

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **FREMAN COLLEGE**

Buntingford, Hertfordshire

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117540

Headteacher: Mr R Harcourt

Reporting inspector: Philip J H O'Neill  
3162

Dates of inspection: 5 – 8 February 2001

Inspection number: 184718

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the school Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	13 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
College address:	Bowling Green Lane Buntingford Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG9 9BT
Telephone number:	01763 271818
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs D Kaye
Date of previous inspection:	March 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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			English as an additional language	
11094	Ian Blair	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development Assessment Attendance Provision for the care of students Partnership with parents Accommodation and resources
19026	Brian Downes	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
			Special educational needs	
19414	Lionel Farraway	Team inspector	English	
30553	Richard Fuller	Team inspector	Mathematics	
31685	Valerie Girling	Team inspector	Art	
14691	Jennifer Hall	Team inspector	Science	
8622	Heather Housden	Team inspector	Physical education	
			Equal opportunities	
24042	Deidre Kay	Team inspector	Music	
			Religious education	
15372	Donaleen Ratcliff	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
2183	Peter Thompson	Team inspector	Design and technology	
			Information and communication technology	
5681	Derek Turner	Team inspector	History	
			Other courses in the sixth form	

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	7 - 12
Information about the college	
How good the college is	
What the college does well	
What could be improved	
How the college has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the college	
How well the college is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the college	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	13 - 15
The college's results and students' achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	15 - 17
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?</b>	17 - 20
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?</b>	20 - 21
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS</b>	21 - 22
<b>HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?</b>	22 - 24
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	25 – 27
<b>PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	28 - 32
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	33 - 57

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE**

Freman College is a comprehensive community school, serving students between the ages of 13 and 18 years. There are 730 students on roll, of whom 339 are boys and 391 are girls. There are 174 students in the sixth form. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs, at 15 per cent, is below the national average. The percentage of students with a Statement of Special Educational Need, at two per cent, is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, at three per cent, is below the national average. There are very few students of ethnic minority origin and only two students speak English as an additional language. Students enter the college with levels of attainment that are above average overall, but represent the full range of attainment. The great majority come from relatively advantaged social backgrounds. The college is the school of first choice for all students and is over-subscribed.

### **HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS**

This is an effective school that generally does well by its students, achieving high standards in many subjects. A rich and varied curriculum is supported through a high proportion of good teaching. Through clear leadership the school provides satisfactory value for money. However, the value for money provided by the sixth form is good.

#### **What the college does well**

- Good standards are achieved in English, science, geography, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and Latin.
- There is much good teaching, especially of students aged 14 -16 and in the sixth form.
- The sixth form provides the students with a rich and rewarding experience in which they thrive.
- The college takes great care to ensure students' welfare.
- The college does much to support students' social and cultural development.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities in the performing arts and competitive sport and games.
- The college is clearly led.
- The governors have a very good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses.

### What could be improved

- The standards achieved in information and communication technology are unsatisfactory and the college does not meet the National Curriculum requirements in the subject. Standards are too low in mathematics in the sixth form and in religious education in Years 10 and 11.
- There is too much unsatisfactory teaching.
- Insufficient use is made of information about the students' attainments to plan for their learning.
- The college does not work sufficiently closely with parents in supporting students' learning.
- There are weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of how well the school is performing.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

The school's strengths outweigh its weaknesses.

### HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in May 1995. The key issues identified for action at that time have been addressed satisfactorily. There has been some useful analysis of the factors resulting in the lower attainment of boys. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls has narrowed in most subjects. The weaknesses in the methods and resources used in teaching students in the lower sets that were identified in the previous inspection remain. There have been very significant improvements in the quality of financial planning, which is now very good. At the time of the previous inspection, the college was far behind national developments in the improvement of policy and practice for students with special educational needs. The current special educational needs co-ordinator has performed a herculean task in seeking to bring this area up to date. She has brought about very significant improvements but much remains to be done. Overall, good standards have been maintained and there have been improvements in some subjects. Through the recent strengthening of the governors' involvement in the management of the college, it is now set to achieve further significant improvements in its work.

### STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	B	B	D	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A Levels/AS Levels	A	A	A		

Using the average points scored, which takes into account the performance of all students taking the examination and not just those achieving the higher grades, the above table indicates that GCSE results in 2000 were above those attained nationally and below average when compared to the attainment of schools in similar circumstances, ie schools with similar

proportions of students eligible for free school meals. Results have improved over the last three years. The very high standards achieved at A-level have been maintained. From above-average levels of attainment on joining the college, students make steady advances in their work through Year 9. Progress in the development of knowledge, understanding and skill speeds up as students move through the remaining years.

In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, students achieved well above average standards. In relation to the standards achieved by similar schools, attainment in English was above average, whilst in mathematics and science it was below average. Boys and girls, aged 14, achieve comparable standards overall in English, mathematics and science. Attainment in the tests has steadily improved in these three subjects since the previous inspection, though below the national trend. Fourteen-year-old students reach the nationally expected standard in all subjects, other than information and communication technology. In Latin, standards are good for this age group as a result of very good teaching.

In the standards reached in the GCSE examinations, there were particular strengths in English, English literature, science, electronics and Latin, whilst well below average standards were achieved in religious studies and statistics. These results are reflected in the standards seen in lessons and in the students' current work in Key Stage 4. Sixteen-year-olds, at this stage, reach the expected standard in art, design and technology and history, whilst exceeding it in English, mathematics, science, geography, modern languages and physical education. Standards in religious education, at this age, are unsatisfactory. In the General National Vocational awards, taken in the sixth form, an above average proportion of students achieved a qualification. The college sets and meets satisfactorily challenging targets in most subjects. Overall standards in information and communication technology across the college are unsatisfactory.

Candidates entered for A-level in 2000 achieved well above average standards. The overall pass rate was above the national average. Attainment at A-level was well above average in English, mathematics, chemistry, physics, art and design, geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education; average in biology; and below average in design and technology and music. Standards were particularly high in chemistry and French. Overall standards have improved steadily over the last four years. These standards are not fully reflected in the current Year 13, particularly in mathematics where attainment is unsatisfactory. This results partly from the quality of teaching and partly from the relatively lower levels of attainment of the students when joining the course. Standards seen in business studies are average.

The students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily. Very highly-attaining students achieve well, as do the few students who experience English as an additional language. There has been a steady improvement in the standards of attainment since the previous inspection, but slower than the national rate of improvement.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	The great majority of students are happy and value their time at the college. They have positive attitudes to their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Generally good. Students are polite to each other and to the adult members of the college. There were no exclusions over the last year.
Personal development and relationships	Students respond well to the opportunities to exercise initiative and responsibility. They act responsibly. Relationships are mainly harmonious and mutually supportive.
Attendance	Satisfactory. A few students are persistently late in the mornings.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 13-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16
Lessons seen overall	satisfactory	good	good

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

The overall quality of teaching is good. Of the lessons seen, 17 per cent were very good, 38 per cent good, 32 per cent satisfactory and 9 per cent unsatisfactory. There was a small measure of outstanding teaching and of teaching that was poor. The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory in Year 9 to good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Teaching is very good in Latin and good in English, science, business, geography, modern languages, music, physical education and the GNVQ courses. It is satisfactory in mathematics, art, design and technology, history, information and communication technology, and religious education. Teaching is unsatisfactory in art in Year 9 and in religious education in Key Stage 4. Literacy and numeracy are taught satisfactorily. The good quality of teaching creates good learners, who work persistently to improve their work. The central strengths in teaching are the teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm and the clarity with which they explain tasks, thus ensuring that students are sufficiently clear about what is required of them. The main weaknesses in teaching come from poor planning and unclear objectives.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The college covers the full range of the National Curriculum, except in the case of information and communication technology where some key aspects are not taught. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities in the performing arts and competitive sport and games. The college does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all the students.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory and improving: much work has been carried out over recent years to bring the college's work in this area in line with national developments.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. The few students concerned are given the help they need to acquire sufficient fluency to participate fully in lessons.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. The school supports the students' spiritual and moral development well and is particularly good in what it offers to extend students' social and cultural horizons, especially the opportunity to participate in a very good range of performing arts.
How well the college cares for its students	The college takes very good care of its students. The teachers know individual students well and give them good guidance. There are some weaknesses in the way students' progress is tracked.

The school does not have good links with parents, with the consequence that the extent of parents' involvement with the students' work is limited. The response to the questionnaire is unduly negative for a school that does so well. The teachers' support for students is weakened by the often ineffective use of the results of tests and examinations to guide future teaching.

## HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The college is clearly led. However, the college acknowledges that the management systems in place, though satisfactory, do not work well in supporting the future development of the college.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are now forming themselves into a cohesive and more effective group. Under the present chairmanship they are very well led in taking the college into the next stage of its development.
The college's evaluation of its performance	Though the college takes some measures to evaluate how well it is performing and to relate its achievements to those of similar schools, this is an area that requires further refinement if it is to be fully effective.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are deployed satisfactorily towards the improvement of teaching and learning.

