaining the higher grades in English and English literature, mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, art, food technology, drama, geography, history, music and PE was higher than national averages. In combined science, French and German results were close to national averages. In 1999 overall results in terms of average scores in GCSE and the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at grades A*-C exceeded the targets which the college has set itself for the year 2000.

16 Working in co-operation with the contributing primary schools the college has established an effective approach to improvements in literacy which includes a strong emphasis on the development of oral skills. Standards of speaking are average in Year 7 but good progress is made as students progress through the college and they become confident, lively speakers. Students are confident to answer questions and enter discussion; they enjoy presenting a point of view. High attainers are articulate and give clear, fluent explanations of their work. Standards of speaking in modern languages are not so well developed. High attainers are proficient at an elementary level but cannot sustain conversation in French or German. Many students do not respond well to opportunities to practise speaking in the target languages. Reading has a high profile and a number

of successful initiatives have been introduced. Good progress is made with reading although some students are not confident reading aloud. Students have a broad experience of reading and there have been recent improvements in the proportion of boys who choose to read fiction. Almost all students develop reading skills which allow them full access to the curriculum. Overall standards of writing are good and high attainers produce excellent extended writing in which ideas are well developed and expressed. Students are competent note takers and make good use of notes and drafting in preparing their work. Written work of a high standard is found in coursework in geography, art and mathematics. Overall standards in spelling, grammar and punctuation are sound. Many students, especially boys, arrive with poor listening skills and teachers spend much time developing the skill. Standards improve and the great majority of older students do listen carefully to teachers and each other. This is an area which requires constant attention by teachers as students, particularly those in lower sets, with short spans of attention, find difficulty with listening carefully over extended periods. Standards of listening among older students are closely related to teaching styles and motivation. Students of modern languages have difficulty in understanding native speakers.

17 The college has a numeracy policy and has undertaken an audit of practice. A numeracy booklet has been produced for Year 7 students. Almost all students have a sound grasp of basic numeracy which they are able to draw upon in many subjects. In Key Stage 3 in science and DT emphasis is placed on accuracy in measuring and recording. Students develop competency in these skills and in science and geography they can present, manipulate and interpret numerical information in a number of graphical forms, both manually and on computer. In DT they confidently display their measurement, setting out, cutting to size and assembly skills. They have a good understanding of volume, capacity and area. They handle number work well in control applications in ICT and DT.

18 Standards in ICT and its use across the curriculum are much better than at the last inspection. Students at both key stages have a good range of skills which they use in lessons and in their own time. The cross-curricular approach at Key Stage 3 is particularly helpful in raising awareness of the full range of ICT applications. Most students can communicate information through word processing, desk top publishing, databases and spreadsheets. Students make good use of CD ROM and Internet facilities. Although the situation is much better than at the last inspection shortages of hardware and limited opportunities for hands on work continue to limit progress in some areas of the curriculum. Investigative skills are well developed, particularly in the use of CD ROMS, the Internet and specialist software in music, DT and information systems. The interpretation and evaluation of data is much in evidence in science and geography. Students do well with problem solving and investigative approaches in DT and mathematics. Very good use is made of the library and other lines of research in English by individuals and through independent group work.

19 At the time of the inspection students in Year 7 were still coming to terms with their new environment and Key Stage 3 work. Progress is always at least satisfactory in Year 7 and will be better when less time is taken with the development of learning, particularly listening, skills. Progress in both key stages is usually good and rarely unsatisfactory. Some unsatisfactory progress occurs in English and modern languages and is associated with undemanding teaching and low expectations. The good progress made in many subject areas, including English, stems from good teaching and the responsiveness of students. Students respond positively to the very high expectations of some teachers. Students with SEN make good progress in all areas except modern languages where lack of confidence and poor motivation contribute to attainments which are lower

than expected. Very strong progress is made in the improvement of reading skills. Twelve students who entered the college a year ago with reading ages below nine years ten months have averaged gains of 18 months in their first year. 47% of the present Year 11 entered college with reading ages below their chronological ages. The proportion is now 19%. Twenty one students with learning difficulties on the SEN register entered for GCSE in 1998 averaged seven passes.

20 Since the last inspection the college has established a very strong database for the measurement of individual student performance and its evaluation against projected progress. This assessment system is being introduced and when fully operational will be an important aid to progress to teachers and students.

• **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

21 The overall response of students is good, maintaining the standards reported after the last inspection. Response was at least satisfactory in more than 90% of lessons, at least good in almost three quarters and very good in more than one third. Most of the unsatisfactory response is in Key Stage 4 and is related to immature behaviour by a small number of boys in Year 11. There is some evidence to suggest that the behaviour was designed to attract the attention of inspectors. Behaviour in almost all lessons is good and students are polite and helpful. Most students respond quickly to their teachers although too much time is taken in some lessons in Key Stage 3 in establishing an atmosphere where students can listen carefully to the teacher and each other. Behaviour is consistently good in the practical subjects – music, drama, PE, art, DT and science. It is very good in response to very strong teaching, in many lessons in English, mathematics and history. Students respond very positively to well established classroom regimes and expectations of behaviour. Behaviour around the college is very good. Students behave very sensibly in the crowded circulation areas and stairways at break times and between lessons. Buildings and equipment are treated with respect and there is no evidence of graffiti. Students can be trusted to use the library, the ICT laboratories and the music suite with the minimum of supervision. Levels of litter are relatively low. Students have regard for safe working practice in laboratories, workshops and PE. Key Stage 4 students on the DIY course worked under minimum supervision, wearing appropriate clothing and following proper safety procedures when handling very hot metals. There is little evidence of bullying. Any incidents are taken very seriously and followed through promptly by senior staff. The number of students excluded temporarily is greater than at the last inspection but within the normal range for the size of the college. Permanent exclusions are rare.

22 Most students have good attitudes towards work. They work hard and take pride in the presentation of their work. They are proud of their achievements and work which is displayed around the college. Students are largely well organised and self-motivated. The great majority remain on task and work productively, individually and in groups, when not directly supervised. In ICT and food technology students co-operate well when required to share equipment. Group skills are good in English when students carefully consider each others' views in responding to a common task. Pair, group and team work are good in PE and self-discipline is very good in group practical work in music. Relationships among students and with staff are good; the great majority of students respond very positively to the very high levels of respect shown to them by teachers. Students also relate well to visitors; students on the community awareness course were at ease and showed considerable confidence in working with severely handicapped young adults. There is a good

response to opportunities to take responsibility. Students take on responsibilities as prefects, team captains, school councillors, duty students and library assistants. Key Stage 4 students act very responsibly on work experience and on community placements. Students gain in maturity as they pass through the college. Almost all are well prepared in terms of personal, social and independent learning skills by the time they leave.

23 Students with SEN are well integrated. Although some have short attention spans most respond well and remain on task in lessons which are well structured and employ a range of teaching and learning approaches. A few students, particularly older boys, find difficulty in maintaining attention through the 60 and 65 minute lessons, especially if there is an emphasis on listening and speaking and behaviour and productivity deteriorates towards the end of lessons. The majority of SEN students are well motivated and many attend voluntary sessions to improve their basic skills. They are very tolerant of each other and teachers skilfully foster constructive relationships with them. Relationships with support assistants and in withdrawal sessions are good. Students with learning difficulties make substantial gains in social and study skills and grow in confidence.

- **Attendance**

24 Attendance is good and has been well maintained since the last inspection. The level of attendance at 92.6% is above the national average. Unauthorised absence at 0.2% is well below the national average and is mainly confined to students in Year 11. Most students arrive punctually. In most classes registration takes place promptly, and throughout the college there is an efficient start to the day. Lessons begin on time, and this and the good level of attendance have a very positive effect on students' attitude, attainment and progress.

- **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

- **Teaching**

25 The quality of teaching is a strength of the college and standards are significantly better than last time. Standards of teaching in mathematics and ICT, criticised at the last inspection, are much improved. The good progress made by almost all students relates directly to good teaching. The use of ICT across the curriculum has improved considerably. Teaching is at least satisfactory in almost all lessons and good or better in almost three quarters of them. Teaching is very good in rather more than one third of lessons. There is little difference between standards of teaching at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Teaching is consistently strong in science, in mathematics, ICT and music at Key Stage 3 and in English, art and DT at Key Stage 3. There is a substantial proportion of good teaching in all subjects except modern foreign languages.

26 Specialist teachers have a very good command of their subjects. The knowledge and understanding of ICT is very strong among the core teachers and many others have the knowledge and confidence to make good use of ICT in their lessons. Non-specialist teachers in history and RE are well prepared. Many teachers, for example in music, art, PE and English are very committed to

and enthusiastic about their work. Specialist teaching and support for students with SEN is well informed and very sensitive to their needs.

27 Almost all lessons are well planned. Planning is very good in music, mathematics and science. There is, for example, some very well prepared teaching of poetry in Key Stage 4 in English but there is also some poor planning where lessons have no clear sense of purpose and lack challenge. Many modern language lessons are well planned but some stick too closely to the textbooks. Project work in art and control work in ICT is very well prepared. Many good lessons begin with a clear statement of objectives and end with consideration of what has been achieved.

28 The variety of teaching and learning styles employed to catch and hold the interest of students is a strong feature. Role play features in drama, English and history. Games are well used in mathematics and science – a card game in physics helped low attaining students to understand circuits. Interesting projects are selected in DT, ICT and art. There is a good balance between explanation and participation in music. Teachers of subjects, especially English, history and RE make good use of discussion and group work, and almost all teachers use questioning to check understanding and to encourage students to think carefully about issues. Most lessons make a brisk start and activities are well sequenced with a good balance of time to each of them. Teachers successfully plan lessons in music and PE in this way and use very good demonstrations to reinforce their explanations of new work. Some of the exposition in mathematics is excellent. Many tasks in practical subjects are open ended so as to allow students across a wide range of attainment to be challenged and experience success. Much care is taken to match work with the levels of attainment of students. Differentiated worksheets are used in history, geography, science and music. A variety of approaches – graded materials, targeted questions and individual support are employed successfully in English and geography to involve low attainers. In many cases students are appropriately challenged. In music the challenges are well matched to students' attainments and in art students receive much personal attention and encouragement to produce their best work. High standards are expected in ICT. In several subjects – English, mathematics, science, geography, history, modern languages and drama – the picture is more mixed with some very challenging work and much that is adequate. There is some scope for making more rigorous academic demands on students.

29 In most lessons good use is made of time and resources. Teachers draw on a very wide range of sources – video, TV, tape, projectors, ICT, artefacts, library, field visits – to illustrate and bring relevance to lessons. Most lessons proceed at a good pace although this is not always the case in some lessons in modern languages, English and drama. In a few lessons in Key Stage 3, particularly in Year 7, and low attaining groups in Year 11 too much time is taken up by unsatisfactory behaviour. Even when teaching is strong it does not always hold the interest of low attaining students with short attention spans throughout the long lessons. Classroom management is generally good. It is excellent in drama, art and music, and very good in science, English, history and PE. Structures are not always sufficiently strong to maintain a good learning environment in RE and modern languages and the informal style used in some geography lessons is not successful with all students. The level of respect shown by teachers for students is outstanding. Teachers are invariably courteous and sensitive to students' needs and in the great majority of cases the approach is reciprocated. Many teachers successfully bring humour to their classes. They give positive feedback with lots of encouragement and celebration of success. Students are confident of the help and support which is available to them and they readily ask teachers for assistance. They value the quality of marking and comment and the quick turn-round of marked work. Arrangements for homework are better than at the last inspection. It is set regularly and most is sufficiently

demanding. Help is available to students and teachers regularly give their time to the homework club. Homework reinforces and extends work done in lessons. It is well integrated with project work, used to develop research skills, and often forms the basis for discussion in class.

• **The curriculum and assessment**

30 The college provides a broad and balanced curriculum, meeting requirements of the National Curriculum in both key stages, including those for ICT which was an issue in the last inspection report. All National Curriculum subjects and RE are studied in Key Stage 3. In Years 8 and 9, German is added to complement the study of French. Nearly all the students take both languages at this stage. All students follow complementary studies in RE, personal and social education (PSE) and an innovative multi-disciplinary 'Enquiry' course designed to develop inter-related skills of research, problem solving, and presentation using a variety of traditional and information technology based techniques. At various stages in Years 7 to 9, the English, mathematics, humanities, science, ICT and music departments play a part by integrating designed Enquiry activities into their teaching and learning programmes. The Enquiry programme also provides a means of consolidating and extending the literacy work undertaken in the primary feeder schools.