There are sufficient staff to teach all subjects, apart from religious education in Key Stage 4 where there are weaknesses in the teaching of students who do not take the GCSE examination in religious studies. Accommodation and resources are adequate. The sixth form is very well housed. The headteacher has provided a distinctive vision for the college over the years. The college has been slow to adapt its management systems to current needs, but has made a good start through the more robust involvement of the governors.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fact that their children are happy at school and well supported in their learning.</li> <li>• The good progress made by the students in their work.</li> <li>• The good teaching provided.</li> <li>• The good range of extra-curricular activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teaching of mathematics.</li> <li>• The way the college works with parents.</li> <li>• The limited amount of homework and the inconsistency with which it is set.</li> <li>• The information provided about the students' progress.</li> <li>• The management of the college.</li> </ul>

The inspection evidence supports the parents' overall positive perception of the college. It concurs with the parental concerns about some of the teaching of mathematics. As the parents suggest, the college does not work well with them. Inspectors did not find evidence to support the parents' misgivings about homework; on the contrary, their findings support the conclusion that homework is used well to support learning, albeit better in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than in Year 9. Inspectors find that, contrary to the view expressed by some parents, the college provides good information about the students' progress. They agree that, although management is satisfactory, overall, there are some weaknesses.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The college's results and students' achievements**

1. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, a well-above-average proportion of students reached the standard expected at this age in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students reaching the higher Level 6 was also well above average in these subjects. These results represent good progress from above average levels of attainment by students joining the college at the start of Year 9. Compared to schools in similar circumstances, ie schools with similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals, the proportion of students reaching the expected Level 5 was average in English and mathematics and below average in science, whilst attainment of the higher levels was above average in English, below average in mathematics and average in science. Looking at the average points score, which takes into account the performance of all students taking the tests, students achieved well above average standards. In relation to the standards achieved by similar schools, attainment in English was above average, whilst in mathematics and science it was below average. The differences in the standards achieved across these three subjects can be traced to some extent to weaknesses in the implementation of some key policies and to variation in the quality of teaching. More significant, however, is the fact that the college's influence on the attainment of these students extends only over one year.
2. Boys and girls, aged 14, achieve comparable standards overall in English, mathematics and science. Attainment in the tests has steadily improved in these three subjects since the previous inspection, but the trend in attainment for 14-year-olds has been below the national trend. Fourteen-year-old students reach the nationally expected standard in all other subjects. In Latin, standards are good for this age group as a result of very good teaching.
3. In 2000, 16-year-old students achieved above-average standards in the GCSE examinations. The trend in attainment, however, has been below the national trend. The proportions of students achieving five or more A\*-C grades, five or more A\*-G grades and one or more A\*-G grades have all been well above the national averages. In relation to the achievements of similar schools, these proportions were below average, above average and very high respectively. The rate at which students progressed from their attainment at Key Stage 3 to GCSE has been above the national rate for achievement of five or more A\*-C grades and well above it for achievement of five or more A\*-G grades and one or more A\*-G passes.
4. In the standards reached in the GCSE examinations, there were particular strengths in English, English literature, science, electronics and Latin. The proportions of students' A\*-C grades was well above average in English, mathematics, science, business and French; above average in German and history; average in design and technology and music; below average in art and design and geography; and well below average in religious studies and statistics. These results are reflected in the standards seen in lessons and in the students current work in Key Stage 4.

5. Candidates entered for A-level achieved well-above-average standards. The overall pass rate was above the national average. Attainment at A-level was well above average in English, mathematics, chemistry, physics, art and design, geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education; average in biology; and below average in design and technology and music. Standards were particularly high in chemistry and French. Overall standards have improved steadily over the last four years. These standards are not fully reflected in the current Year 13, particularly in mathematics where attainment is unsatisfactory. This results partly from the quality of teaching and partly from the relatively lower levels of attainment of the students when joining the course. In the General National Vocational awards offered in the sixth form, an above average proportion of students achieved a qualification. Standards in business studies are average.
6. The school sets and meets satisfactorily challenging targets in most subjects. However, these targets are not yet rooted in a sufficiently sophisticated analysis of the attainments and learning needs of individual groups of students.
7. Students engage in a limited range of writing across all subjects. They apply their numerical skills to the analysis and interpretation of data in some subjects, particularly in science. In science, for example, they describe their experimental findings using the appropriate language. They represent data using a good range of modes of representation. Overall standards in information and communication technology across the college are unsatisfactory as the college has been slow to develop this area.
8. Students join the college with above-average levels of attainment, though they exhibit a wide range of attainment. Overall, they make good advances in the development of knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the college. Satisfactory progress through Year 9 accelerates to a more rapid rate through the remaining years. The students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily, although not as well as their peers, in relation to their prior levels of attainment. The teaching they experience is not yet sufficiently underpinned by a detailed knowledge of their needs. The special educational needs' co-ordinator has undertaken a monumental task in preparing individual education plans for all students on the register of special educational needs, but these plans have not yet fully taken root in practice. Very highly-attaining students are supported in making good progress in all aspects of their work. The few students who experience English as an additional language in their homes are supported effectively in the development of the level of fluency required to participate fully in lessons.
9. There has been a steady improvement in the standards of attainment since the previous inspection but it has proceeded more slowly than the national rate of improvement.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

10. Students show a positive attitude towards the college and are keen take full advantage of what it offers them. This is due mainly to the congenial atmosphere that the staff provide. Year 9 students, for instance, commented on the freedom they are allowed; they appreciate the way teachers respect their views. Overall, students' response to lessons is good. The quality of their response is closely related to the quality of teaching. Where teaching is good or better, which is the case in most lessons, students are fully engaged in all aspects of the lesson, show a high level of motivation

and respond positively to the enthusiasm of the teacher. In the minority of lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, students tend to lose concentration.

11. Behaviour is generally good both in classrooms and around the college, with students responding well to the high expectations of the staff. Most of the time they act as responsible young adults, showing courtesy and consideration to one another. Just occasionally there is some inappropriate horse-play. Students show respect for the property of the college. For example, there is no evidence of litter or graffiti anywhere around the site: this in spite of the fact that many of the corridors and public areas are not in good decorative order. The college is an orderly community, generally free from bullying and racism, with those from minority cultural and religious backgrounds, both students and staff, fully integrated into its life. However, instances both of bullying and racism do occasionally occur and are a cause of concern for some parents. When incidents of bullying do occur, the college has generally effective procedures in place to deal with them, mainly through the tutor group system. There were no exclusions over the year preceding the inspection.
12. The quality of relationships within the college, both amongst students and between students and teachers, is very good. A major contributory factor to this is the effectiveness of the tutor group system, which attaches each student to a member of staff for the whole of their time in college, thus enabling them to get to know each other well. These arrangements encourage friendships to be formed across the year groups. This results in older students helping the younger ones. For example, sixth form students sometimes help those with special educational needs during free periods. Students show initiative and responsibility for their own learning, especially in the sixth form. For example, two students determined to take A-level in information and communication technology, even though this is not offered as an option at the college, bought their own textbooks, entered themselves for the examination and built the necessary equipment from spare parts supplied by support staff.
13. Attendance levels at the college are broadly comparable with the national average for secondary schools. At the time of the inspection, however, it was much lower than usual, in some classes down to 80 per cent, due to illness. There is no significant variation in attendance across the year groups. Family holidays taken during term time are a major contributor to authorised absence, which is higher than average. Unauthorised absence is consistently below the national average. Overall, attendance is satisfactory. Virtually all students arrive at college punctually; hence, lessons start and end on time, even though there are no bells to indicate lesson changes. A small number of students, however, persistently arrive late and this has a detrimental effect on their learning.

## **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

14. The overall quality of teaching is good. Of the lessons seen, 17 per cent were very good, 38 per cent good, 32 per cent satisfactory and 9 per cent unsatisfactory. There was a small measure of outstanding teaching and teaching that was poor. The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory in Year 9 to good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. This is broadly similar to the judgements about teaching made at the previous inspection.

15. Teaching is very good in Latin and good in English, science, business, geography, modern languages, music, physical education and the GNVQ courses. It is satisfactory in mathematics, art, design and technology, history, information and communication technology. Teaching is unsatisfactory in art in Year 9. In religious education, whilst teaching is good in Year 9 and in the sixth form, it is unsatisfactory in Key Stage 4. Literacy is taught satisfactorily; though the college has a sound policy it has not been implemented fully in the teaching of all subjects. The teaching of numeracy is in a similar position. In this respect, the college has much ground to make up in relation to national developments.
16. Effective planning of lessons is rooted in the teachers' good knowledge of what they teach. There is often a liveliness and good humour in lessons allied to a clear sense of purpose. The students respond to this positive atmosphere and work hard to achieve to the full extent of their competence. A marked feature of many lessons is the clarity with which teachers explain what the students are to do and to learn. This leads to a crisp start to lessons, with the students settling down quickly to their work and making good advances in learning. At the heart of much of the best teaching lies the teachers' skill in providing a progressively demanding series of stimulating activities that embody essential concepts and skills. In some cases, the students almost unwittingly reach some high levels of understanding. This was clearly the case, for instance, in an outstanding English lesson in Year 10 when the students were exploring the text of Dickens' 'Hard Times'. The teacher, through very skilled prompting, steadily led the students to some excellent analysis of the text, whereby their ideas reached higher and higher levels of sophistication. The teacher's unobtrusive but well-defined interventions were key features, too, in a mathematics lesson in Year 11. In this instance, the students all felt involved in the lesson, as all their ideas were valued. This increased their confidence in offering solutions to demanding problems and led to significant advances in learning. This level of purposeful, positive intervention by teachers was a strength of many other lessons.
17. High expectations of behaviour are revealed in the generally rigorous adherence to classroom routines. This leads students to develop a commitment to learning that becomes firmly rooted as they move through the years. Students experience an appropriate mixture of whole-class teaching, group and individual work. Teachers are usually adept at matching the teaching style to the purpose of the lesson. Homework is used well to support learning, but there are occasional inconsistencies in the way it is provided and in the extent to which it is related to the pupils' learning, particularly in Year 9.
18. The main weaknesses in lessons lie in poor planning and imprecise objectives, whereby the lesson proceeds and ends in a rather blurred way, leaving the students to wonder about the point of it all. In these cases, the students have difficulty becoming involved in the lesson and make little progress. Occasionally, too, the lack of pace, urgency or challenge leads students to settle for a modest pace to their work which is matched by very modest achievement. Often, too, key concepts are not explained sufficiently or tied in to what the students already know.
19. The teaching of students with special educational needs is satisfactory in all subjects apart from science, where it is good, and Latin, where it is very good. In these subjects, teachers are familiar with students' individual targets and set work at an appropriate level. In other subjects the provision is less consistent. Where extra support is provided in lessons, there is good teamwork between teachers and classroom assistants and this is a contributory factor towards raising standards.

There are very detailed and specific individual education plans for students with special educational needs, but these are not yet consistently used to inform teaching. The few students for whom English is an additional language are well supported where appropriate. The progress they make in their work in relation to their prior attainment is not significantly different from that made by their peers. This is also true of the higher-attaining students and the students with exceptional skills.