31 In Years 10 and 11 all students study English, mathematics, double or triple award science, a technology subject, physical education and a modular course which covers careers, health and religious education. In addition, all students choose one from history, geography or GCSE religious education plus a modern foreign language. The technology programme is selected from a choice of six. Two further choices are available from courses which include a second foreign language, a second humanities subject and GCSE courses in RE, PE, ICT and art. Students can take up to ten GCSE subjects. This is a heavy workload for some and because of this, option blocks contain non-GCSE programmes in community awareness, DIY skills and the youth award scheme. GCSE RE, the youth award scheme and double foreign language options failed to attract viable numbers this year. 17% of students have selected three sciences this year, a significant increase since 1998.

32 The daily timetable is organised in five, 60 - 65 minute teaching units. This creates significant imbalance in time allocation to some subjects and places heavy demands on students. It does not particularly suit subjects that need to use a lot of oral work. There is some evidence that the long lessons contribute to restlessness, declining concentration and occasional poor behaviour observed in a minority of lessons.

33 The deployment of teaching time is generally appropriate but there are some issues. In Key Stage 3, time allocation is below national norms in history, geography and religious education and when linked to the rotation of subjects in Year 7 and Year 9 limits depth of study and development of subject specific skills. Subject rotation affects progress in Year 9 music and may affect GCSE recruitment. Time allowed for the study of two languages in Years 8 and 9 is barely adequate. The cumulative effect of this is felt in Year 10 where again the time is below national norms. In English however, the time allocation for the language and literature in Key Stage 4 is generous by national comparisons. The time allocated for RE at Key Stage 4 is insufficient to meet the objectives of the agreed syllabus and the statutory requirement is not met.

34 Timetable organisation has some unhelpful features that have implications for continuity of learning and access for some students. For two Year 7 French classes, two of the three lessons are on the same day. For one class, all language lessons occur on two consecutive days, creating a six-day gap before the next contact with the subject.

35 Despite these anomalies, considerable efforts are made to ensure equality of access to the curriculum and to ensure good continuity of learning between the key stages, leading to effective progression into Post 16 education, employment or training. The very good liaison with the feeder primary schools is a notable feature. Links are strong. Induction days for Year 6 students, curriculum co-operation in English, mathematics and science, excellent sharing of SEN information, all help to create a smooth transition and maintain learning across the Key Stage 2/3 boundary. Effective subject planning, allied to sound assessment systems, largely maintain this momentum through the key stages in the college.

36 The comprehensive Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 PSE programmes are well organised and continue to evolve. Year 9 now includes a specialist module on personal learning planning which is a key feature of schools in Cambridgeshire. Students are encouraged to take an active role in setting targets for personal development, academic progress and identifying potential career interests. In Key Stage 4, a committed team of specialists builds on earlier work to cover further modules of health education (including sex and drugs education) and the consideration of values and attitudes in the context of personal and social development. RE is incorporated into the Year 10 and 11 scheme.

37 Careers education and guidance is strong. It is carefully co-ordinated, delivered by experienced staff and involves effective liaison with the careers service. Work experience opportunities are provided in Year 10. Many placements are obtained through direct well-established links with local commercial, business and industrial organisations. Governors are involved and the guidance process is supported by good reference material and computer software in the college library. There are strong links with the Post 16 sector and meetings are held annually in the college at which the Post 16 institutions explain opportunities to parents and students. Provision for advising SEN students is good. All have interviews and their progression needs are evaluated throughout Key Stage 4. Parents and students speak favourably about the nature and quality of the careers education and guidance programme. Cross-curricular key skills are as yet underdeveloped. The college is not running any accredited general national vocational education courses although special arrangements for individual students have been made with other institutions.

38 The extra-curricular opportunities are wide ranging in relation to the size of the college. The weekly bulletin informs students of lunchtime and after school events, including those provided by the community centre in the college. There is a good fixture list for traditional games, with most sessions being taught by specialists. Over 60% of the students are involved in sport activities although there are fewer opportunities for girls than for boys. An extensive list of other activities includes vocal and instrumental music, drama, chess, technology, Christian union, mathematics workshop, GCSE statistics, science workshops and homework clubs. These are complemented by well established foreign exchange visits, concert evenings, joint music and drama productions, subject related fieldwork visits, participation in the mathematics challenge and science master-classes and visits to science exhibitions, theatres and art galleries. Students are well aware of the range of provision and value it.

39 There are good procedures in place for the assessment of student attainment and progress at both subject and college level. Subject judgements are largely based upon attainment in regular departmental common assessment tasks. Since the last report, the college has devised a marking policy and all subjects have systems in place which, although varied and reflecting particular departmental needs, are understood by students and parents. Departments keep appropriate records and the detailed reports and records of achievement meet all statutory requirements. The college has an impressive range of data on each student to provide a baseline for evaluation of attainment and progress through the key stages. The senior managers have invested a great deal of effort analysing GCSE performance to provide subject and college targets and have supported this with in-service training. By the end of next year, externally standardised information will provide projected grades for each student to refine the existing target setting procedures. Subject leaders and heads of year are increasingly using the data to improve their own assessment systems and to monitor and guide students to achieve negotiated targets. This approach is established in Key Stage 4 and is now being extended to Key Stage 3. It will provide a good basis for value added judgements and a spur to further improvement of standards of attainment and progress.

40 Assessment, reporting and recording requirements for SEN are in place. There are very good review procedures and very effective liaison with primary schools to maintain continuity of learning. Individual education plans are satisfactory but, at this stage of the academic year, not yet in place for all students who need them. Subject leaders are provided with excellent information on student needs which for the most part is well used to maintain good progress.

41 The college has made significant progress since the last inspection. The developing systems for target setting and judging added value are sound, providing good data to subject leaders to guide the development of the teaching and learning programmes. Subject assessment is more consistent because of improved standardisation. Some issues relating to the organisation of the curriculum remain, particularly with regard to time allocation, the organisation of ability groupings and statutory requirements for RE in Key Stage 4.

· **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

42 The college makes good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and has satisfactorily maintained it since the last inspection. Inspectors support the view of most parents that their children receive good personal and social education. Religious education and assembly themes make a significant contribution to this area of personal development.

43 Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Through their study of artists and their work students become aware of the background to paintings and are able to reflect upon the feelings and intentions of artists as well as appreciate the aesthetic qualities of their work. Studies of literature and poetry seek to give an understanding of the motivations of authors and their characters as well as a realisation of the beauty and power of language. Drama emphasises knowledge and understanding of character or situation. In art, English, drama and music students are given many opportunities to interpret and describe their own emotions. Teachers in science and geography invite students to contemplate the natural wonder of the universe from the elemental structure of the atom to the vastness of the universe, and from the powerful forces of physical

geography to the majesty of the landscapes they create. These studies form a natural springboard for reflection on man's influence on the environment. Team games allow students to feel the satisfaction of working with others and to experience and manage success and defeat. In RE at Key Stage 3 students have opportunities to reflect upon their own beliefs and those of people of different faiths. These opportunities are limited at Key Stage 4 because of the time allowed for RE. Some year group assemblies give students the opportunity to reflect on fundamental issues. During the inspection students reflected in silence on the recent Paddington rail crash and its effect on the people concerned.

44 Moral development is good. The college teaches the principles which distinguish right and wrong very effectively and provides a good moral code as a basis for behaviour. Staff are very good role models and have high expectations of consideration and respect. Teachers strongly support the aims of honesty, fairness and respect for truth and justice through their examples and the specific content of subjects such as PSE and RE. Students support a range of local and national charities. Good opportunities are provided for students to consider and debate moral issues such as personal rights, responsibilities and equal opportunities. Good opportunities are planned to foster students' moral development through drama, science, technology, history, geography and PE. A drama lesson addressed the problems of bullying, and in technology students considered the need for data protection and the misuse of the Internet. A visiting speaker from the School Health Education Unit gave a very informative and hard-hitting presentation on drugs awareness to Key Stage 4 students. Some assembly themes contain strong moral messages. For example, Year 9 students considered the plight of homelessness and the dangers of jumping to conclusions about others.

45 Social development is good. Students are encouraged to become independent and take responsibility for aspects of their learning. Most students are courteous and confident and abide by the agreed code of conduct. Many students take on extra responsibilities, for example as representatives on the school councils, library monitors and as duty monitors in Year 9 when they act as receptionists and assist with administration. A few students in Year 11, elected by their peers, become senior prefects. Opportunities are provided for students to develop social skills through team games, inter-school sports, extra-curricular activities, residential visits, and by making choices and decisions about their work. Students work well collaboratively on practical exercises in groups, for example, during science and technology. Music and drama enable good social development through group work and taking part in productions. The Citizenship Foundation enables students in Year 11 to take part in the Youth Parliament Competition and debate many social questions. Community awareness is a strong element in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and provides students with a very good understanding of social differences. Some students work with handicapped people, visit senior citizens or work with young children. Students following the community awareness course have well supported community placements in a range of settings.

46 Provision for cultural development is good, and students are made aware of local traditions and customs through several areas of study. A stimulating selection of books, pictures and artefacts are on display around the college. Students visit galleries, museums and the theatre. English draws on a range of cultures in the study of literature and poetry. Exchanges and visits to France and Germany and the content of French and German lessons give good experience and understanding of the customs and traditions of the countries. Students in Year 7 are introduced to the Islamic civilisation in both history and RE. African, Islamic and Japanese influences were observed in project work completed by students of art in Years 10 and 11. Musical appreciation and understanding takes an international perspective which is reflected in some students' compositions.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

47 Good support and guidance is provided by the college for all its students, and parents speak highly of the pastoral care and support which their children receive from staff. This good level of support has been well maintained since the last inspection, and makes a strong contribution to students' attainment and progress. Academic support enables students at all levels of attainment, including those with SEN, to take full advantage of educational opportunities linked well to their individual needs. Form tutors and heads of year are readily accessible and know their students well. The good relationships between students and staff have a positive impact on their personal development and general confidence. The college has a very successful scheme for some students to be assigned a mentor to assist them in managing their course work. Mentors are volunteers from business and the teaching staff. Strong support is available to students making choices of careers, work experience and Post 16 courses. Students have access to a counsellor who visits the college every week to meet with individual students who have personal problems. Good transition procedures are in place to support students moving from Year 6 to Year 7, and students speak highly of their induction experience.

48 Good procedures have been developed for monitoring academic progress and personal development within departments, and form tutors monitor homework diaries regularly. Attendance is satisfactorily monitored and the completion of registers meets the statutory requirements. Unauthorised absence is followed up well and the education social worker makes home visits when required. Students arriving late are required to sign in and explain their lateness.

49 Procedures for monitoring discipline and behaviour are good and provide clear guidelines for teachers and students. A consistent approach towards discipline with a good system of commendations and sanctions ensures that the college is generally an orderly and safe environment. Bullying and harassment are uncommon, promptly dealt with and recorded in the incident book.

50 Child protection procedures are good and comply with statutory requirements. The college has a trained person with responsibility for this area of support. All staff, including lunchtime supervisors, are aware of the procedures to be followed in cases of concern. Health and Safety issues are well monitored by governors and an annual audit is carried out by the LEA. Clear guidelines are available to staff, and students are constantly made aware of safe practices, especially in science, PE and technology. Good provision is made for first aid with qualified first-aiders on site. An accident book is kept up-to-date, and students who are unwell receive good care and attention. Dining facilities are adequate and midday meals are well organised and served hygienically. Proper attention is paid to fire risk, and regular fire drills are held when the buildings are evacuated. A well organised programme of PSE which is strongly supported by outside speakers makes an effective contribution to health education, including sex education and drugs awareness.

Partnership with parents and the community

51 There is a strong partnership with parents and the community which has a favourable impact on standards, progress and quality of education. The partnership has been well maintained and extended since the last inspection. Most parents feel welcome in the college and are supportive of their children's studies. All students have a homework planner which parents sign each week to agree that homework assignments have been completed on time. Good home/school links have been established by form tutors and year leaders who contact parents directly on such issues as attendance, underachievement and celebration of success. In accordance with statutory requirements, parents have received a copy of the Home/School Agreement. The parents of those students with SEN are kept very well informed about individual education plans, reviews and progress.

52 The parent/teacher association is very active and supports the college well through fund raising to provide additional curricular resources including the development of the college's website. The PACE (parents as co-educators) group meets regularly to exchange ideas and explore ways of improving students' education.

53 The quality of information provided for parents is good and the majority of parents feel well informed. The prospectus is well presented and contains helpful information about the curriculum and college organisation. Consultation evenings are held for each year group and parents are invited to meetings at each transition point including the move from primary education. Curriculum information booklets are provided for parents of students in Years 7, 8 and 9. Annual reports meet statutory requirements and provide clear information about attainment and progress and targets for improvement. Although grades are awarded for effort, some parents feel that insufficient information is given about their children's level of attainment.

54 The college's links with the community are strong. They enrich the curriculum and promote students' progress and personal development. Students have the opportunity to join community courses at the end of their school day enabling them to work alongside adults. The college has good liaison with the feeder primary schools and the sixth form colleges and organises joint activities such as the Arts Day and the Summer Literacy School. Through the community awareness course students work on the parish council millennium project, work with handicapped people, visit the elderly and work with young children. Students in Year 10 raised money for the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre by setting up a bakery mini-company and music and drama students performed with the English Sinfonia Orchestra at a summer concert this year. Visitors to the college enrich the curriculum and provide students with additional experience. Members of the University of the Third Age contribute regularly to college activities and provide help to Year 7 students with reading and a local employer holds interview technique sessions with students. Students go out on a variety of visits, for example, science trips to West Runton, Cotswold Water Park and Anglia Polytechnic University's Chemistry at Work Exhibition. Students in Years 7 and 9 have the opportunity for a residential visit to Normandy and camping in the south of France.

55 Links with industry make a very positive contribution to students' progress and achievements. Local businesses and industries support the college's commitment to work experience which is well organised. The college benefits from the support of a number of companies which provide sponsorship for such activities as science, technology, the sports

development project and books for the library resources centre.

- **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

- **Leadership and management**

56 In response to criticisms raised in the last report the college now produces a three year development plan which identifies whole college and departmental priorities and performance targets. There are strong arrangements for monitoring and formally evaluating standards.

57 There have been major changes in management and leadership since the last inspection. Until very recently the present warden held an acting position during the secondment of the substantive holder of the post. Falling rolls have required staffing reductions and a reorganisation of the senior staffing structure. The governors have much closer working relationships with management and staff and are much better informed than they were in the past. The present management arrangements are very open and there is a very good level of co-operation between governors and managers. Governors contribute effectively to decision and policy making and there is a clear and appropriate division between their policy-making role and the management role of the headteacher. Governors have been very effective in using their individual and collective strengths in support of the college, for example in major fund raising, representing the college to the wider community and setting standards for health and safety. The college benefits from thoughtful and intelligent leadership from the governing body, warden and senior management. There is a shared commitment among governors, management and staff to the pursuit of high standards and to achievement through caring. All senior managers are attached to faculties which provides effective short lines of communication between senior and middle managers. Senior managers have a strong presence around the site and are kept very well informed. The college is a listening organisation. Several good appointments have been made in middle management since the last inspection and this is a strong area of the college. Governors meet their statutory obligations except that there is no daily act of collective worship and the arrangements for RE at Key Stage 4 do not provide a satisfactory response to the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.

58 There is a good development plan for the college and the faculties which incorporates LEA educational priorities over the next three years. Faculty priorities are consistent with those for the whole college. The planning cycle is continuous and provides for evaluation of its effectiveness. Targets, resources, time scales, monitoring and evaluation procedures are clearly set out. Targets with significant financial implications are heavily dependent upon external fund-raising by the college's educational trust for success.

59 The college has been successful in tackling the points raised at the last inspection through its action plan, except in respect of the daily act of collective worship and RE at Key Stage 4. It does not feel that the former is a realistic expectation and although it has made progress with the latter the time allowed does not give students the full entitlement to RE. Very good progress has been made in establishing systems for monitoring and evaluating policies, plans and performance. A very good database has been established against which individual progress of students can be reviewed. Procedures are in place for monitoring and evaluating the performance of students against predicted outcomes. The development plan provides for the evaluation of change and there is an established programme for the review of college policies. The college has recently set up arrangements for

formal observation of all teaching staff by line managers and peer observations. These arrangements when fully developed to include annual review will provide a strong base for staff development. The intention of governors to develop Investors in People processes in the college will enhance development opportunities for all staff. The quality and quantity of provision for ICT and the standards attained by students have improved substantially. Specialist staff, in-service training, up-to-date equipment and software and new courses have all contributed to improvement in work across the curriculum. The attachment of governors to faculties, the rolling programme of departmental review by governors, management reviews of departments and the subject leaders group all contribute to a comprehensive programme of curriculum review. Current curriculum plans include the development of government priorities for literacy, numeracy and citizenship. Literacy programmes are the most highly developed of the above and are very effective in raising standards, particularly in reading.

60 The college is making good progress in the achievement of its aims and values. It is well regarded by parents and is well liked by students. Governors feel that the educational ethos is strong and improving. The ethos reflects a commitment to caring and inclusiveness. Students feel secure and confident of the support of staff. Staff go to great lengths to respond to individual needs. Many teachers have high expectations of students but in some areas there is scope for greater academic rigour. Insufficient demands are made by some teachers and the work ethic is not strong among a minority of students. Students grow in confidence as they move through the college and the great majority are mature young people with good attitudes and a good range of independent learning skills when they leave. There are good arrangements for equal opportunities policies and practice. The college has tried, with some success, to modify stereotypical views of courses and employment. There is no evidence of bias or discrimination. Policies, management and support for students with SEN are very strong. Effort and achievement are celebrated and students feel valued and respected.

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• **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

61 Overall there are sufficient qualified teachers to meet the demands of the curriculum. The balance of age and experience is good and a high proportion of staff hold posts of responsibility. More than half of the postholders are women. Teachers and students are well supported by the college's skilled and hard working non-teaching staff who are in most areas sufficient in number to enable the college to function effectively. Students with SEN are well served by learning support assistants in addition to their qualified teachers. There is, however, a need for more technician time in the science department and the modern foreign languages department would benefit from the employment of a native speaker to assist with examination students needing oral practice.

62 Documentation and procedures for the induction of newly qualified teachers are clear and effective; all staff new to the college receive very good support both within their departments and at a whole college level. From the beginning of the school year appraisal has taken the form of monitoring of teaching through classroom observation. This process is properly documented and discussed with the teacher afterwards and any resulting needs for professional development are followed up. Once this new scheme is fully established the college should consider how it can be broadened to include a two-way process that encourages staff to review their own performance and discuss their aspirations. Staff professional development is a strong feature of the college's provision. All in-service training and professional development, provided from outside and by the college itself, is channelled through a representative committee which publishes its minutes and

reports regularly to the warden and governing body. This ensures that all requests for training are fairly considered and related to the appropriate budget.

63 The college has pleasant, spacious and well appointed accommodation, much of it purpose built for specialist use. Facilities for sport, many of them shared with the wider community, are excellent. The attractive grounds are kept in very good order and are largely free of litter. Subject departments have good accommodation, most of it grouped together, which is generally adequate for the demands made on it. Well presented collections of students' work are on display in classrooms, corridors and central areas of the college. All accommodation issues mentioned in the last report have been effectively dealt with: wheelchair access is now complete on the ground floor; design and technology accommodation has undergone complete refurbishment as a result of the fundraising efforts of staff and governors; the unsightly bicycle sheds have been fenced off; toilet facilities are now adequate.

64 There are a few areas remaining, however, which do not promote the highest standards and need to be addressed. The science laboratories need redecoration and refurbishment. This work is included in the college development plans. Design, technology and art areas need blinds to reduce the effects of strong sunlight, which, in the case of food technology, could present problems of health and safety. Three of the four modern foreign language classrooms do not have carpeted floors and the acoustic reproduction of taped material is accordingly less sharp.

65 The provision of learning resources for most areas of the curriculum is good and many of the shortages mentioned in the last report have been put right. There are some subject areas, however, where resources remain to be improved. Science, art and music still need better ICT facilities. In science and history there are insufficient textbooks for home use by students. The physical education department lacks the funds to make better use of the college minibus or hire transport for team away matches. Although the ratio of computers to students is around the national average of one to ten, there is an immediate need for computer systems which complement each other. Standards would be improved if the relative shortage of up to date hardware was overcome.

66 The college library is an excellent resource. It is spacious and welcoming and is efficiently managed by a qualified librarian and one assistant who vigorously promote it so that it is well used in and out of lessons and after school for homework clubs. Some subject areas make very good use of the library, but there is still room for more use by other departments. The provision of books, periodicals and multi-media software, including controlled access to the Internet, is ample and up to date, encouraging good reading and research habits and appealing to all ages and levels of attainment. All Year 7 students receive very good induction into library use and protocol. A good number of students in Years 8, 9 and 10 volunteer as library trainees and give essential help to the librarian. The library's computer provides very good analytical data which enables the specific targeting of certain year groups to help encourage or rekindle good reading habits. Current staffing hours for the library do not permit its full opening during each lunch hour. In view of the very good use to which the library is put and the shortage of other free time for students to use it, the college should consider ways of keeping it open for longer periods.

67 Good use is made of resources outside the college. There is a wide range of visits to galleries, museums and theatres. Key Stage 4 students visit Wimpole Hall to collect historical data for GCSE coursework. The science department runs visits to Melbourn Science Park for Year 8 and trips to West Runton beach for biology studies. Many students in both key stages take advantage of the good programme of exchange visits and trips to France and Germany.

The efficiency of the school

68 Until recently there has been very little longer term financial planning. Falling rolls with reducing income and the heavy cost of the accommodation have given this small college very little room for manoeuvre. The efforts of governors and management have gone into managing the financial situation. The staffing establishment has been reduced and management restructured but the college has not been able to balance its budget and by the end of the financial year it will carry a revenue deficit of £138,000. Student intake numbers are increasing and the college has a recovery plan, approved by the LEA, to return to a balanced budget. The governors and Warden intend that the plan will carry them through the period of low student numbers without further staff losses. Financial procedures are sound and well documented. Guidance is clearly given on them to budget holders. Monthly print outs of expenditure and commitment are provided for management and financial statements are placed before each meeting of the governors' finance committee. The last audit conducted by the office of the County Treasurer pointed to a number of procedural matters which required attention; all these have been dealt with.

69 In addition to reductions in staffing levels alongside falling rolls the college has taken a number of initiatives to improve its efficiency and increase its income. Measures have been taken to reduce the cost of services – heat, light and water – although improvements in the management of the heating system would bring further savings. The ratio of planned against emergency building maintenance is improving and spending on educational resources is calculated according to need rather than on an historical formula. In the same way the college is moving away from budget building on historical information and towards budgets which are increasingly informed by education development plan priorities. Major improvements have been carried out during the period of very tight budgeting due to the success of governors' fund raising and support from the PTFA. The governors raised money for the refurbishment of technology and have targets to secure major renovation of the science accommodation. There is a good lettings programme and the college has been successful in bidding for national monies for specific educational initiatives such as the improvement of literacy. Plans are under way for a major bid on the Lottery Fund to develop a community arts facility.

70 Good use is made of staff in matching qualifications and experience to work. Present pupil:teacher ratios and class contact time are in line with national averages but the financial recovery package envisages that class contact time will be increased in the short term. Educational resources are well used and value for money checks are made on all new purchases. The college has good accommodation and a very pleasant site but accommodation costs account for a greater proportion of the budget than found in most schools. Attempts are being made to use accommodation more efficiently; an audit of room use has resulted in some changes of room usage. The resources provided for students with SEN are very well deployed.