20. In the best lessons, teachers are quick to detect barriers to learning and provide individual students with well-targeted support. The teachers' knowledge of the individual students is often a strength, leading to appropriate adjustments to lessons to include those who struggle with some of the more demanding concepts. The success of many lessons comes from the ease with which the teachers relate to the students. They, in turn, respond by seeking help and talking easily about what they find difficult. This strong bond of trust between the students and the teachers is seen by the students as a defining feature of the college.
21. The quality of teaching is reflected in the students' rapid acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding. The students respond readily to lessons, particularly when the teachers' enthusiasm for the subject is evident and the point and purpose of the lesson are clear. They have a fair idea of the extent of their achievements and how best to refocus their efforts in order to do better. However, information about students' attainment is not always sufficiently organised to help teachers make refined judgements about the help they need to give in individual cases.

#### **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?**

22. Students enjoy a good range of curricular opportunities both formal and informal. The National Curriculum, in Year 9, is enriched by the addition of Latin and drama. At Key Stage 4, students are offered a good range of courses. They are all required to study English, mathematics and science, design and technology, a modern foreign language and physical education. This provides a good balance between the arts, humanities and sciences. The choice of four additional subjects, including business studies and religious education, and the opportunity to continue the study of two languages enrich the students' experience further. The number of subjects studied for GCSE has increased since the last inspection, thus providing a wider choice to suit the interests and enthusiasms of the students. The curriculum in the sixth form is rich and varied. All students are required to take A-level general studies. This course broadens students' horizons and works well in preparing them for the next stage in their lives. They extend their interests through the opportunity to choose two, three or four additional subjects from the good range offered at both AS and A-level. The curriculum is further broadened through the opportunity to work towards General National Vocational Qualifications in leisure and tourism and business. Many extend their skills further by working towards the Community Sports Leaders' Award.
23. The requirement for the acquisition and development of skills in information and communication technology in all curricular areas is not met, with the consequence that students' knowledge and skill in this area are unsatisfactory. In religious education, the treatment of world faiths in Year 9 is too shallow.

24. Strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory. However, the arrangements by which individual departments are responsible for the monitoring and the maintenance of standards of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum at both key stages do not work well. There is a lack of rigour in correcting errors in workbooks. There is evidence of good practice in science, geography and design and technology. In these subjects there is a strong awareness of the importance of language and number. No opportunity is missed to extend and apply pupils' knowledge of number and to encourage accurate writing.
25. There is a good range of learning activities outside the classroom. These are often integral parts of GCSE, AS-level, A-level and GNVQ coursework, involving field studies, work experience and educational visits both day and residential. These activities make a good contribution to the standards achieved and to students' personal development.
26. A rich array of extra-curricular activities allows students to pursue new interests, acquire or improve existing skills and to compete and engage in personal challenge. These activities make a substantial contribution to students' personal and social development. They also bring together students of all ages, providing older students the opportunity to exercise leadership in organising college events. For example, they organise concerts for charity. Good planning ensures a high participation rate in these activities. House activities promote a sense of belonging to the school community and foster healthy competition as well as providing opportunities for fun. The college is well known for excellence in music and drama.
27. The college encourages students to make considered decisions about their future careers and to work towards their personal aspirations. The students receive sound careers advice. There are good arrangements for providing personal guidance to students in the sixth form. Students engaged in GNVQ courses make good use of work-related opportunities. The careers programme is currently under review and has been steadily enriched.
28. The college works hard to ensure that all students benefit fully from their experience there. Tutors know their students and provide a good first point of contact should difficulties arise. In many cases older students support their younger peers. The formal guidance provided by a course entitled 'Learning for Life' is poor and, in its present format, is unproductive.
29. The college provides satisfactorily for students with special educational needs, though developments in this area are considerably behind most other schools nationally. The special education needs co-ordinator has done an outstanding job in establishing a register of pupils with special educational needs and in accelerating the development of very clear individual education plans for these students. She works closely with external agencies, representatives from each department, parents and students. Clear guidance and information are given to all staff. The use made of this information to support learning within the classroom is inconsistent; for example, it is unsatisfactory in art and very good in Latin. The use of work set at different levels for pupils of differing levels of attainment is also inconsistent; for example, the same materials and methods are used in a middle and lower set in French.

30. The college offers a soundly based programme of personal and social education, including health education. Students are provided with clear information on drugs and substance abuse. There is a comprehensive programme of sex education. Students are encouraged to make positive decisions in the way they conduct their personal lives.
31. The college has established positive links with the local and wider community and these are used effectively to support learning. Students benefit from work experience placements in the town and elsewhere in the county. Representatives of local industry make a good contribution to careers guidance. There are well-organised visits to places of worship. Through its music and drama productions, the college provides a much-appreciated venue for entertainment for the surrounding area. There are positive links with social services and with the local police. The college makes a strong contribution to sporting achievement regionally and at county level in providing skilled sportsmen and women. College teams compete effectively in the local area and within the county.
32. Teachers work well in partnership with colleagues in the middle schools in order to ensure that what is learned there links with work in Year 9. This collaboration is well established in some subjects but is tenuous in others. Tutors in the sixth form and senior staff have established valuable links with institutions of higher education.
33. All students have equal access to all subjects of the National Curriculum at Year 9 and in Key Stage 4. Through their careers education programme and discussions with their form tutors, students are clearly guided in making option choices in Year 9, sixth form choices in Year 11 and decisions about higher education in Year 13. The majority of students are satisfied with their option choices and sixth form choices. Students are set in Year 9 and placed in two bands in Key Stage 4. These arrangements generally work to the benefit of all students. There is good curricular provision for gifted and talented students and for students with English as an additional language.
34. The wide-ranging curriculum in the sixth form ensures that all students pursue courses relevant to their aspirations. Students also have good opportunities to extend their sporting skills to new activities such as badminton.
35. The college does not satisfy the statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship, although moral issues are treated helpfully at assemblies. The college makes a clear statement in its prospectus on its commitment to the spiritual, moral and social development of the students. This commitment is reflected in the quality of what it provides. This area was identified as a strength in the previous inspection report; it continues to be so.
36. The deeply reflective way that most religious education is taught encourages a sense of spiritual awareness and also contributes positively to the students' moral, social and cultural development. In other subjects, too, good use is made of opportunities for reflection beyond immediate and particular concerns. This is clearly evident in English and music, where appropriate issues are discussed in relation to the students' personal beliefs and concerns. The feelings and attitudes conveyed by war poets in an English lesson and, in geography, the predicament of whole populations destroyed by flooding are explored as cases touching our most fundamental moral concerns. Students are encouraged to see in science an expression of the human spirit in search of meaning. They are led to see the implications of their behaviour for their peers. Moral issues are further explored in geography when looking at the consequences of changes in consumer demand to the economies of less economically developed countries. There are missed opportunities in religious education, in Year 9, to explore

the diversity of religious beliefs.

37. The college provides very well for students' social and cultural development. Students' social development is encouraged by the successful creation of a sense of community. Social attitudes are encouraged by an accepted code of behaviour and by the effective use of group and paired work in many lessons. Self-reliance is developed by encouraging students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning as they move through the years. The good level of extra-curricular provision also makes a significant contribution to the students' social development.
38. The curriculum makes good use of opportunities to relate to the cultural diversity of British society and celebrates the diversity of culture around the world. This is achieved in music, for instance, by using musical instruments from other cultures. Students' sensitivity to cultural diversity is further developed through the experience of up to three modern foreign languages and two classical languages. In Latin, for example, the students are made vividly aware of the cultural setting of the language and see in classical civilisation many of the values and beliefs to which we adhere today. College visits and trips to Germany, France, Italy and Belgium enable students to learn about other European cultures. Students' attention is particularly drawn to their own cultural heritage through English and history. The annual camp at Stratford-upon-Avon promotes this appreciation and provides an opportunity to share an experience with visitors from other nations.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

39. Overall, the college discharges its duty of care very well. It has very good procedures in place to ensure the welfare of its students, with senior members of staff taking personal responsibility for specific areas; for example, a head of department, who is also a teacher governor, is responsible for health and safety. He conducts a useful annual 'safety week' during which a thorough health and safety audit is carried out. He ensures that electrical equipment is tested each year and regularly reviews the college's health and safety policy. Risk assessments are carried out appropriately by departments. Governors are well informed about health and safety issues through relevant items placed on the agenda of their meetings. There are very good arrangements for responding to the outbreak of fire. A dedicated medical room is administered well by one of the office staff. There is a sufficient number of staff with first aid qualifications and all staff receive some basic training. Additionally, Year 9 students are taught basic first aid through house group sessions. The only significant deficiency in the college's provision is the toilet facilities for students. Most of these are in urgent need of refurbishment and, in the shorter term, of more regular servicing.
40. Procedures for child protection are all in place. They are clear and understood by the staff who are kept up to date and fully informed about how to identify students at risk. Good links have been established with social services staff and with the educational welfare officer with responsibility for child protection.
41. The college has good procedures in place to monitor and improve students' attendance. Registers are marked appropriately. There is a quick and efficient response to absence: tutors follow up any unexplained absences by phoning home or asking the office staff to do so. There are effective measures to deter internal truancy.
42. Overall, the provision for promoting good behaviour is satisfactory. An appropriate policy lists the sanctions imposed if students misbehave, but it is rather thin on rewards for good behaviour. Classroom behaviour is generally well managed, especially in

lessons where the teaching is good. The college treats cases of oppressive behaviour seriously. Discussions take place between the group tutor and the parents of the students involved and good strategies are in place for dealing with both the offender and the victim.