71 Having regard for the characteristics of the college, including the quality of education and the attainments and progress of students, the college provides good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

72 When students enter the college in Year 7 the results of a range of tests suggest that attainment is in line with the national average although there is some variation from year to year. Progress in the key stage is good so that by the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in English is above average. Students do very well in the National Curriculum tests. In comparison with all schools, results in 1998 are above the national average and in line with results of students in similar schools, that is with a similar proportion of students taking free school meals. Performance at Level 6 and higher was well above average in 1998. Over the last three years performance in English has been consistently well above the national average. Girls do better than boys but the gap between boys and girls is narrower than is the case nationally. In 1999 Test results at Level 5 are similar to the previous year but less good at the higher levels. The college has lodged an appeal about this year's Test results.

73 Progress is very good at Key Stage 4 and standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average. GCSE results in English have improved consistently. At the end of Key Stage 4 results in English in 1998 were significantly above the national average and better than in the previous year. Results in 1999 improved still further. The proportion of students achieving A* and A was well above national figures. Boys' performance has improved and the gap between boys and girls has narrowed. Performance in English Literature has been consistently above the national average and has improved in line with the results in English.

74 The department places emphasis on the importance of oral activities and consequently many students make good progress as they move through the college. They become confident and lively speakers, able to communicate their ideas fluently, as for example in Year 9 where groups of students were discussing the information they had gathered in the library as part of their work on ballads. Students enjoy participating in conversation, discussion and role play. They learn to listen carefully, to consider ideas and to explain and express opinions. Low attaining students in Year 10 were able to discuss quite complex ideas about the different achievements of boys and girls. They are encouraged to express a personal response and to develop and sustain a point of view in discussion without prompting. High attaining students often have very well developed vocabulary. Some students, however, especially boys, are reticent speakers and not very comfortable in discussion.

75 Most students can read and write at a level appropriate for their age and are able to cope with reading requirements across the curriculum. Students heard reading out loud did so reasonably expressively. They learn to examine language closely and to identify points and styles of writing about character, narrative and meaning in the novels, plays and poems they read. They can illustrate and support their ideas by drawing quotations from the text. The high profile given to reading in Key Stage 3 has considerable impact on students' attainment in reading as well as affecting reading habits, in particular of boys. A computerised system in the college library enables the librarian to monitor students' borrowing. Since the introduction of the reading award the gap between boys and girls in borrowing of fiction books has narrowed significantly and the number of books taken out

increased. Students with SEN make considerable gains in reading through Key Stage 3. Many students enjoy writing and high attainers are able to write at length - some writing achieves the highest standards in terms of ideas and sophistication of expression. Critical appreciation of writing and understanding of language styles develops well. Students understand the need to write for different audiences and purposes and are able to draft their work. They have learned to take notes and have techniques for ordering and sifting their ideas. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally competent and progress well. Standards of presentation are good. Some students make very good use of ICT to present their work.

76 Students' response to English is very positive. Most listen and concentrate well in lessons. They are attentive, interested and willing to work hard. They co-operate well together, ask questions and respond well when given responsibilities. They are able to work independently and organise themselves in groups. A few students have a short span of concentration and easily become restless. There are some students in Year 7 whose behaviour is immature.

77 Teaching of English by core staff in the department is always good or better. There is, however a significant proportion of other teaching which is unsatisfactory although the school will have the opportunity to remedy this in the coming months. In the best lessons teachers have very good subject knowledge and clear objectives for learning. They use their material confidently, as for example in a Year 7 poetry lesson where the teacher skilfully and incidentally reinforced students' knowledge about adjectives and adverbs in a poetry lesson on 'The Lady of Shalott'. Good lessons are carefully planned as part of a unit of work where each lesson follows sequentially. Expectations are high and sometimes very high, for example in Year 10 where students in groups were studying a very challenging poem by James Fenton and considering how the poem might end. Many lessons proceed at a good pace. They get off to a brisk start, the teacher injects some urgency into the task and students respond well. There is variety in lessons through the use of a range of strategies such as role play, class discussion, structured group work and very good use of the library for research activities. In these lessons relationships with students are excellent and students feel that their contribution is valued. Teachers are well informed about students and good individual support and oral feedback are given. Tasks and materials are carefully selected and teachers adapt their approaches well to suit the needs of individuals. There is effective co-operation with in-class support for students with SEN. Homework is used well. The weak lessons observed during the inspection lacked a clear sense of purpose and structure as a result of inadequate planning. In these lessons expectations are low and far too much time allowed for tasks. Teaching focuses on only a few students so that others are not actively engaged, sometimes for the whole lesson. Interventions by the teacher are inappropriate and relationships with students unproductive.

78 The department has developed some imaginative and effective curriculum initiatives notably to support literacy in Key Stage 3. There is an important emphasis on wider reading which is promoted through several carefully targeted strategies building on the very good links with feeder primary schools. Strategies include a programme of testing and careful monitoring of progress. Time in tutor periods as well as lessons and homework is given to reading and the Rainbow Reading Award motivates students and enables the librarian to monitor the borrowing habits of boys and girls. In Year 7 students are supported by staff from Learning Support and by volunteers from the University of the Third Age who listen to reading. Additional curriculum time in Key Stage 3 is provided through 'Enquiry' where students learn how to use ICT in their work in several subjects including English as well as developing research skills in the library. There has been excellent development in both curriculum and classroom practice designed to encourage students as

independent learners. The range and use of assessment has also improved since the last inspection. Teachers now have a considerable bank of data to inform planning and organisation and to enable teachers to target under achievement especially in Key Stage 4. Students are clear about the symbols used in marking but the department does not grade work or record assessments consistently and written comment is sometimes brief and not well focused. The practice of setting targets for improvement is not yet well established. The department has clear outline planning of curriculum and is amplifying this at both key stages through the development of further interesting and creative resources which make teaching and learning styles explicit. A strong contribution to students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is made through a range of range of activities arising from the study of literature and language.

79 The English department is vigorously managed. There is a close focus on raising standards and improving the quality of provision though committed and thoughtful leadership. Relationships within the department are effective and businesslike. There are good arrangements for monitoring of teaching which need now to be made more systematic. Development planning is strong.

80 Since the last inspection the department has made considerable advances in several areas, in particular the focus on and approaches to literacy and provision for ICT. The department has the capacity and systems in place with which to address the points raised above.

• **Drama**

81 Drama is taught as a discrete subject in Key Stage 3. Students respond very positively and work well in lessons. By the end of the key stage attainment is broadly average. Students are particularly strong in co-operative group work and are able to organise themselves independently to create an improvised scene to perform to the class. They are able to empathise with differing roles and characters. In Key Stage 4 drama is offered at GCSE. In recent years attainment at GCSE has been consistently well above average and in the last two years all students have attained A*-C grades. By the end of the key stage students have made good progress with practical work and are able to adapt to different styles and forms of presentation and consider their effectiveness. In Year 11 students reached above average standards in presenting scenes from 'The Real Inspector Hound'. They are interested and enthusiastic in lessons and behave well. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned with activities that are thoughtfully structured. There is variety in lessons and tasks follow on sequentially. Relationships are excellent. A few students who are not enthusiastic about much of their other work are highly motivated by drama lessons. Challenging material is presented in creative ways but sometimes the pace of lessons is slow and too little is expected of students although they respond well to energetic teaching.

82 Drama plays an important part in the life of the college. Excellent planning supports the subject and an important contribution is made to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Extra-curricular activities are good and have recently included, for example, a 1940s concert evening, a presentation evening by Year 7 students and an annual production - 'Little Shop of Horrors' last year, which involved many students and staff. The college is involved with the Melbourn Arts Development Group and has had very productive links with the Convivio Theatre company.

Mathematics

83 Overall standards of attainment in mathematics are good.

84 Students enter the college with standards of attainment a little above the national average. They make good progress so that by the end of Key Stage 3 their standards of attainment in mathematics are good. This is confirmed by the results of national testing undertaken in the summer of Year 9. Taking the three years 1996, 1997 and 1998 together, the performance of students in national testing was well above the national average. There was, however, considerable variation in the results over these years with performance strongest in 1997 and weakest in 1998. Over the period the results of boys were well above the national average and were strongest in 1997. The results of girls were above the national average but declined steadily over the three year period.

85 In 1998, the weakest year, the performance was broadly in line with the national average, with three out of every five students achieving Level 5 or better. It was above the national average at the higher levels with two out of every five achieving Level 6 or better. Overall it was well below average in comparison with schools with students from similar backgrounds. In 1999 however the results of the college showed dramatic improvement. Four out of every five students achieved Level 5 or better, representing an improvement of twenty percentage points at this level over the previous year. Half of all students reached Level 6 or better, an improvement of ten percentage points at this level. The performance of students in 1999 is very good.

86 Standards of attainment are being maintained, so that attainment in the current Year 9 is also well above the national average at this stage. Students are developing good skills in the use of number and are being taught to use a calculator appropriately and accurately. They are accustomed to the use of letters to represent numbers in algebra. They have good spatial perception and are familiar with a variety of shapes in two and three dimensions. They can collect data, tabulate it and represent it in suitable diagrammatic form. Their skills are particularly well developed in terms of using and applying mathematics. They carry out practical work with care and accuracy, and approach investigative work thoughtfully and systematically.

87 Students make very good progress at Key Stage 4 so that at the end of this key stage their standards of attainment in mathematics are very good. This is confirmed by the results of GCSE examinations. In 1998 the results showed an improvement of fourteen percentage points over the results of the previous year and were well above the national average. More than three out of every five students gained GCSE grades in the higher range A*-C, and all students entered for the examination gained a grade in the full range A*-G. In 1999, results were better still, showing a further improvement of eight percentage points over the results of 1998. In this most recent set of GCSE results almost seven out of ten students gained a grade in the higher range A*-C, and again all students entered gained a grade in the full range A*-G. The performance of girls was better than that of boys in 1998; this position was reversed in 1999.

88 The present Year 11 does not as yet show promise of attainment at this standard. Students who find the subject more difficult, however, are approaching GCSE through graduated assessment. The remainder of the year group will be entered for the examination at foundation, intermediate or higher levels of entry. Students have continued to progress well in terms of the use of number and also in relation to shape, space and measures. High attainers are familiar with

trigonometry and can use a calculator for a wide range of operations. These students have developed considerable facility in algebra and can use a range of sophisticated techniques for the representation and analysis of data. Their work in terms of using and applying mathematics is very well integrated with the rest of the course and continues to be an unusually strong feature.

89 Mathematics is an essential tool for use in the study of a number of other subjects and conversely these subjects contribute to the study of mathematics. In science there is an emphasis in Year 7 on accurate measurement and recording. Both science and geography make a significant contribution to graphical work through data capture, logging and representation. In technology there is insistence on accurate measurement, marking and assembly. In the garden lay-out project tessellations are used. In other aspects of this subject it is necessary to use area, volume and capacity and again graphical skills are important.

90 The attitudes to learning of students themselves are an important factor in the progress they make both in individual lessons and overall. In one quarter of lessons observed the response of students was good, and in almost a half it was very good. In these lessons students listen to the teacher with care and pay attention to the work on the blackboard or whiteboard. They respond politely and usually accurately to direct questions and are willing to contribute to discussion at length. They approach practical and investigative work with thought and care and play games with enthusiasm. They apply themselves well to the examples set for them, sustain concentration well and take care with the presentation of their work.

91 Relationships between students are good and they co-operate well with each other for paired and group work. Relationships between teachers and students are positive and students are able to take full advantage of their teachers' comprehensive knowledge both of their subject and their capabilities. In rather more than a quarter of all lessons, however, the response of students at both key stages, though satisfactory overall could be improved. Some students do not respond quickly when asked to listen and some are unnecessarily noisy. Sometimes this happens despite well prepared, courteous teaching.

92 Teachers believe that students' attitudes to learning are improving. Good GCSE results over the last two years have helped to improve perceptions and build confidence and students are now aware of the structure of the course and the direction their studies will take. The scheme of work is very carefully managed by teachers so that the requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met, the resulting mathematics is attractive and interesting, and there is excellent variety of approach.

93 The head and second in department are the only two full time teachers of mathematics. They are very ably supported by two part time teachers and two teachers who also teach ICT and science respectively. The department has the makings of a very strong team, is very well led and confidence and trust between teachers is growing. Teachers meet weekly to focus on the development of an aspect of the curriculum or the needs of a year group and this discussion is of high quality.

94 All teachers have sound basic classroom skills. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all the lessons. It was very good in nearly half of all lessons and good or very good in more than three quarters. Lessons are carefully prepared in accordance with the scheme of work and are well pitched for the class and the examination objective. High expectations are built into the scheme.