43. The induction of new students is well managed, and supported by ample information about each student supplied by the providing middle schools. However, as the transfer takes place in the middle of a key stage there is some uncertainty about the level of students' attainment on entry, with the consequence that the assessment of students' progress in Year 9 is difficult. The college is aware of this problem and is addressing it in collaboration with the middle schools. Despite these difficulties, the assessment and monitoring of students' academic progress are satisfactory. Indeed, students report that they find the procedures in place are helpful in enabling them to know how well they are doing and where they need to improve. There is some variation in practice across subjects. For example, students' progress is clearly tracked in science, but less so in physical education. Evidence gathered through assessment is not used well to guide curricular planning.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

44. Overall, the parents' views of the college are satisfactory. Most parents are supportive of the college and recognise its many strengths. They value the fact that their children are happy in the college and that they make good academic progress. They also see great strengths in the tutor group system in that it encourages good relationships and contributes strongly to the welfare and guidance of students. However, there is a significant minority of parents who are dissatisfied with aspects of the college's work. These include the variability in the quality of teaching in some subjects, poor standards of behaviour in some classes and instances of bullying which they allege the college did not handle competently. Other aspects of concern include the amount of homework and the consistency with which it is set, the way the college works with parents to support their children's learning and the amount and quality of the information supplied by the college. The findings of the inspection in these areas are recorded in detail elsewhere in this report, but it is the sheer range and variety of the complaints, albeit from a minority, that indicate an undercurrent of parental concern. During the time of the inspection it was not possible to determine the root cause of this concern, but the governing body is aware of its existence and has already initiated measures to deal with it.
45. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and about the life of the college. There is an annual written report on each student at the end of the academic year, which is of good quality. It covers comprehensively the standard of the student's performance across the curriculum and in other areas of college activities. Reports are positive and encouraging in that praise is given for what the student has done well and also some indication of what they now need to do to improve. The governors produce an informative annual report for parents. However, it does not contain attendance data or the results of examinations and end-of-key-stage tests. Although this information is made available in separate documents at the annual meeting between governors and parents, and is also sent to parents who specifically request it, these procedures do not fully meet the legal requirements. There are several well-organised parents' evenings throughout the year at which parents have the opportunity to discuss their children's progress with class teachers or group tutors. Parents find these meetings useful.
46. Overall, the contribution made by parents to the life and work of the college is very

limited. For example, there is no parent teacher association and vacancies for parent governors are difficult to fill. However, when the college asks for help, for example, with the refreshments at college events, an adequate number of parents respond positively. Also, parents make some contribution to their children's learning. They help with homework and finding information for their project work, and they take them on educational visits. Parents, however, feel less competent to help as their children approach GCSE examinations.

## **HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?**

47. The college is clearly led. The headteacher, supported by a dedicated team of teachers, has done much to take the college to its current high standing in the area. His distinctive vision and his own often exemplary teaching have been the key factors in the college's success. The college has worked hard to create an ethos for learning where students are happy. Over the years the management of the college has sought to adjust and adapt to the rapid changes in the world of education, particularly the demand for more systematic accountability for the use of teachers and resources. In some respects the college has adapted successfully. For example, the opportunity to introduce vocational courses has been grasped imaginatively: some of the initiatives in this area are a strength. The sixth form has developed in leaps and bounds despite some strong competition from other providers. In some other areas, developments have been slow. This is true, for instance, of the creation of a register of students with special educational needs, although development is now gathering pace through the very good management of the special educational needs co-ordinator.
48. The overall management of the college is satisfactory. Senior managers have a good range of complementary skills and generally use them well to support teachers in their work. The current management structure and procedures do not serve the college's purpose as well as intended. This is acknowledged by the college. There is considerable unevenness across the college in the implementation of key policies, with the result that the level of support that teachers receive varies from department to department. Departments tend to operate in isolation from one another, developing their own response to their understanding of the college's key objectives. In some cases, for instance, there are very good records and helpful documentation. In others there are insufficient records of what has been taught or of students' attainments. There is considerable variation, too, in the extent to which knowledge of the students' attainments helps to shape their future learning, although there is some very good practice, for instance, in science. The standards achieved are not monitored effectively, nor are the reasons behind the drop in standards in some areas analysed appropriately. All this stems from the lack of clear formal policies and procedures relating to the monitoring and support of teaching. Some departments feel too far removed from central decision-making. Those departments that have direct links to the first level of senior management are in a stronger position to affect policy and practice than those that do not.

49. The quality of management is inconsistent. It must be said that there has been a growing awareness within the college of these difficulties in management. For example, whilst the management of science, modern foreign languages, music and classics is very good, information and communication technology is managed unsatisfactorily. The college has worked confidently with informal systems of exchange. This level of informality, whilst still supporting good relationships, is inadequate to ensure the effective running of the college in the complexities of the context in which it now functions. There are acknowledged difficulties emerging from the teachers' experience of the current system of management. Communication across the different levels of management is not effective. Additionally, the way that responsibility allowances have been allocated does not mark clearly the levels of responsibility exercised by post-holders. The faculty/departmental structure lacks a clear rationale, with the consequence that many teachers do not feel that it supports them effectively in their work.
50. The governors have only recently begun to establish a relationship with the college that makes it possible for them to hold it to account for the standards and quality of education it achieves. They are now very well led in the exercise of their responsibilities but have considerable ground to make up. Their current evaluation of the college's management systems and procedures has done much to forge a more critical, yet supportive, relationship with senior managers. The governors and the headteacher have yet to work out clearly the best ways to define and exercise their mutual responsibilities. However, the governors' very good knowledge of the college's strengths and weaknesses puts them in a strong position to begin to manage the college more effectively.
51. Development planning identifies some of the key priorities for the college's future. It is not based on a thorough analysis of current needs so has not responded fully to the acknowledged weaknesses in management systems. There is a will to change and look more closely at the perceptions of all staff of how the college is currently run. The college's budget is well managed. The governors are provided with clear information about expenditure. They know the extent to which the college's priorities are at the heart of significant decisions about expenditure. Financial planning is very good, having improved considerably since the previous inspection. Funding designated for specific purposes, particularly that related to the support of students with special educational needs, is spent appropriately. The college is very well served by an efficient office. Daily routines are clearly established and consistently maintained.
52. The commitment to improvement and capacity to succeed are revealed in the quality of the senior managers, in the teachers' expectations for attainment, in the quality of leadership in many departments and in the college's readiness to respond to the findings of the inspection. The impetus to improve is impeded to some extent by a lack of secure systems of communication within the college. However, this does not weaken the teachers' resolve to raise standards. For example, the identification and dissemination of good practice in lessons have recently been conducted to good effect, by some departments, on the basis of the most recent examination results.
53. There are sufficient qualified and experienced staff to teach most subjects. There is insufficient expertise to teach religious education to all the classes in Key Stage 4, with the consequence that some classes make slower progress than others in the development of religious knowledge and understanding. The management of staff is satisfactory. There are strengths in the ways that some departments identify the needs of teachers and respond to them. In other areas, monitoring of teaching is not

sufficiently refined to identify needs and provide the right level of support.

54. Staff new to the college are looked after sufficiently to ensure that they know what is required of them. They are aware of the most effective ways of seeking support for their work and are encouraged to undertake appropriate training when they feel they need it. The programme of appraisal and performance management has been effective to some extent in identifying the needs of staff and in managing their professional development. Not all staff have job descriptions and so are occasionally left unclear about the full extent of their responsibilities.
55. The college ensures that appropriate consideration is given to cost and value in decisions about all key items of expenditure. It compares its costs and results with other schools in similar circumstances. It is beginning to improve the sophistication with which it relates students' attainments as they join the college with what they achieve as they move through the years. Information and communication technology is used satisfactorily for administrative purposes, but it is not used well in most subjects. Funding received by the college for specific purposes is appropriately spent. This is also true of funding and resources set apart for provision for students with special educational needs.
56. Resources for learning are generally adequate and are used effectively, supporting learning and enabling students to make good progress.
57. Overall, the college has adequate accommodation. Most teaching areas are light and airy with modern furniture in a good state of repair. However, the mathematics and English departments are housed in temporary buildings that are substandard. Work is due to start on one of these areas. There are sufficient specialist rooms such as laboratories, computer suites and workshops, and the library with its good range of books and other resources is particularly attractive. However, the dining area, although providing students with the opportunity to obtain food of high quality at both break and lunch times, is rather depressing and gets seriously overcrowded. The corridors and communal areas are somewhat gloomy and do little to lift the spirits. The college has a rolling programme of maintenance and redecoration, but it is apparent that there are several areas in need of urgent attention, for example some of the toilet facilities and changing rooms.
58. The accommodation for the sixth form is very good. The students are well served by a good range of information and communication technology facilities, a generous social area and sufficient areas for quiet study.

## WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

59. In order to take the school further forward in its development and improve the quality of the students' experience, the following actions should be taken:

- (1) Raise standards in information and communication technology by:
  - meeting the National Curriculum requirements for the subject;
  - providing all teachers with the appropriate level of knowledge, skill and confidence to teach information and communication technology through their subjects;
  - identifying the good practice that already exists and disseminating it across the school;
  - ensuring that all departments plan for the inclusion of the use and applications of information and communication technology that relate specifically to their subject.  
(Paragraphs 126-128)
- (2) Raise standards in mathematics in the sixth form by:
  - addressing weaknesses in teaching that lie at the heart of the drop in standards evident in current work;
  - implementing rigorously the departments policy on marking students' work;
  - engaging students more actively in lessons.  
(Paragraph 80)
- (3) Raise standards in religious education in Years 10 and 11 by:
  - providing sufficient time to cover the syllabus in depth;
  - providing more opportunities for writing;
  - providing appropriate training for the non-specialist teachers of religious education.  
(Paragraph 159)
- (4) Further address weaknesses in teaching and consolidate good practice by:
  - setting targets for improvement for individual teachers;
  - monitoring progress towards these targets;
  - sharing the good practice in teaching that exists within the school.  
(Paragraph 18)
- (5) Make better use of the information about the students' attainment by:
  - ensuring that all departments work to the same standards in the recording of assessment data;
  - that the data collected is managed centrally;
  - appropriate use is made of information communication technology in the analysis of the available data.  
(Paragraph 43)
- (6) Address weaknesses in the way the school manages the monitoring and

evaluation of its performance by:

- exploring ways of rectifying the acknowledged difficulties in the exercise of the different layers of management, looking particularly at the relationship between faculties and departments;
- ensuring that greater priority is given on the agenda of the governors' meetings to matters related to the monitoring of the curriculum and the quality of teaching;
- improving communication across the school by, for example, providing more regular briefings for all staff;
- address the anomalies in the distribution and rewarding of responsibilities.  
(Paragraphs 48-50)

(7) Extend the partnership between parents and the college by:

- reviewing the current ways of communicating with parents;
- identifying more precisely the main areas of parental dissatisfaction;
- continuing to seek the parents' views on what they see as the school's strengths and on how to improve provision further;
- seeking ways of working more closely with parents in supporting students' learning.  
(Paragraphs 44, 46)

Other issues for the attention of the school and governors:

- reading remains a weakness for some lower-attaining students;  
(Paragraph 66)
- the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are not consistently well taught in all subjects;  
(Paragraphs 15, 77, 89)
- not enough emphasis is given to the teaching of practical skills in design and technology, particularly in Years 9 and 10;  
(Paragraphs 110, 111)
- some of the projects in design and technology, particularly in graphics and resistant materials, are too narrow in their scope;  
(Paragraph 112)
- staffing difficulties in art continue to affect standards of attainment;  
(Paragraph 108)
- religious education for Year 9 does not deal adequately with world religions;  
(Paragraphs 23, 157)
- the school does not meet the requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all students;  
(Paragraph 35)

- there are weaknesses in note-taking in geography and history that adversely affect standards;  
(Paragraphs 115, 120)
- the governors' annual report for parents does not contain attendance data or the results of examinations and end-of-key-stage tests as required by statute.  
(Paragraph 45)

## PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	135
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	63

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	17	38	32	9	2	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### Information about the college's students

#### Students on the college's roll

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the college's roll	556	174
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	22	na

#### Special educational needs

	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	13	1
Number of students on the college's special educational needs register	96	16

#### English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	2

#### Student mobility in the last college year

	No of students
Students who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Students who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	33

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
College data	7.3
National comparative data	5.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	0.1
National comparative data	0.4

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Year 9

Number of registered students in final year of Year 9 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	90	82	172

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	68	75	71
	Girls	73	68	63
	Total	141	143	134
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	82 (74)	83 (77)	78 (71)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	48 (32)	54 (47)	48 (40)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65	68	75
	Girls	73	69	73
	Total	138	137	148
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	80 (82)	80 (77)	86 (82)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	36 (45)	47 (56)	53 (47)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	77	82	159

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	39	73	75
	Girls	59	81	82
	Total	98	154	157
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	College	62 (64)	97 (95)	99 (97)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	College	43 ( 42 )
	National	38.4 (38)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A Level or AS Level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	31	42	73

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A Levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A Levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	21.5	22.3	22 ( 21 )	na	na	na
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	College	77
	National	73

### **Ethnic background of students**

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	0
White	723
Any other minority ethnic group	2

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

*This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.*

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	48.5
Number of students per qualified teacher	15

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y9 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	257.5

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.0
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y11**

Year 9	21.6
Key Stage 4	19.4

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1970313
Total expenditure	2001138
Expenditure per student	2888
Balance brought forward from previous year	48299
Balance carried forward to next year	17474

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	609
Number of questionnaires returned	180

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	52	5	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	50	7	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	16	60	10	2	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	55	17	3	4
The teaching is good.	26	62	7	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	53	14	3	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem.	40	47	11	1	1
The college expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50	44	5	0	1
The college works closely with parents.	21	51	18	6	4
The college is well led and managed.	24	50	12	8	6
The college is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	53	4	2	3
The college provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	46	9	2	7

### Other issues raised by parents

There were some anxieties expressed about incidents of bullying and oppressive behaviour. The teaching of mathematics was also a particular area of concern for parents.

## **PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **ENGLISH**

60. The proportion of 14-year-old students achieving the expected Level 5 in the 2000 end of Year 9 tests was well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. There has been a steady improvement in the proportion of students achieving Level 5 and the higher Levels 6 and 7 over the past three years, as a result of good teaching and the students' interest in their work. Boys and girls reach comparable standards. Inspection evidence reflects these test results, with attainment in English above the national average for boys and girls by the end of the key stage.
61. The proportion of 16-year-old students achieving A\*-C grade passes in the GCSE English language and literature examinations in 2000 was well above the national average. The proportion of boys and girls achieving these grades has risen steadily over the past three years. A particular feature is the well-above-average proportion of boys and girls achieving A\* and A grades last year in English language. Last year's GCSE results indicate that students have made good progress since taking the end of Year 9 tests in 1998, a finding reflected by inspection evidence.
62. In the GCE A-level English literature examination in 2000, the proportion of sixth form students achieving the higher A and B grade passes was well above the national average. There has been a steady improvement in the proportion of students achieving these higher grades over the past three years and all students entered for the examination have passed. Inspection evidence reflects these examination results: students make good progress and achieve good standards by the end of their sixth form studies. All five sixth form students entered for the GCSE English language examination in 2000 gained passes, with four gaining C grade passes. One student entered and passed the GCSE English literature examination.
63. The college entered students for GCSE drama for the first time in 2000. The seven sixth-formers entered all passed with A\* to B grades. Drama is now taught as a discrete subject in Year 9 and is an optional GCSE subject in all other years. By the end of each key stage, attainment is at a satisfactory standard, as is the progress students make in the development of knowledge and skills. A reason for this more limited attainment and progress, in comparison with English, is that most students do not begin discrete drama lessons until they enter the college in Year 9; they thus lack sufficient experience in developing their own drama performances.
64. Students with special educational needs make good progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. These students are taught within mainstream English and drama lessons and support is provided appropriately. As a consequence, by the end of each key stage and in the sixth form, these students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment levels.
65. The majority of students enter the college with literacy levels above the national average. Speaking and listening skills are good by the end of all three key stages. Students are fluent and confident in both formal and informal settings. They listen carefully and respond clearly and confidently in lessons. They make good progress in the development of speaking and listening skills as they move through Years 9, 10 and

- 11, by which time most are confident in presenting and sustaining well-reasoned arguments.
66. By the end of Year 9, attainment in reading is in line with national expectations for the lowest-attaining students and is above expected levels for the remainder. The development of reading was judged to be a weakness in the previous inspection, and although the college has developed strategies to encourage reading, the approach is not sufficiently systematic to ensure that all students read sufficiently widely and appropriately, particularly in Year 9. By the end of Key Stage 4, the standard of reading is above the national expectation for most students. However, for some lower-attaining students reading with understanding remains a weakness.
  67. The quality of students' writing is above the national expectation by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Development of style and fluency in writing for a range of readers is a strength. However, most lower-attaining students and many average and higher-attaining students make basic errors that affect overall standards of writing. For example, weak spelling affects students at all levels of attainment. Most Year 9 teachers do not provide a systematic and progressive programme of basic skills teaching, related to individual and group needs, as part of their planning. As a consequence, many students move into Key Stage 4 with basic writing skills at variance with the well-structured and well-argued essays they consistently produce.
  68. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. There is some good teaching throughout the key stages, but there are marked differences in the quality of teaching across the school. For example, almost all of the GCE A-level teaching is very good. In Key Stage 4, there is some excellent teaching, whilst in Year 9 there is some unsatisfactory teaching.
  69. Much of the teaching is imaginative and creative. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject is reflected in the students' enjoyment of the variety of approaches and activities they experience. The students' response to lessons and their eagerness to participate in discussion and class activities is revealed, for example, when Year 10 students explore responsibility for Duncan's death in 'Macbeth', or consider perceptions of the value of water from the poem 'The Blessing' in relation to the recent earthquake disaster in India. The creation of such positive learning environments is due to a combination of factors: teachers have a very good grasp of their subject, have high expectations of students and establish positive working relationships. This enables students to rise to the challenges set, giving them the confidence to explore ideas. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on Dickens' novel 'Hard Times', students led the class in a close analysis and appreciation of the text. The teaching of literature is a particular strength of the department.
  70. Not all the teaching is as successful. Some lessons are weakened through a lack of clear objectives, with the result that the students are not clear about what they are expected to learn: the teachers, in turn, are unclear about what the students achieve. In these lessons, teachers tend to stray from the point or fail to provide clear classroom expectations for students. Lessons are occasionally weakened, too, when teachers fail to reinforce the main ideas at the end of the lesson or to assess securely the progress students make. In a few cases, this unsatisfactory teaching leads to unsatisfactory behaviour.
  71. There is some inconsistency in setting and marking homework. For the most part, it is set regularly and extends and complements the work of the classroom. A feature of teaching is the effective use of drafting and redrafting of assignments. These are

marked assiduously and enhance the development of style, structure and an appreciation of literature. Less effective is the general marking of spelling and grammar. This is often minimal and does not sufficiently support this aspect of students' learning.

72. Most of the teaching in drama is satisfactory, with a small measure both of good and of poor teaching. Lessons are generally well structured, with students building up drama skills progressively. A particular feature is the appropriate place given to constructive criticism of students' group drama through class discussion. Learning is much more effective in the scripted element of the curriculum, where students' knowledge is supported by what they learn in English lessons. Improvisation is less successful: the lack of sufficient previous experience impedes students' learning. In these lessons, teachers are not sufficiently clear about the skills to be taught.
73. The faculty has yet to integrate fully information and communication technology into the curriculum. The difficulty is the lack of computers in English classrooms and the distance of the English teaching area from the relevant facilities.
74. The department does much to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Most teachers take opportunities to discuss issues of deep significance as they arise in literature. For example, sixth-formers discussed the nature of pride as part of their reading of 'The Remains of the Day', and Year 11 students discussed the decline into primitive behaviour of the characters in 'Lord of the Flies'.
75. The English and drama curriculum is particularly enriched by the excellent contribution of extra-curricular drama. It is an outstanding feature of the college, with three major drama productions each year that include a Shakespeare play, a musical and a further two plays or cabaret production. There is also an annual house drama competition. There are numerous visits to the theatre and an annual sixth form summer camp at Stratford-upon-Avon for a fortnight, devoted to the study of Shakespeare's plays.
76. The department is well led and well organised. A number of effective changes have been introduced since the last inspection; these include oral assessments, the teaching of drama, new GCSE and GCE syllabuses, a comprehensive test for students entering the college in Year 9, a literacy policy and some strategies for the teaching of reading. However, planning for the future development of the department is not sufficiently directed to the areas of greatest need. For example, there is a one-year development plan that does not meet the need to develop resources for teaching information and communication technology throughout the department. With the exception of provision for this subject, resources are good. The department lacks a central base for housing stock and to provide a working area for teachers. Accommodation for drama is good. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection, with significant improvements in examination results in all three key stages.