Teachers have good exposition skills and their board work is clear and accurate. In some lessons the standard of exposition is unusually good, economical, clear, and contributes to the development of an excellent ethos for learning. In others the development of reasoning is facilitated by the careful use of coloured chalk to distinguish the aspects of learning. Very good practical work, mathematical games and the use of ICT are being carefully promoted through the mathematics Enquiry lessons.

95 Teachers set suitable homework in accordance with college policy. Their procedures for the marking of students' work are sensible and appropriate. Arrangements for the regular assessment of students' progress are very good. Teachers have good information on students' attainment to date, and maintain comprehensive records. They have good arrangements for liaison with contributory primary schools. They are well informed about the needs of individual students. Good provision is made for those students with SEN who make good progress as a result.

96 Accommodation is good and close to ICT and learning support. Communications are facilitated by the grouping of rooms and teachers have a base in which they can maintain ongoing preparation for the lessons of the day. Progress since the last inspection has occurred mainly in the last two years which have seen the great improvement in students' attainment described earlier, the rationalisation of the scheme of work, the development of procedures for targeting and recording attainment, and for monitoring work in the classroom. The new teaching team deserves the success it has achieved so far and has excellent prospects for the future.

• **Science**

97 The progress of students accelerates as they move through the college and they attain standards which are a little above average by the end of Key Stage 3 and significantly above it at the end of Key Stage 4. The results obtained in the 1998 National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds were above the national average for those gaining Level 5 and above and in line for those with Level 6 and above. Teacher assessments were close to the national averages at both levels. The results were well below those of schools having similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals. Over the past three years the average levels attained have been well above national averages with boys performing a little better than girls. The proportions gaining each level in the 1999 tests were similar to those of 1998. Every student taking the 1998 GCSE examinations in biology, chemistry and physics gained at least a grade C which is well above the national average. The proportion gaining A*- C grades in double science was in line with the national average. The results in 1999 significantly improved in double science, were similar in biology and physics and not quite as high in chemistry. Students in 1999 achieved GCSE results which were on average almost two-thirds of a grade better than those predicted from their performance in standard cognitive and attainment tests two years previously. The last inspection report indicated that the GCSE results compared well with national figures; they are now significantly higher. Strategies have been introduced this term in Year 7 to improve attainment in Key Stage 3 particularly at higher levels. Year 7 students now have an extra period of science a week and particular attention is being given to the development of thinking skills.

98 Students enter the college with levels of attainment that are close to average and they make progress which is at least satisfactory through Key Stage 3. Progress is very often good in lessons

so that by the end of the stage they have acquired a sound knowledge and secure understanding of the subject matter in each of the attainment targets. Year 7 students soon learn the essentials of good laboratory practice and how to observe and measure accurately and record appropriately. By the end of a lesson involving practical work higher attaining Year 9 students could explain the process of photosynthesis in terms of the chemical change. In another lesson a group of lower attaining Year 9 students consolidated knowledge of circuit symbols using a card game and then competently and confidently constructed electrical circuits. By the end of Year 9 students know positions of the main body organs and can describe functions of them. Higher attainers are able to explain how pressure changes with temperature in terms of particle movement. Most students accurately plot ray diagrams to show reflection and refraction and competently use simple chemical formulae. Progress is good throughout Key Stage 4 and by the end of it attainment is above average. In one lesson a group of Year 11 lower attainers used their knowledge well and successfully separated a mixture of three substances. In another students quickly appreciated problems using communication techniques involving light, sound and electricity. Another group were fully engaged in a challenging practical task on the effects of an enzyme. Higher attainers are able to explain rates of reactions in terms of collision theory. Most students accurately interpret distance-time graphs and calculate energy quantities and can describe effects of hormones in the body. Lower attainers identify metal and non-metal characteristics and place metals in order of reactivity. Practical skills develop to above expected levels particularly those of interpretation and evaluation in Key Stage 4. Students throughout have the numeracy skills to enable them to process experimental results and present them in various graphical forms. Their written work is well presented and they are careful to use correct terminology and units. Their ICT skills are well developed. Students with special needs make the same good progress as others. This is brought about by good teaching, appropriate grouping arrangements, provision of suitable tasks, and in some lessons, very effective in-class support.

99 Students are expected to behave well and try hard and they respond very well. There were no instances of any serious misbehaviour during the inspection. They arrive promptly and well prepared for lessons and almost always settle quickly. Apart from occasional instances of inattention they listen carefully and concentrate on the tasks. They respond well and willingly put forward ideas when encouraged. In practical work they co-operate very well working safely and productively without constant close supervision. Their attitude to homework is good.

100 The quality of teaching is very good overall and has improved since the last inspection. It is always satisfactory or better and very good or excellent in almost two thirds of lessons. Teachers know their subject well and make it comprehensible to students of all levels of attainment. They are very well aware of course and examination board requirements. They know students extremely well and usually skilfully question them to make them think and apply their knowledge. Teachers have high expectations and stress the importance of accuracy, correct use of nomenclature and quality of presentation. Lessons are very well planned and objectives are made clear at the start. Almost all lessons provide a variety of tasks. Support staff are used effectively and they know lesson plans in advance. Task sheets are well prepared and sometimes more than one version is available to cater for differing attainment levels within the group. Class management is almost always very good and practical work is conducted in a safe and orderly manner. Occasionally cases of inattention are not quickly corrected and sometimes groups of individuals are too large to ensure that everyone is fully occupied throughout. Most teachers adopt a purposeful and lively approach and conduct lessons at an appropriate pace. Encouragement, praise and humour are used to good effect. Homework is purposeful, often reinforcing and extending work done in lessons and frequently provides opportunities for development of research skills. Marking is done conscientiously with many informative comments. In an excellent lesson the objectives were made

clear and skilful questioning drew out information from students. A challenging class practical followed in which students were fully engaged working safely in pairs without the need for constant close supervision. The teacher moved around checking understanding and questioning to make students think and apply. In conclusion there was a clear summary and the homework provided extension and preparation for the next lesson.

101 The curriculum is planned well and provides good breadth with three types of GCSE courses. The schemes of work currently being updated ensure appropriate continuity and progression. ICT is now used much more than at the last inspection but lack of equipment still limits opportunities for hands on development of ICT skills. Assessment procedures are good and the information obtained is used for monitoring progress, deciding group arrangements and for guidance on selection of course. It is planned to use it for more target setting for individuals. Teachers are well qualified and have a good balance of experience. They are deployed effectively making good use of specialisms and expertise with particular groups. The department receives well organised high quality support from its technical staff but has to rely on goodwill and self-help to meet fully its servicing needs. There is strong leadership with a supportive and consultative style. All staff work hard as a team with a clear commitment to high standards and continuous improvement. There is sufficient accommodation but the laboratories need decorating and refurbishing. Students do not have books issued for permanent use at home and there is a shortage of ICT resources but otherwise resourcing is just adequate. The department has successfully addressed the issues raised in the last inspection report and is in a strong position to maintain improvement.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

102 The level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Challenging schemes of work provide students with opportunities to learn a broad range of two and three dimensional skills. There is an emphasis on the development of research skills early in the key stage. Students demonstrate an ability to investigate and write about artists and their work. Year 7 students have studied the work of William Morris and show themselves to have a good knowledge of his methods and techniques. At the end of the key stage they have a firm understanding of many artists and movements in art. The elements of art are well developed and Year 8 students are competent in using texture, pattern, shape and colour in textile designs. There is a good and appropriate use of sketchbooks, which are used regularly to collect ideas and images to be incorporated in work. Observation constitutes a high proportion of study during the key stage. In a Year 9 class students made quick pencil sketches of members of their class. They understand proportion and scale and use these elements in their sketches. Observation is also incorporated into three dimensional ceramic studies, as in Year 7 relief tiles on display in the corridors of the college. The high standards reported at the last inspection have been maintained.

103 At Key Stage 4, standards of attainment are very good. GCSE results have remained consistently high since the previous inspection and are significantly above the national average in the higher A* - C grades. In the most recent GCSE art, painting and pottery examinations students achieved 100% A*-C grades. The development of good technical skills is matched by sharp intellectual insights. Students research their subject thoroughly and plan their final outcomes with care. This is evident in Year 10 ceramics, where students develop ideas for the construction of their pottery and match surface decorations to their designs. Students have a thorough knowledge of artists' work and learn from in-depth study of individual artists and movements such as Art Nouveau. One Year 11 student developed his initial sketches of a tree into an art nouveau style twisted form. In textiles, students maintain a high standard of work. Year 11 students are independent in their studies and use sketchbooks to plan the development of their work. There is evidence of a range of artistic influences, including Celtic, Islamic, African and Romanesque in their textile designs. Overall standards of attainment have improved from the high standards reported at the last inspection.

104 Progress is always at least good. It is very good in examination classes in Key Stage 4. Good liaison with primary schools and 'art days' prior to joining the college instill positive attitudes towards art from an early stage. These attitudes are maintained over both key stages. The work set for students is challenging, for example the project on William Morris, where Year 7 students find out about the Arts and Crafts movement and Morris's designs as a substitute for nature. There is very good pace to all lessons and classes are quietly industrious. There are high expectations on the part of all art teachers and students are given much individual attention. SEN students make very good progress and benefit from individual attention and personal target setting. Marking is regular and consistent and students are motivated by teachers' written comments and effective day-to-day assessment. Regular visits to galleries during Key Stage 4 provide inspiration, and support very good progress. This has been maintained since the last inspection.

105 Students are well behaved and responsive to teacher direction; they enjoy art. They are respectful of the art rooms and take pride in the excellent displays of their work, both in the art

rooms and around the college. Art plays a major role in the personal development of students.

106 Teachers are well-qualified and have a very good knowledge of their subject. Their specialisms include textile design, jewellery, ceramics and fine art, providing a broad range of expertise. Teachers set high standards through their own commitment to the subject. Schemes of work are well planned and continuously reviewed. Assessment procedures are thorough and provide for both teacher and student comments. The high quality of day-to-day assessments is a major factor in the maintaining of high standards in art. Teachers' comments are valued by students who use them to progress their own standards of work. This is evident in ceramics where the teacher uses 'stick-its' to write comments in students' sketchbooks so as not to write over work. The high quality of teaching is seen to relate directly to the standards of attainment achieved by students. The quality of teaching was good or very good in both key stages in the last report - this has at least been maintained.

107 The department is well led and efficiently managed. Resources are used effectively and good use is made of the county library service and college library. Accommodation is of a good size and equipped to meet the needs of the main art disciplines. Strong sunlight during morning sessions in ceramics causes discomfort and blinds are considered to be a priority. The upstairs art rooms become stiflingly hot during warm days and have an effect upon students' concentration. Teachers are trained in the use of computers and good use is made of the library based computers for research. There is, however, a need for departmentally based computers for designing, scanning and digital camera work.

108 The department has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection and there is strong evidence that this will be maintained.

• **Design and Technology**

109 At the end of Key Stage 3 standards of attainment are good. The level of attainment is consistent across the disciplines of DT, which include food technology, graphic products, resistant materials and ICT applications within DT. A majority of students achieve National Curriculum Level 5. Girls' attainment is higher than boys', which is in line with national trends. Students' folders show an understanding of the process of design and a capability to solve problems. In food technology Year 8 students tested products for their fat content. They examined, measured and weighed products prior to cooking, then repeated the procedure afterwards. They made predictions based upon evidence. In resistant materials students used numeracy skills when measuring, marking out, cutting and assembling a wooden box for a travel game. Design skills linked to ICT are evident in Year 8 graphic products where students fit a logo and text to the net of a product package. There has been good improvement since the last inspection when craft skills in construction materials were insufficiently developed and experiences in resistant materials and processes were too narrow. At Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are very good. GCSE results indicate food technology students are achieving significantly above the national average. In graphic products and resistant materials they are above the national average. This represents a marked improvement since the last inspection. The most significant improvement is in resistant materials where results are much better. Girls outperform boys overall, in line with national trends. High quality presentation skills are observed in Year 11 graphic products where students work independently on a project based on packaging and containers. One student researched the materials used and the cost to produce designer carrier bags. Computer applications are used effectively to research products and to develop designs. The Year 11 non-GCSE group are skilful in planning designs and work to scale when designing an ornamental garden. The Year 11 community awareness group demonstrate good social skills when working with students from a centre for handicapped young adults. They use their food technology capability to teach visiting students how to mix different types of chocolate crispy recipes. On completion they work with the handicapped students to judge which are the most popular.

110 At Key Stage 3, all students, including those with SEN, make good progress. Students' work is regularly marked and the marking system understood. Teachers' comments guide students in their work and set challenging targets for improvement. They provide individual support for all levels of attainment and day-to-day assessment is particularly strong. At Key Stage 4 students make very good progress. Formal assessment procedures are well constructed and used to good effect by teachers. Students are required to work to criteria in making self-evaluating comments. There is a strong pace in lessons and students are taught to manage time and resources efficiently, for example, in food technology where Year 10 students make savoury and sweet dishes using herbs or spices. They plan their preparation and cooking time to meet the time available to them. There is very good improvement in progress over both key stages since the last inspection.

111 Behaviour in classes is consistently good at all stages. Good relationships exist between teachers and students, leading to positive attitudes towards work. Students are provided with challenging projects and tasks that require them to research ideas and learn to work through a process. Students develop in maturity as they progress through the two key stages. They are co-operative, as in food technology where students share cooking and preparation facilities.

112 The quality of teaching is mainly good and particularly strong at Key Stage 4. Teachers are well-qualified and have good subject knowledge. One teacher has recent industrial experience. All lessons are well-managed and teachers set demanding and open-ended projects and tasks.

Questions are well considered and there is good classroom discussion. Students are encouraged to be independent in researching projects and they contact companies to gain advice and technical information. One student used the DT based computers to fax a company for specific information during a lesson. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and represents a well-balanced team. There is good leadership and clear direction for the future. The department is supported by good technician support although the time provision is considered to be low.

113 Accommodation is very good and there has been a complete refurbishment of the department since the last inspection. The installation of a computer and electronics suite has initiated an excellent integration of ICT into DT projects and a new course has also been set up in GCSE electronics. There is a need for blinds to be fitted in food technology where strong sunlight constitutes a health and safety risk for students when using cookers. All other aspects of health and safety are well considered. The department has responded positively to the comments and issues raised in the last report and has made very good progress since then. There is the potential to continue to improve.

Geography

114 Students enter the college with a wide range of prior experience in geography. They make good progress through Key Stage 3 and, by the end of the key stage, attainment exceeds the expectations of the National Curriculum. Students have a sound core of geographical knowledge based on National Curriculum themes, are competent in using geographical skills, have an awareness of place and location, are familiar with the representation of data in a variety of graphical and diagrammatic formats and have a sufficiently secure grasp of these techniques to harness their knowledge effectively.

115 Good progress persists through Key Stage 4 for the many students who opt to continue geography. In 1998, 60% of the 80 students entered for GCSE geography gained grades A*-C against a national average of 49.8%. There were significant numbers of very high grades. This was an improvement on the previous year and this trend was maintained in 1999 when 73% achieved grades A*-C with no difference between the performance of girls and boys. Geographical knowledge is acquired around the requirements of the GCSE Syllabus and students have a broad and often detailed geographical knowledge, use terminology with reasonable proficiency and are competent in interpretational and representational skills. Project work is of a high standard. Year 11 students recall their experiences in the subject with satisfaction.

116 Students' work at all levels and including GCSE coursework invariably reveals high levels of student interest. Written work is tackled with vigour and often with enthusiasm, is neatly presented and generally completed. Response in lessons is good at Key Stage 3. Students are interested in the work and they respond well in discussions and to questions. They concentrate well and work productively on practical tasks with minimum supervision. The attention of some students flags towards the end of the long lessons and listening skills are not strong but good classroom management, motivating materials and teaching styles keep students on task. Response at Key Stage 4 is much more varied and surprising in view of the high quality of students' work seen during the inspection. Attitudes and behaviour of students in upper sets varies between very good and satisfactory. Students contribute well to question and answer sessions and are well

focused on their studies. They work productively in groups and show respect for the opinions and ideas of others. Some of the student/teacher relationships are very productive. Listening skills are still not well developed but students respond quickly to strong teaching. Much of the behaviour in lower sets at Key Stage 4 was unsatisfactory although there was some evidence that a small number of students were providing a special performance for the inspector. Students took time to settle in lessons and their progress was hindered by immature and discourteous behaviour. Students were reticent in oral work and poorly motivated.

117 Standards of teaching are always at least satisfactory, although they are significantly stronger at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. They are strongest where students have a clear understanding of acceptable behaviour. The easy, informal style used in some of the teaching is successful with some groups but not with poorly motivated, immature students in lower sets in Key Stage 4. Generally teaching is characterised by high expectations of students and attention to detail. Teachers use a range of approaches which catch and hold the interest of most students. Students make good progress in knowledge and understanding of the reasons for the relocation of the iron and steel industry through study of maps and photographs of the Port Talbot area. The attention of students in a lower set was immediately captured by Kenyan artefacts which were used to illustrate aspects of the geography of Kenya. Some teaching maintains good pace as in a lesson which used a variety of local materials backed by carefully directed prompting to gain much understanding of urban redevelopment. One or two lessons, however, did not make a brisk start and maintain a good pace with consequent losses in productivity and progress. Careful and regular assessment is well used to inform teaching and set targets. Teaching takes good account of the needs of students with SEN through the use of graded materials, stepped questions and differentiated tasks for individual project work, groupwork and self study. Students with SEN make good progress at Key Stage 3, but inattentiveness and poor commitment restricts the progress of some students at Key Stage 4. The assessment of students' work is thorough. The department's marking policy is known and understood by students.

118 Overall curriculum time is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 but, as reported at the last inspection it is below national norms at Key Stage 3. Opportunities to provide depth and consolidate study are hampered by the carousel delivery and the infrequency of lessons at Key Stage 3. Some students, especially low attainers, find it difficult to maintain attention over the sixty minute lessons.

119 The head of department gives effective leadership and a clear sense of direction. The emerging monitoring and evaluation of teaching, in a subject where significant numbers of students are taught by non-specialists, should provide a vehicle for fostering the spread of good classroom practice, and together with a review of curriculum delivery, ensure further improvement to the high standards already achieved.

History

120 The quality of specialist history teaching is generally good though more consistently so in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. The teacher has a confident grasp of the subject matter, conveying something of the spirit of the past with colourful detail and capturing the interest of younger students. A lesson on the feudal system was enlivened with simple role-play and gentle humour that clearly communicated the basic principles of the complex system of holding land in return for homage and service. Lessons are well prepared and supported by a range of task sheets, providing students of all abilities with the opportunity to make progress. SEN support staff are briefed and their time is usually used efficiently for the benefit of a wider group of students. Lessons in Key Stage 3 are well paced with an effective blend of teacher explanation, general questioning and student classroom tasks, usually linked to an appropriate homework exercise. In Key Stage 4, the pace is more leisurely and although lessons are effective, older students should be challenged more vigorously to encourage extended oral explanations backed by evidence. The skills of interrogating and interpreting contemporary sources are underdeveloped and should be targeted more specifically through the key stages. Video and other visual aids are used well and students are carefully prepared beforehand for any field work exercises. Classroom management is sound. Good behaviour is expected and firmly insisted upon, even if this means delay in the lesson. Student work is regularly marked; attainment is made clear using a published departmental mark scheme. Students know how well they are doing and their degree of effort is recognised. Short comments are attached to work and some targets for improvement set. These could be more specific. A marked feature of the lessons is the care and sensitivity shown in all dealings with the students.

121 Most students respond positively to courteous treatment. Most are well behaved although a few have to be reminded of classroom routines. They are able to concentrate and work well independently and in pairs. Structured task sheets meet the needs of students of differing abilities and aid independent working. Listening skills are not well developed at the start of Key Stage 3 and some students are slow to improve and still need guidance in Key Stage 4. Most, however, are co-operative and motivation is satisfactory or better in all lessons. Most are eager and enthusiastic about the subject. This creates an effective working atmosphere in lessons, based on mutual respect.

122 Students at all levels of attainment make steady but good progress in relation to their previous attainment. Attainment on entry is about average. By the end of the key stage it is above average in many but not all aspects of knowledge and skills in the subject. The limited time available to the subject has an impact in this respect. The ability to extract information from given secondary sources develops well during the first three years although there is less evidence of wider personal research. There is effective consolidation of factual knowledge, helped by the regular assessment routines of the department. Problem solving skills improve. Short term links between cause and effect are generally appreciated by the end of the key stage. A sense of time and sequence is well established. Students acquire a perceptive appreciation of what it was really like to live in the past. Written responses to the question 'Would you have liked to be alive at this time?' produced some perceptive and interesting comparisons of past and present circumstance. There is however, less progress than there should be in acquiring skills of interrogating and interpreting contemporary pictorial, written sources and artefacts.

123 During Key Stage 4 progress remains good but the rate of improvement slows and the quality of learning in lessons is more variable. Some of the classes are very large and this tends to dictate the style of teaching and limit the range of method employed. There is an appropriate focus

on preparation for the GCSE examination. Students make good progress in mastering factual content. The ability to extract information and use it in essays is sound but many students are content to work from the textbook, topic sheet or video material provided by the teacher. Wider personal research is evident but by comparatively few students. When taught to look with a more enquiring and discerning eye at contemporary sources, students quickly grasped the approach. Higher attainers soon appreciated that the context of each source has to be taken into account when judging reliability and value to the historian.

124 By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above average when measured against national expectations. Teacher assessments at the end of the key stage are based upon accurate understanding of the national standards. Attainment in the 1998 GCSE examinations was well above average when compared with national statistics but has fluctuated considerably in recent years. In part this variation reflects the shifting balance in attainment in the cohort of students taking the subject each year. Weakness in some aspects of local history project work also affected the attainment of students who were on the borderline of achieving higher grades in 1999. Although the percentage of the students securing grades A* - C was much lower in 1999 than 1998, the proportion of students securing A*/A grades was the highest ever. Girls did better than the boys at this highest level. All candidates secured a grade in the examination but a significant percentage of students did less well in history than in other GCSE subjects. GCSE results over the last two years is however, higher than that reported at the last inspection.

125 Leadership of the subject within the humanities faculty is positive and thoughtful. Schemes of work have been rationalised and are adjusted when assessment reveals inadequacy. Non-specialist colleagues are given appropriate guidance and good topic and task sheets are available. The specialist teacher marks all the common assessment tasks to ensure consistency. Greater use could be made of whole school data on Key Stage 3 attainment to project GCSE expectations and target underachievement. There is heavy reliance on photocopied material and although the textbooks are appropriate, there are not enough to provide students with a wider range of reference texts for home study. Allocation of money for the purchase of teaching and learning resources is low by national standards. There is an urgent need for more up to date projection equipment to improve the impact of visual aids.

126 The generally sound standards and good progress mentioned in the last report have been maintained although the department has not managed to boost the numbers opting for the subject in Key Stage 4. GCSE results have risen since the last report and are currently above the national average, but the fluctuation over time noted in the last inspection continues, with some students doing less well than they could. Curriculum time in Key Stage 3 is still below national norms and in Years 7 and 9 the experience of the subject remains intermittent because of the rotation of history, geography and RE in the humanities cycle. This has an impact on in depth studies and associated skill development.

Information Communication Technology

127 Standards on entry are satisfactory. Students are confident when using computers and capable in the use of basic applications, however, their touch-typing skills are limited. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards of attainment are above average. This represents an improvement from the last inspection when standards of attainment were broadly in-line with the national average. The majority of students achieve National Curriculum Level 5. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. The Key Stage 3 'Enquiry' course introduces students to basic computer skills and cross-curricular applications. It is well planned and provides a broad range of experiences. In the early stages of the course Year 7 students learn typing skills. They have a good knowledge of the position of the home keys and are able to apply previous knowledge of the keyboard when touch-typing. There is good and appropriate use of ICT in the course module that includes mathematics, as in Year 8 where students use 'Logo'. Most students know a range of Logo's and can construct them on a computer, for example – 3 digit spirals. In music, Year 9 students use 'Cubasis' software. They are able to add drum and other percussion parts into a previously recorded chord sequence. At the time of the last inspection there was insufficient opportunity for Key Stage 3 students to use their knowledge of information technology across wider contexts. This has improved and there is now good cross-curricular delivery. Statutory requirements are met.