## Literacy

77. The majority of students enter the college with above average skills in reading, writing and listening, and for most students literacy standards are sufficiently high to support learning in all subject areas. Since the last inspection, the college has made some progress towards the development of a policy for extending students' skills in reading and writing in all subjects. There remains much more to be done. There is insufficient common understanding across the school about how to proceed. The literacy policy has omitted reference to the development of discussion and debate and fails to provide sufficient guidance and support to departments to develop language within their subjects.

## MATHEMATICS

78. Standards in mathematics at the end of Year 9 are high. In 2000 the overall attainment of 14-year-olds in the National Curriculum tests was well above the national average. Improvement since 1997 has reflected the national trend. The proportion of students achieving Level 5 and above was also well above the national average. Although girls' results were better than boys', both boys and girls exceeded national standards. However, attainment overall, and for those students achieving Level 6 and above, is below that of schools in similar circumstances. The majority of Year 9 students are working at or above a typical standard for their age. Students achieve high standards in topics involving number, algebra and geometry, in measurement and in data handling. They justify their solutions, showing considerable insight, using graphs and spreadsheets well. Good use of information and communication technology is evident in the work of students of all levels of attainment.
79. Students do well in GCSE mathematics examinations. The proportion achieving grade C and above in 2000 was significantly above the national average and nearly all students in the year group achieved a GCSE grade. The profile of results was similar to that of each of the previous two years. No students achieved the highest grade of A\*, but only a very small proportion achieved the two lowest grades. For higher-attaining students the results indicate satisfactory progress compared with their overall attainment two years earlier. Students enjoy success in the full range of mathematical topics studied. Students of average attainment are introduced to more advanced trigonometry, while lower-attaining students extend their understanding of number by studying standard index form. This additional work underpins GCSE success and enables students to strive for the highest appropriate grade in the examinations. The standard of mathematics coursework develops well from students' achievement in previous years.
80. In 2000, standards attained in the A-level examinations were well above average. Results at A-level have been steadily improving. However, the standard of A-level work currently observed at the college is below that of the three previous years. A suitable range of work is covered but there is not always rigorous development, building upon understanding of concepts previously studied.
81. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teaching in Year 9 is satisfactory overall with some good features. Teaching is good when the teacher uses a range of mathematical language and judges the pace of the lesson well to build upon students' knowledge. This is evident when, for example, in the study of linear graphs, higher-attaining students learn by refining their ideas when considering questions posed by the teacher. Lower-attaining students develop understanding of angle properties when the

teacher guides learning through discussion with individual students. In a few lessons students learn at an unsatisfactory rate. These students' current work has been marked on two or three occasions at most; answers are very rarely given and students have no concept of how successful they are at their work. The homework set is usually concerned with finishing work begun in lessons: it does not extend students' understanding.

82. Key Stage 4 students acquire skills, knowledge and understanding at a good pace as a result of good and very good teaching. Students of average attainment show real curiosity as they develop concepts of gradient from their everyday experiences. Higher-attaining students, working effectively in small groups, describe problems using algebraic notation, learning well through clear direction. Teachers give careful support for the improvement of literacy to students with special needs, to ensure that questions are correctly interpreted.
83. There is a very small measure of unsatisfactory teaching. This occurs when students are introduced to a number of topics without being guided logically through them. Since the beginning of the college year, no work has been marked nor have the solutions to questions been provided.
84. Sixth-form teaching is good in lessons where the teacher has planned a sequence of progressively challenging activities. This was evident, for example, when concepts of standard deviation unfolded from a range of approaches based on students' previous knowledge. Teaching is occasionally weakened when students are confused about key concepts. This was evident, for example, when students' understanding of mechanics had not been revised in the lead up to the study of projectiles.
85. There are particular teaching strengths at the college. Management of students and good student/teacher relationships secure an environment in which students generally work at a brisk pace. The teachers' knowledge of the students' prior attainment in national tests and college examinations is generally used well to decide which topics need revision, to form suitable teaching groups and to monitor the progress of individual students. However, a weakness of much teaching is that teachers do not adhere to policies of marking and assessment specified in the departmental handbook. A significant proportion of many students' work is unmarked. There is a lack of marked and assessed homework, individual questions and short tests, the outcomes of which could be used to inform teaching and raise the level of students' understanding. There is also a lack of consistency in the range, quality and timing of homework set. For example, one Year 9 class was set a substantial piece of work to extend concepts of data handling. In a parallel class, a few examples of rounding numbers to a given number of decimal places merely repeated skills which students had already very successfully demonstrated in the lesson.
86. Students' attitudes to mathematics are good; they work at a good pace, thriving in the good and sometimes excellent relationships with their peers and teachers. They are courteous in asking appropriate questions of teachers, who respond with warmth and encouragement. Students in Year 9, Year 10 and Year 11 work co-operatively and engage in lively discussion when in small groups. In contrast, sixth form students are often passive and lack confidence.
87. Students do not have access to computers to support their work during lessons, with the consequence that they do not make sufficient progress in their understanding of the applications of computers to mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 4.

88. Since the last inspection, high standards have been achieved in public examinations for all students. Weaknesses in marking students' work remain. Recent developments, which are very supportive of teaching, include new departmental documentation and a database that is used well to track students' performance and set targets for achievement.

## **Numeracy**

89. The application of numeracy and its development across the curriculum are satisfactory. Students are already competent in using number and measures when they join the college and as they progress through Year 9 their confidence in applying these skills in different subjects develops well. In mathematics lessons, students of all attainment levels make good progress in using percentages, graphs and spreadsheets and applying their knowledge to the solution of problems. The college does not have an overall numeracy policy, with the consequence that there is some unevenness in what teachers offer students across the subjects. Numeracy skills are developed and applied well in science lessons. For example, Year 9 students use percentages when studying germination; Key Stage 4 students are competent in the use of calculators and apply concepts of average with understanding. Numeracy supports studies effectively in geography: students are good at interpreting climatic graphs and population graphs; sixth-form geography students also use graphs with confidence. Pie charts and bar charts are used to good effect in technology in Year 9. However, there is very limited use and promotion of numeracy in the remaining subjects.

## **SCIENCE**

90. Students aged 14 and 16 reach above-average standards overall. This is as a result of good specialist teaching in all years. Standards of attainment have improved in tests and examinations since the last inspection. In national tests in science over the last four years, 14-year-olds achieved well above the average for all schools in terms of the proportion of students reaching or exceeding the expected Level 5. Though there was some very high attainment, the average attainment of each student was below that of most other schools. Lower-attaining 14-year-olds do not achieve as well as they could.
91. By the age of 16, the standards achieved by boys and girls in GCSE double and single science examinations have been consistently well above average over the last three years. There is no consistent pattern to the relative achievement of boys and girls in GCSE double science. Last year, girls reached higher standards than boys. In the previous year, boys achieved better than girls; and before that, boys and girls achieved similar standards. In single science, girls consistently achieve much higher grades than boys, although last year the girls attained far fewer GCSE A\*-C grades than usual.
92. In the 2000 A-level examinations, standards in chemistry were high, and there were well above average standards in physics. Standards in biology were average. In lessons and in work seen in the sixth form, the most active and challenging learning takes place in physics, because the pace of these lessons is brisker than in biology and chemistry. Students meet the course requirements for all three subjects.
93. The quality of teaching in science is good and has improved since the last inspection. In over eight out of ten lessons, teaching standards are at least good and occasionally very good or excellent. This high standard of teaching, consistent across the science teaching team, provides the challenge needed to promote the good progress of students over the full attainment range and across all years. No time is wasted in lessons, because: the standards of behaviour are very high; health and safety risk

assessments are firmly in place; the management of classes is very secure; and the planning and organisation of resources are very efficient. In this latter respect, a very good service is provided by the science technicians. Students have very good access to specialist science teaching. The very secure knowledge that teachers bring to science lessons makes a significant contribution to the good progress that students make. Teachers use their specialist skills enthusiastically to add breadth and interest to their teaching; often the lessons are fun, especially in physics. Through improved marking and assessment procedures, teachers monitor progress carefully, especially progress in the development of the full range of investigative skills. Through their assessments, teachers guide students to the most appropriate courses and groups. The central storage of assessment records on computer is highly effective in the monitoring of students' progress and students are kept well informed about their achievements. Teachers' use of praise raises students' self-esteem.

94. Science teaching makes a good contribution to the continuing development of students' literacy and numeracy skills, in the latter case through the many opportunities for carrying out mathematical calculations and graphical work. Students make good use of information and communication technology to support their learning, for example to research soil contamination using the Internet, to test and improve their knowledge and understanding of human and plant reproduction, and to record and analyse data from their experiments on sound. Very effective use is made of computer programs to demonstrate the dynamics of resistance in an electrical circuit. In the planning of science lessons, however, little attention is given to assessing and improving students' competence in information and communication technology, with the consequence that in a Year 10 physics lesson, for example, students' slow keyboard skills prevented completion of their task.
95. At its best the teaching is excellent. The results of very effective teaching were evident, for example, in a Year 10 GCSE single science lesson: students' first hand experience of enquiry into displacement reactions in chemistry developed their skills of analysis, interpretation and application. All listened carefully and asked questions to test out their explanations. The teacher's skilful use of both scientific and everyday language led all students to an understanding of displacement reactions. The higher-attaining students extended their understanding further by drawing independently on their prior learning about the periodic table and the reactivity series of metals. Lower-attaining students in the same class understood the results of their experiments. In a sixth form thermal physics lesson there were similar strengths: students enjoyed learning to think logically in order to evaluate proposed mathematical equations, because very skilful and highly enjoyable questioning techniques were used. Students with special educational needs generally show a great determination to succeed and they make good progress, overcoming literacy and organisational difficulties, and sensory and physical impairments. It is the norm for all students to attain a GCSE grade in science, mainly grade E and above.
96. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in science. Some teaching skills, however, are not uniformly developed to a high standard. The quality of questioning, for example, is not consistently effective. At best, questions are well matched to individual learning needs, challenge students to think, and inform teachers of the progress being made. In a significant number of lessons, however, there are missed opportunities to ask questions, either during or at the end of a lesson, to check how well students have understood. Except in the case of investigative reports, marking rarely includes a comment about how the standard of the written work could be improved. In Year 9, not enough demands are made on some of the quieter and lower-attaining students. They are not always asked sufficient questions during lessons, and they make slower

progress than the other students. There are examples of uncompleted tasks, and less content, depth and explanation in their written work. There is insufficient rigour in planning the deployment of the learning support teachers and assistants, and in monitoring the progress of students on the register of special educational needs.

97. The pace of teaching and learning in biology and chemistry theory lessons in the sixth form is slow and teachers do much of the work; their dictated notes do not offer sufficient challenge or the opportunity for active participation. In contrast, the pace in sixth form physics is brisk and challenging. The quality of display in the science faculty has improved but is insufficient to motivate, add interest and extend learning in lessons.
98. The positive attitudes of the students to science make a most important contribution to the good progress and high standards achieved. Students accept that the onus is on them to make the intellectual effort in lessons and when completing homework. In developing investigative skills, the quality of students' thinking and application is high. Well-established, constructive relationships in lessons have engendered in students the confidence to ask questions, seek and listen to advice, and discuss tasks during group work. Students have a well-developed capacity to study quietly, individually and independently without fuss when required to do so. Through these good learning skills, students consolidate prior learning, test out new ideas, and develop new knowledge, understanding and skills.
99. The very effective leadership and management in the science faculty lie at the heart of its success.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

100. Overall standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly in line with the national expectation. Standards at the age of 16 are overall below the national average in relation to the proportion of students achieving A\*-C grades in the GCSE examination. An average proportion of students achieved grades A\*-G in 2000. Results have not varied significantly over the last four years. Boys and girls reach comparable standards. Standards at age 18 are well above the national average and have been steadily improving due to the quality of teaching at this stage.
101. Students in Year 9 use pencil accurately to draw reproductions of pictures by famous artists; higher-attaining students write perceptively about them. Other students show how the work of the pop artist, Roy Lichtenstein, relates to their own work on cartoons. Though attainment on entry to the school is above average, work seen during the inspection indicates that attainment is just satisfactory. Progress during Year 9 is therefore unsatisfactory as a result of unsatisfactory teaching.
102. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is below the national expectation overall. Attainment at GCSE is below the national average at grades A\*-C. The moderation of the GCSE was a source of dissatisfaction in summer 2000 and a re-mark was requested, which also proved to be unsatisfactory to the college. As a result of these depressed grades and the perception that there was a lack of justification for them, the acting head of department has changed the examination board, and predicted A\*-C grades at GCSE for the 2001 cohort are above the national average. Students in Year 10 research the work of famous artists using a variety of research techniques and showing some development of their ideas in sketchbooks. Students in Year 11 produce colourful lino-prints of buildings, landscapes and natural objects.
103. Attainment by the age of 18 is well above the national average. Students in Year 12

draw sensitively in pencil from observation and develop their drawings into paintings and prints. Digital images provide a source of ideas for Year 12 and Year 13, resulting in striking compositions and high quality silk-screen prints. Some interesting photographs are produced on the one-year course taken by Year 12. Progress during Year 12 and Year 13 is very good.

104. Teaching and learning are overall satisfactory. However, half the lessons seen in Year 9 were unsatisfactory. This is due to low or, in some cases, too high expectations of the group. A lack of planning for the students' different levels of attainment results in poor progress for a significant proportion of students in the higher-attaining bands. Lack of challenge for students in groups in the lower bands means that a significant proportion of them do not achieve well. In these lessons, aims are not made clear to the students, with the consequence that they have difficulties settling down to the tasks and make slow progress. At Key Stage 4, teaching and learning in the great majority of lessons are satisfactory or better. Where teaching is strong, teachers plan well and convey the lesson objectives clearly to students. By making lessons lively and interesting they inject challenge and urgency into the students' work. For example, in a Year 11 lesson the teacher circulated, giving instruction and encouragement, inspiring and challenging students to achieve more, to try something new and extend their skills. The students in response were enthusiastic and focused and many produced work of a high standard.
105. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and often very good. Students are encouraged to work hard and are constantly challenged and urged to push themselves harder. The quality of interest, care and advice is very good and students enjoy art. They are self-motivated, but benefit from sensitive guidance and support in their work.
106. Attitudes and behaviour are overall satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4. Where teaching is weak students become bored and unfocused; this results in idle chatter and little work. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are very good and often excellent. Students are well motivated to succeed and are happy in their work.
107. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. The department has successfully addressed the imbalance between the achievements of boys and girls. Departmental procedures have been developed to give feedback to students and parents, both orally and in written form. There are fewer single periods on the timetable, although they have not been eliminated fully. The time allocated to Year 12 is now more equally balanced with that in Year 13. A new purpose-designed studio has been built since the last inspection, although some lessons are still taught in non-specialist rooms due to the increase in numbers opting to take art at GCSE level. This limits the range of work that is carried out by students.
108. Though the leadership and management exercised by the present teacher in charge of the art department are satisfactory, there are weaknesses caused by uncertainties surrounding staffing. A feature of the department is the quality of the displays of students' work.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

109. Overall attainment is in line with the national expectation. However, attainment in Year 9 is unsatisfactory. This is largely due to the fact that the providing schools offer different courses in Year 7 and Year 8 and have limited resources to provide comprehensive coverage of all aspects of the subject. The department's liaison with the providing schools is good and it has a detailed knowledge of individual students'

attainment on entry to the college. The Year 9 course is designed to make up the deficiencies and complement the curriculum offered by the providing schools. It places appropriate emphasis on knowledge and understanding of systems and control. The college does not offer lessons on textile technology.

110. The teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show that over one-half of students reach the National Curriculum Level 5 or above. Whilst this is significantly below the national average, it is a satisfactory result in view of the relatively low attainment of students on entry. Girls perform better than boys. In the combined Year 9 course offered by the providing schools and the college there is insufficient opportunity to develop the range of practical skills needed to underpin the work at Key Stage 4 successfully, particularly in the area of resistant materials. This slows down progress in the development of skills. However, students with special educational needs are well integrated in lessons and perform well in relation to their prior levels of attainment.
111. The overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with the national expectation. In the combined GCSE examination in the year 2000, one-half the students attained A\*-C grades, and the proportions of boys and girls attaining these higher grades were exactly in line with the national trend, in that girls performed better than boys. There are variations in attainment in the various aspects of the subject. The GCSE results in food studies and graphics were in line with the national average, the results in electronics were well above the average and those in resistant materials were significantly below the average. The results in food studies and graphics were lower in the year 2000 than in the previous year. The poor results in resistant materials are due to the fact that most of the students taking the course were boys from the lower sets in Year 9: their performance was inhibited by the lack of earlier development of key practical skills. In the sixth form, small numbers of students take the AS-level and A-level courses in either design and technology: graphics or design and technology: food. In the year 2000 the A-level examination results were below the national average in both courses.
112. The standard of teaching varies considerably but is satisfactory overall. All teachers have clear plans for lessons and secure knowledge of the subject. There is good use of information and communication technology. When teaching is unsatisfactory the teachers do not have sufficient control over classes, allow students to wander off task, make unnecessary noise and engage in unnecessary movement in lessons. The department does not take full advantage of the setting arrangements either to provide extra challenge for the most able or to address the specific skill weaknesses of the less able in Year 9. There is insufficient emphasis on helping students improve their use of the English language and learn key words. There is insufficient focus, too, on neatness of presentation, the production of good quality sketches and drawings, or accuracy in making products. Too many of the projects are well within the capability of the students and do not give them enough challenge or scope to show their initiative. In the graphics course, there is a limit to what is learned from a week spent designing and making Christmas or Easter cards. Nearly all the projects in resistant materials use wood; there is insufficient use of metal and plastic, particularly in the major coursework in Year 11. Some good projects are undertaken, for example: improving the layout of a youth club to help the disabled; the development of a device to help someone with arthritis to turn a key; the design of a door 'bell' for a deaf person, and the creation of a menu for a celebration event. The practice of teaching GCSE classes in resistant materials and electronics together in the workshop lowers attainment. The assessment of students' work is comprehensive.
113. The department is well led by an experienced and well-qualified teacher. The department is in much the same position as it was at the time of the last inspection and

the overall standards of achievement remain broadly in line with national expectations. All aspects of the National Curriculum are now covered. There remain some weaknesses in the provision of learning resources.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

114. The most recent examination results show that attainment in this subject is high at A-level. Fifty-seven per cent of students achieved grades A and B and 43 per cent grades C and D. However, attainment at GCSE in 2000 is the lowest for many years, with results falling below the national average for all schools, even though an above-average proportion of students achieved five or more A\*-G grades. In the most recent teachers' assessments for 14-year-olds, the proportion of students attaining at the expected Level 5 or above was high. In written work and oral work most 14-year-old students reach satisfactory standards, whilst good standards are reached by 16 and 18-year-olds. The progress made by a significant minority of both higher and lower-attaining students is very good in relation to their prior levels of attainment.
115. The overall quality of teaching is good across the years. Teaching is good in half the lessons at both key stages and in three-quarters of lessons in the sixth form. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The strengths of the department lie in the expertise of all the teachers and the consideration given to the needs of students. Lessons are well planned and include a good variety of activities. For example, in a lesson in Year 11 a game was used to good effect: students assumed the roles of coffee producers and made decisions about supply and demand. This lesson ensured full participation, consolidated decision-making skills and contributed towards moral and social development. Teachers employ a good range of strategies to make students think. Questioning is particularly effective in probing understanding and is used well to challenge pupils and extend their language. Very good use of time was exemplified in a Year 9 lesson on Japan, where students completed five different activities and used three different skills in the allocated time. The change from one activity to the next was smooth and this led to significant advances in the students' learning. Occasionally there is some unproductive use of note taking.
116. Learning reflects teaching. Students' good understanding of the subject is apparent in current work. They enjoy the good range of learning opportunities provided. They empathised effectively with the plight of people suffering the aftermath of earthquakes and volcanoes. They show perseverance in practical work. For example, a challenging lesson on urban and rural links required students in Year 10 to match Ordnance Survey maps to aerial photographs and street maps. They carried out this task confidently and to a good standard. Students answer questions well and volunteer additional information. However, they are less enthusiastic about written work, and the quality of work and the productivity of the highest-attaining students are insufficient. This also applies to sixth form students.
117. Students' attitudes are positive: they are attentive and the majority of students willingly participate in lessons. Homework is done to a good standard. Most students show an interest in the subject and relate well to each other and to their teachers. They work with persistence, both collaboratively and independently. The majority, including students with special educational needs, show sustained concentration. The behaviour of all students is very good.
118. The department is well led and managed and has addressed effectively the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection. Work is now planned appropriately for the different levels of attainment; individual educational plans are used well to inform

planning; work is now marked rigorously and resources have improved considerably.