128 At the end of Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are good. The most recent GCSE examination results for information systems are above the national average in the higher A*-C grades. There has been a consistent upward trend since the last inspection. Girls have outperformed boys until the most recent examination when the trend was reversed. Students are capable users of ICT and make full use of library-based computers for research and cross-curricular project work. There are some limitations imposed by a lack of sufficient up-to-date computers. The two systems based in the ICT rooms cause frustration and inhibit good learning, as evidenced in science where the limited provision of computers resulted in teacher demonstrations of datalogging, rather than students gaining hands on experience. The opposite occurs in DT where the more powerful and up-to-date PC's are based. In Year 10 students experiment with control application to operate working models. In a Year 11 graphic products lesson students demonstrate their ability to scan drawn designs and merge text in a project on packaging. Overall there is effective use of the resources and a broad range of ICT use takes place across the curriculum.

129 At Key Stage 3, students progress from a satisfactory level on entry to good at the end of Year 9. The introduction of typing skills in Year 7 results in students gaining confidence in the use of computers. There is good pace in lessons and the cross-curricular nature of all ICT lessons provides relevance to their work. Progression is consistent across all abilities and SEN students make good progress, as for instance in Year 7 English where the Systems Support Officer provides in-class support for students during lessons. At Key Stage 4 students make good progress. The GCSE Information Systems course is well-planned and lessons are well taught. For example, in Year 10 students learn how to use 'Logicator' software to operate a traffic light system. The pace of the lesson is good and students are set clear objectives. Students are made aware of their strengths and weaknesses and provided with personal targets for improvement. Students have access to computers out of lessons and make full use of time and resources. Workbooks and folders demonstrate a regular use of ICT in the presentation of work and in the use of graphs, charts

and graphic inclusions into their text. Progression of students' skills and attainment in ICT and co-ordinating its development across the curriculum was a key issue for action in the last inspection report. This weakness has been successfully addressed.

130 The majority of students have positive attitudes towards ICT and behaviour is mainly good. At best students at all stages apply themselves to the tasks set, they are co-operative and support each other in their work. There is good concentration in most lessons and students develop independent research skills, as during lunchtimes in the library resource base. Behaviour is very good in the majority of lessons. ICT lessons play a major role in developing collaborative skills, particularly during Key Stage 3 where pairs work on tasks when sharing computers.

131 The quality of teaching is very good. The core ICT staff have good knowledge of the subject, including industrial experience. There has been an effective in-service programme for all staff since the last inspection and the Enquiry course provides for the applications of Key Stage 3 ICT in all major curriculum areas. Teachers set challenging objectives and have high expectations of students. The staffing of ICT has been restructured in response to the weaknesses highlighted in the last report when there was no overall curriculum co-ordination and planning. Since then the college has appointed an ICT manager who is largely responsible for the curriculum development of ICT and a Systems Support Officer who provides expertise in the administrative use of ICT. He also assists in teaching GCSE information systems and provides in-class support. The scheme of work is well constructed and provides full coverage of National Curriculum requirements. Assessment procedures, including marking and reporting, are written into all subject schemes of work and there is effective collating of attainment levels on completion of Key Stage 3. Assessment procedures support students' development and set targets for future improvement. Assessment procedures have improved since the last inspection. The ICT manager has a wide range of responsibilities including a teaching commitment within the mathematics department. This results in a heavy workload, particularly in a rapidly expanding area of the curriculum. The Systems Support Officer provides excellent support.

132 The computer provision across the college is approximately in line with the national average. There has been a major investment in computers since the previous inspection but there are still serious limitations in the quality of computers based in the two main ICT rooms. The department has the capacity to maintain the improvement made since the last report.

Modern Foreign Languages

133 Attainment in French and German by the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with national expectations. Most students, including low attainers and those with SEN, can give details about themselves and their family life with some confidence and in reasonably well accented French or German. Higher attainers have good recall of newly learnt language and a reasonable understanding of their teacher's instructions, especially when they are spoken to consistently in the foreign language. Standards in top sets, however, are below those generally expected from highest attaining linguists. In a Year 9 top French set, for example, students had just been introduced for the first time to the past tense and struggled to make coherent sentences to describe activities in the recent past. It is understood that this work is now introduced in Year 8. Standards are always best where teaching is brisk and challenging, affording students ample opportunity to practise new language. In

some Year 7 and Year 8 French and German lessons, for example, skilful teaching has given beginners confidence to speak intelligibly about themselves.

134 GCSE results in both languages over the past three years have on aggregate been at around the national average and have shown a slight increase over this period. Girls' results have been higher than those of boys and by a greater margin than nationally. The small group of high attainers who took French GCSE in 1999 achieved 91% A*-C grades. Attainment in lessons in Year 11, however, is currently below expectations, particularly in speaking and listening skills. Higher attainers speak proficiently at an elementary level but show little sign of being able to hold more sustained conversations in the foreign language or of using past tenses with any confidence. Most students have difficulty understanding native speakers on tape and require greater training in the skills of listening in a foreign language. Many low attaining students, through poor motivation and in some cases a reluctance to involve themselves, are attaining standards well below those expected. Standards of writing and reading are somewhat better. Higher attainers produce some accurate written coursework and, with the use of dictionaries, can make sense of higher tier reading material.

135 At both key stages the progress students make in lessons and over time varies according to the quality of teaching and students' response to it. Currently students of French in Year 7, and those in Year 8 learning German, are making good progress and have reached a satisfactory level of attainment in the short time they have been learning a new language. At this level students respond favourably to teaching that is generally focussed and demanding. In Year 9, however, where the teaching is less challenging, progress is inconsistent and in some cases is slower than expected. In one German lesson, for example, a group of higher attaining students made very few gains in their acquisition of new language. The teaching lacked pace and purpose and gave the students too little opportunity to be actively involved.

136 Some students in Key Stage 4, mostly those of higher attainment, do reach expected standards by the time they take GCSE and a few show above average proficiency in all language skills. Low attainers and those with SEN respond well to rigorous teaching and in one French lesson made good gains in their use of phrases on the topic of transport and how they get to college in the morning. In other cases progress was held back by unacceptable behaviour and the teacher's unwillingness to confront it. Progress in the second half of most lessons is often slower than in the first half. Many students have difficulty sustaining concentration in a foreign language medium for the full sixty minutes. Teachers accordingly resort to activities that fill in time rather than those that promote new learning, and time is lost in claiming and keeping students' attention.

137 At both key stages the attitudes and behaviour of students are variable. In cases where teaching is strong and engaging, students behave sensibly, settle well to the tasks given them and enjoy language learning. Most Year 7 and Year 8 students, for example, and many others in both key stages show enthusiasm for their work and eagerness to answer questions. In a significant minority of lessons, however, especially in Years 9 and 11, response is unsatisfactory. Students are restless and reluctant to involve themselves; not everyone is attentive when the teacher explains or presents new language; there is a persistent undertow of irrelevant chatter. The teaching in such cases often lacks rigour or focus; occasionally there is a tacit acceptance of some unsatisfactory behaviour and a failure to check incipient restlessness. Many high attaining students have a positive attitude to their work, complete home study assignments on time and present written work neatly and with pride.

138 In the large majority of lessons the quality of teaching is satisfactory and in a few cases it is

better than this. Teachers generally have a secure grasp of the languages they teach and when they use French or German appropriately as the principal means of communication students understand and speak the language better. In many cases, however, the foreign language is not used sufficiently in the classroom, nor is there enough insistence on students' using it themselves for simple requests. Teachers should firmly establish the foreign language from the outset and develop strategies for ensuring comprehension without resorting to English.

139 Teachers' expectations of students vary considerably. Where teaching is at its best there is a brisk demanding pace and an implicit assumption of high standards of work and behaviour. In other cases teachers expect less of students than is appropriate. For example, there is little evidence of high attaining students being given more challenging or open-ended tasks within large classes containing a wide range of attainment. Teachers' planning and use of method and resources overall are proficient, but where they keep closely to the textbook there is a less engaging variety of method and a greater reliance on teaching through written exercises. As far as possible teachers should develop resources and materials that allow them to use the textbook as a helpful supplement rather than as the main vehicle of teaching. Listening comprehensions should be better exploited for their linguistic content and used as much for teaching listening skills as testing them. The overhead projector could be used to even greater effect.

140 Teachers manage students with courtesy and respect, though at times this is not accompanied by appropriate firmness. A particular strength of teaching is the practice of stating clearly the objectives of the lesson at the start. The ends of lessons are frequently rushed, leaving insufficient time to set home study tasks clearly or to wind down in the foreign language and dismiss students in an orderly manner. Marking of students' written work is regular and encouraging, but would benefit from a greater insistence on correction and repetition. Teachers make occasional use of ICT, but more needs to be done in this area to increase the motivation of some students, particularly boys.

141 Assessment of students' work, occurring regularly with results clearly communicated to students, is a real strength of the department's work, as are its very thorough handbook and schemes of work. The department enjoys effective leadership and relationships between staff are cordial, encouraging a spirit of sharing and mutual support. Good arrangements are in place for monitoring the performance of staff through classroom observation. The setting of targets for students in Key Stage 4 is at an early stage and should now focus on those in Year 10 who are under-performing. The department should urgently review the numbers it is intending to enter for Certificate of Achievement rather than GCSE in both years at Key Stage 4.

142 Timetable arrangements for some students do not provide for good continuity of learning. For two Year 7 classes two of the three lessons are on the same day. For one class all lessons are held on consecutive days, creating a six day gap before the next contact with the subject. In Year 11 setting arrangements are such that a few students are in sets inappropriate to their attainment and cannot easily be moved. The college has remedied this situation in Year 10 but needs to address the anomaly in Year 11 as a matter of priority. The time allowed for the study of two languages in Years 7 and 8 is barely adequate and there are currently no students in Key Stage 4 studying two foreign languages. If the college wishes to continue offering a second foreign language to most students in Year 8, it should make it easier for keen linguists to study French and German to GCSE. Time allocation should be reviewed across the key stages to give students a more even exposure to the languages they study. The department's accommodation is well appointed and spacious with some very good displays of students' work. Acoustic properties of rooms would be much

improved if all classrooms were carpeted. Regular exchanges and visits to France and Germany promote good cultural understanding. There would be considerable benefits from the employment of a foreign language assistant.

143 Over the past four years since the last inspection the department's strategic focus has centred upon vital areas of administration which needed improving and updating, such as policy documents, schemes of work and resources. All this has been achieved to very good effect and now the department is efficiently administered and well resourced. Now the focus should be shifted to the key objective of driving up standards through the improvement of teaching methods and the raising of expectation and academic rigour. It needs a clear plan for the means by which it intends to improve GCSE grades and tackle the disparity in performance between boys and girls. In view of its good leadership and the unity and commitment of its staff, the department has many of the conditions needed to make further improvements and raise standards.

• **Music**

144 Overall standards of attainment at the end of both key stages are above national averages. In 1999 GCSE results were very good; 93% of students achieved grades A*-C and 100% achieved grades A*-G. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year's successful results, when 80% of students achieved grades A*-C compared to 64.7% nationally in 1998 and 100% of students achieved A*-G compared to 96.5% nationally. The number of students gaining the higher grades has also increased.

145 Levels of attainment at Key Stage 3 are above average for the majority. In Year 7 students made good progress in a lesson on moods in music, to achieve a class performance called 'Mystery' using the whole tone scale. Those using chromatic xylophones and glockenspiels find the notes easily and quickly and use them confidently. They use appropriately sensitive dynamics and listen well to each other. Year 8 students, after studying Elgar's Enigma Variations, used similar techniques to vary either a well-known tune or their own melody composed on the keyboard. The lower attaining musicians exploit timbres and register well, while the higher attainers use inversion techniques and changes of mode. Facility on the keyboard shows what good progress has been made since starting the college. This is undoubtedly boosted by access to the keyboards at break and lunchtime in order to do their practical homework which is set regularly. By Year 9 keyboard skills are very well developed and confident. Students play using chord sequences over which they improvise fluently. Also in Year 9, students learn to use ICT for their compositions and make good confident progress. Particularly noteworthy in this class is the progress made by a student with SEN who recorded an interesting chord and percussion sequence. Progress of all students with SEN is good because many find they can be successful in a practical environment, and because they are individually well supported by the teacher. Progress in ICT is good across all levels of attainment, because the pupils are enthusiastic, and because the tasks set are challenging but achievable. Progress is hampered, however, by lack of computers. The department and the college have worked hard to provide the technology already in place, but more equipment is needed to promote higher attainment in composition particularly at Key Stage 3. Students' progress during Year 9 would be improved by more continuous exposure to music which at present is rotated with other subjects.

146 Levels of attainment at Key Stage 4 are well above average, which represents a clear improvement since the last inspection. Year 11 students practise improvisations on given musical fragments or poems. They work hard individually to achieve a good standard of presentation in a short space of time. The majority of students are able to develop ideas well while maintaining a good structure, while those who are less proficient at this aspect keep the music going. Progress in performance, which has improved since the last inspection, is due to a variety of opportunities to play and sing, to good instrumental teaching and to appropriate demands being made. In Year 10, students make good progress with part-singing, particularly boys. The whole group performed 'Mustang Sally' and 'Midnight' for which they had prepared well, particularly the bass guitarists.

147 Although students are quite reserved in class, they enjoy music throughout both key stages. They are now opting for music at GCSE and for instrumental lessons in greater numbers. There are over 100 students learning to play an instrument this year. Concerts and musicals are a feature of the school which generate great enthusiasm not only from the many students who take part but from the parents also. Video recordings of these concerts show lively performances of a good standard. Pupils behave very well in class; they are courteous and respect each other. They enjoy good relationships and have a good rapport with their teacher particularly at Key Stage 4. Students are developing good personal practice skills at both key stages through practising keyboards or using computers out of lesson time. In this task they are totally trustworthy. The same evidence of individual hard work can be seen in instrumental lessons and in the level of preparation for performance.

148 The quality of teaching is very good. The teacher is a practising musician, plays a variety of instruments very well and provides an excellent role model for the students. Lessons are very well planned to include a good range of activities. Exceptionally hard work has gone into providing appropriately challenging tasks and high quality materials for pupils of all abilities. The work of the department continually improves. The recent initiative of the evening music school, the many other lunchtime and after school activities, and regular concerts throughout the year are a testament to this. The curriculum provides a great deal of music to listen to, to play and to use as a stimulus for composition. The students are made aware of what is required of them in the National Curriculum for music and for GCSE. Procedures for assessing students' work are good and progress of all students is well monitored. Assessment is particularly good when regular opportunities are provided for reflection and self-assessment as part of the learning process. This is a very good department which has all the policies and procedures in place to maintain standards.

Physical Education

149 Overall standards of attainment in physical education are in line with national expectations. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly average though in some activities it is good. For example, in girls' hockey the standard of play is high with accurate passing and good stick control and in rugby boys show a good knowledge of the game with a keen awareness of the need for teamwork in supporting play. In Health Related Exercise (HRE) both boys and girls demonstrate good levels of personal fitness and a well-developed understanding of the benefits of training. Throughout the key stage, standards are usually higher where girls and boys are taught separately and it is in mixed groups that attainments are average.

150 By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are at broadly average levels. Games playing ability is

generally good, fitness levels are quite high but levels of knowledge and understanding in the subject are less well developed. Students who are studying for GCSE attain good standards. In badminton for example, there is a good balance between skills, knowledge and understanding. Most students play the game to a good level producing a wide range of well executed shots and have a good understanding of how to use them on court to outwit opponents. The most recent examination results are well above the national average for A*-C grades, and have improved year on year for the last three years. Students from all year groups represent the school in district, regional and national competitions in most traditional team games and especially in athletic activities.

151 Most students make sound progress over time. The open ended approach to practical tasks allows students with SEN to make good progress and show clearly increased levels of self-confidence. The best progress is made in Key stage 3 in those lessons where girls and boys are taught separately. The improvement made in boys' rugby, both in playing skills and in understanding a new game, contrasts sharply with much slower and less well-sustained progress in mixed classes in gymnastics. In Key Stage 4 core PE lessons, where more emphasis is given to participation in physical activity and new experiences in sport than to the further development of skills, knowledge and understanding, progress is slower. In GCSE classes progress is good and work in folders in both Years 10 and 11 shows clear improvement over time, for example in the gains in the students' correct use of specialist terminology and their understanding of the nature and purpose of a range of training programmes.

152 The majority of students respond very positively to the work in their PE lessons. They work eagerly and with enjoyment and most are well engaged in the activities over long periods of time. A few boys in Year 7 find concentration difficult and this affects the progress made in the lesson. In Year 9, a small minority of students, mainly boys, are inattentive during explanations and demonstrations of techniques. In many lessons the students work effectively in pairs and small groups. When this happens, progress is stimulated by conversation, discussion and decisions about how to improve. Most students are helpful, pleasant and reliable; levels of participation in PE lessons are very good.

153 The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory and in many lessons it is good. Teachers give clear instructions and effective demonstrations in setting clear objectives for most lessons. Class control and the organisation of activities is good showing clear attention to good planning. Most lessons have a good shape with sufficient time at the beginning for students to warm-up and opportunities for review at the end of the session. Teachers have sufficiently high expectations of all students and show them considerable respect using an encouraging and supportive style. In some GCSE theory, too much time is given to teacher directed work with insufficient opportunity for students to be actively involved in their own learning. Otherwise time and resources for learning are used most effectively and homework is well used to extend the work done in examination classes. Students are taught to work safely especially when assembling large apparatus in the gymnasium.

154 The curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements at both Key Stage 3 and 4. The overall programme is broad and balanced though achieving continuity across Key Stages 2 to 3 is not made easy with limited information and variable standards on entry. The requirement to extend knowledge and understanding, including personal health and the basis of fitness in Key Stage 4 requires greater emphasis. Separation of boys and girls, especially in the older year groups would allow both to make better progress. Appropriate arrangements are in place for assessing students' performance. The records produced are detailed, well written and include clear opportunities for

student self-assessment. The data collected should now be used to inform planning and influence curriculum development decisions. There is a strong, regular and popular programme of extra curricular activity in traditional sports and games; it makes a valuable contribution to the life of the school. The department is well-managed and, based on clear and comprehensive policies and records, its activities run smoothly. The facilities for PE are very good and resources for learning are of a good standard in both quality and quantity. Lack of funds prevents the departments from making best use of the minibus or hiring transport for team away matches.

155 Since the last inspection overall standards of attainment have been maintained. Standards in GCSE examinations have been significantly improved so that they are now well above the national average. Arrangements for recording and for the use of assessment information are now very well developed. When attention is given to the matters raised above, the department is very well placed to move forward.

• **Religious Education**

156 This report relates to Key Stage 3. The organisation of the RE timetable is such that no Year 10 or 11 lessons were taught at the time of the inspection. Key Stage 4 lessons are largely discussion based which limits the amount of written work available for scrutiny.

157 Specialist teaching is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Lessons are well prepared and based on a secure knowledge of the key elements of belief and forms of worship of the main world faiths. Books are marked regularly. Pertinent feedback is given. Students are encouraged not only to find out about Christianity and other faiths but also to relate this information to their own experiences, progressively formulating personal responses to some of the issues they encounter as they move through the key stage. Classroom tasks are appropriately challenging and the best lessons achieve a good balance between teacher explanation and student activity. Consistent routines for the start and end of lessons could be applied more rigorously. Lessons have clear objectives linked to neat blackboard summaries that provide a framework for student thinking. Good questioning techniques are used to encourage participation. All positive contributions from the students are valued and students are encouraged by the courteous and sensitive way the lessons are conducted. The teacher sometimes shows too much forbearance when dealing with poorly motivated students.

158 Most students behave well. In the best lessons, they are attentive, enthusiastic and co-operate well with the teacher and with each other. They make sensible points and volunteer personal opinions. In one Year 7 lesson, paired discussion produced some perceptive comment in short but confident presentations to the rest of the class about difficulties that arise when legal road safety requirements for motor cyclists conflict with religious codes of dress. Most maintained concentration, although the hour-long periods are too long to sustain the style of teaching best suited to achieving the aims of many RE lessons. A few students, however, have poor attitudes and are unwilling to participate.

159 Since the last report, RE teaching and learning programmes have been harmonised more fully with the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The time allocation in Key Stage 3 is significantly less than that recommended by the locally agreed syllabus but balances with other

humanities subjects. In Key Stage 4 however, student contact with the identified RE modules within the PSE programme is far below national recommendations. In Years 10 and 11 statutory requirements are not met since there is insufficient time for students to achieve the agreed syllabus objectives. The constraints imposed by limited time are compounded by the breaks in contact with RE. The school is working towards the creation of more opportunities to map formally the spiritual, social, moral and cultural potential in other subjects which would complement work undertaken in RE. Links with topics and themes used in assemblies are also being explored.

160 Despite the time constraints, most students in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress on selected aspects of the syllabus, except in the few lessons where the pace and flow of learning is disrupted by the behaviour of a minority of students. In the best lessons, there is significant growth in skills of organising information and students develop confidence in presenting views and opinions to others. They gain knowledge about world faiths and appreciate how religions communicate meaning through symbols and forms of worship. By the end of Year 9, some higher attainers appreciate how belief influences the way in which individuals live their lives and guides their response to moral issues. SEN students manage well and are encouraged to participate fully. Texts and worksheets pitched to meet differing levels of ability would benefit these students.

161 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations. Recall of knowledge of the stories, signs and symbols of Christianity and major world faiths is generally sound. The highest attainers show a growing understanding of the links between religion and culture in Britain and other parts of the world. They begin to appreciate that although the forms of religion may differ there are many common elements within the faiths they have studied.

162 Subject management is effective but muted. There is efficient use of limited resources. Reasonable procedures are in place to co-ordinate assessment when other colleagues in the humanities and PSE teams teach the subject. Development planning lacks sufficient focus, it requires a clearer identification of costed objectives to raise the profile of the subject. More artefacts are required to support teaching and learning, and to broaden the range of display. Current financial allocations for books and learning resources are low.

163 There has been progress since the last report, particularly in developing teaching schemes and common assessment tasks. A specialist now leads the subject. Some issues identified in the last inspection are unresolved, particularly the time spent on RE in Key Stage 4.

· **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

· **SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

164 The inspection was carried out by a team of eleven inspectors, including a lay inspector. During the week almost 170 lessons, registrations and assemblies were inspected. A number of lunchtime and after college extra-curricular activities were seen. Discussions were held with members of the governing body, the warden, members of the senior management team, heads of faculties, departments and years and other holders of positions of particular responsibility in the college. Curriculum, pastoral and administrative matters were discussed with many members of the teaching and support staff. Inspectors attended a Post 16 evening for parents and students, meetings of staff, heads of department, a department and the college council. Inspectors looked at the practical and written work of many students. All the available written work and reports of a

representative sample of students from each year group were scrutinised. Planned discussions were held with these students and informal conversations with many more. Before the inspection the Registered Inspector held a meeting attended by 22 parents. The team considered the responses of 44 parents to a questionnaire about their opinions of the college.

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165 DATA AND INDICATORS

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Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Year 7 - Year 11	545	10	184	19

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Teachers and classes

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Qualified teachers (Year 7 - Year 11)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	31.26
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	17.43

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Education support staff (Year 7 – Year 11)

Total number of education support staff:	17
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	310.5
Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	77.2
Average teaching group size:	KS3 25
	KS4 21

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• **Financial data**

Financial year:	1999
	£
Total Income	1,377,812
Total Expenditure	1,431,909
Expenditure per pupil	2,542.09
Balance brought forward from previous year	-20,034
Balance carried forward to next year	-74,131

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out: 603
 Number of questionnaires returned: 44

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	36	48	11	5	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	34	45	16	5	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	11	43	34	7	0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	18	57	14	11	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	30	45	14	11	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	23	55	11	7	5
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	20	59	11	9	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	16	50	11	16	7
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	11	57	23	9	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	9	50	30	9	2
My child(ren) like(s) school	32	55	11	2	0

Note: Nil responses are not included, therefore sum of percentages may not = 100%