## HISTORY

119. The department has made sound improvements since the last inspection in attainment and in most aspects of provision, but currently has the disadvantage of a very recent, and short notice, change of staffing. Half the lessons are taken by an unqualified teacher, which has adversely affected the overall quality of teaching and is having some impact on learning.
120. Overall attainment is around the national average. However, standards of attainment vary quite widely both in the work seen, and in test and examination results. At the end of Year 9, attainment in current work is marginally below national expectations, and the most recent teacher assessments of Year 9 students confirm this level of attainment. At Key Stage 4, work is around the level expected nationally, as are GCSE results in recent years, an improvement on the level previously reported. The proportion of grades A\*-C is above the national average, but the average points score, which takes into account the performance of all students taking the examination, is slightly below average. The most striking feature of the Year 9 assessments and the GCSE results is the relatively poor performance by boys. The difference in attainment is noticeably greater than that which occurs nationally. Given the prior attainment of the students on entry to the college, the overall level of achievement is below that expected, but it is the low achievement of boys that is bringing this about. The department is aware of the problem but has yet to find effective ways of solving it. Likely contributory factors to this unevenness are weaknesses in note-taking and the poor organisation of notes and files, particularly amongst lower-attaining students. Additionally, neither the teaching nor the monitoring of work sufficiently ensure that all students are making the full effort needed to fulfil their potential. Whilst some of the marking is regular and includes detailed comment and helpful suggestions for improvement, this high standard has not been consistently implemented across the department.
121. Imaginative writing, firmly based on historical knowledge and understanding, is a particular strength of the work of students at all levels of attainment. This stems from the strong and effective emphasis given in teaching, using such means as video images and poetry, on ensuring that students understand and relate to the circumstances of the subject they are studying, such as conditions in the trenches in the First World War. The levels of attainment reached in other historical skills, such as understanding of cause and chronology, and the ability to interpret sources and communicate understanding in writing, vary according to students' prior attainments, but are generally sound.
122. Attainment and achievement are better in the sixth form than in the younger age groups. A-level results in 1998 and 1999 were well above national averages, though falling slightly in 2000, and included a considerable proportion of the higher grades, an improvement on the performance previously reported. The fluctuations between years reflect the relatively small numbers of candidates and the variations in their prior attainment from year to year. Current A-level work in the sixth form ranges widely. Some of the essay writing is of a very high standard, focusing closely on the question set and providing a clear, concise and cogently argued case. Lower-attaining students show evidence of commitment in the shape of substantial notes, not always well put together, but they tend to describe when they should be explaining. They achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment.
123. Students' behaviour is unfailingly good. Even when the teaching is weak, students

continue to focus on what they are asked to do. The passivity of some students is usually the result of teaching that does not require them to make a positive contribution, though in one sixth-form lesson, uncharacteristically, it stemmed from insufficient preparation by the students rather than any shortcomings in the teaching. Students have mainly positive attitudes to their learning. This results from the very warm relationships established by the teachers with their classes, and ensures that some learning takes place even when the expectations of the teacher are low. For the most part, learning is good: students make significant progress with the tasks set and increase their knowledge, understanding and skills in line with the objectives of the lesson. Students with special needs also make good progress in lessons and in their written work, as a result of the success with which the class teacher recognises and meets their needs rather than of additional in-class support. This marks an improvement since the last inspection. Similar sensitivity was shown to the English language needs of a sixth-form student from overseas. Sixth-form students in particular show initiative and take considerable responsibility for their own learning, encouraged by the sensitive A-level syllabus.

124. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, but in the lessons seen ranged from good to poor. All teachers show at least sufficient, and usually good, command of the subject, and class management is always at least sound, but there are wide disparities in pedagogic skills and thus in the success of the lessons in enabling students to increase and reinforce their learning. The use of video, including some archive material, is nearly always effective. The degree of emphasis on the use of visual source material is unusual, and reflected in the GCSE syllabus chosen. It helpfully complements the use of written sources and provides an alternative form of learning for those to whom the interpretation of written text does not come easily. Whilst the department encourages some students, notably sixth-form students, to make use of the Internet to identify suitable source material within relevant web-sites, it makes little planned use of information and communication technology in lessons. It acknowledges that this is an area that requires further development and constitutes a weakness in the curricular opportunities offered. The spacious, well-furnished and well-used accommodation makes a considerable contribution to the creation of a positive learning environment.
125. Caring leadership rather than systematic management is the hallmark of the department. Documentation is relatively thin and of limited use to an incoming teacher, though syllabus documentation is being suitably updated. However, good support is being provided for the newly arrived teacher by the head of department, and considerable efforts are being made to minimise the disruption caused to students' learning by the mid-year change of staffing. The senior management of the college is considering what further support to give in order to safeguard the standards of provision that this department has consistently maintained over the years.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

126. Although there are many examples of individual students undertaking good work, the overall attainment in the subject is unsatisfactory. The attainment of students at entry to the college is variable. The providing schools offer different courses in Year 7 and Year 8 and some students learn computing at home. The college does not have a detailed knowledge of individual students' attainment at entry or seek to test attainment at the beginning of Year 9. The departments of English, mathematics and science, together with departments in the faculties of humanities, languages and technology, use some computing in their courses. Applications of computer control, CD-ROMs, databases, data-logging, desktop publishing, Internet, spreadsheets and word

processing are to be found in some students' work. These applications are as a result of the interest and at the discretion of individual teachers and students. The students who do apply information and communication technology learn techniques and approaches as the demands of their work in other subjects require. There is no systematic teaching of the subject in the college.

127. The sections in the National Curriculum on reviewing, modifying and evaluating work as it progresses and the section on breadth of study remain largely untaught. As a consequence, students' skill, knowledge and understanding of information and communication technology are very variable at the end of Year 9. The arrangements by which teachers grade students' work in terms of National Curriculum levels and convert these to an overall grade are flawed. The teachers' assessment in the year 2000 when almost nine out of ten students reached the National Curriculum Level 5 or above is a gross over-estimate of attainment. The assessment does reveal, however, that the attainment of girls is higher than that of boys. Students with special educational needs are well-integrated in lessons and perform well in relation to their previous attainments.
128. The overall situation at Key Stage 4 is no better. The college does not offer any examined course in information and communication technology. As in Year 9, departments are encouraged to apply computing in their courses and there are examples of individual students undertaking good work. In design and technology, a significant number of students use word processing, graphics and computer-generated charts to improve the presentation of their coursework, and use e-mail to obtain information on products as a part of their design research. In science, some students use programs effectively to learn about sound and other types of waves, refraction and the nature of light; they also use on-line self-assessment tests as a part of their revision work. In art, some students use scanners and computers well to manipulate images. In geography, some obtain information on regions and climate and obtain pictures using the Internet. There are other worthwhile applications of computing in drama, English, mathematics, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education. Not all students apply computing in their work and there is no systematic teaching of the subject in any department. The same two sections of the National Curriculum that are deficient at Year 9 are also not covered at Key Stage 4. Students' attainment and achievement at the end of Year 11 are not assessed. The college's arrangements at both Year 9 and Key Stage 4 meet neither the requirements of its own information and communication technology policy nor those of the National Curriculum.
129. No course is offered in the sixth form. There are two students who are attempting to take the A-Level course in information and communication technology privately. They have registered themselves, purchased books and built their own computer from parts. They are currently seeking help to have their coursework assessed before it is submitted to the examination board for moderation. The college does not offer the new key skills course in information and communication technology although it has plans to do so in the future. The GNVQ course in business and the GNVQ course in leisure and tourism involve considerable use of information and communication technology. There is a small number of students among those who regularly use computers at home who produce work that is outstanding and of professional standard. The standard achieved by most students at the end of their college lives, however, depends on their choice of courses and projects in other subjects.
130. The standard of teaching in lessons dedicated specifically to teaching information communication technology is satisfactory and occasionally good or very good. The teachers show enthusiasm for the subject and have a secure knowledge of what they

teach. They give clear guidance to students on both the use of different applications and the use of the network. The response of students is always satisfactory and sometimes excellent. Teachers build upon the existing enthusiasm of students for computing and help them acquire new knowledge and skills. However, the teaching of applications of information and communication technology in individual subjects is unsatisfactory. Though the college has begun to offer all teachers internal training on the use of the network and available software, this training is not widespread, nor is it sufficiently focused on the teaching of the requirements of the National Curriculum.

131. The leadership and oversight of the subject are unsatisfactory. The co-ordinator's other duties as head of science, health and safety officer and staff governor do not allow him sufficient time to manage the subject properly. He is well supported by another teacher from the department of science who has the responsibility for staff training. The college's computer systems co-ordinator supervises the network and the main computer room well, but has had insufficient training to offer more comprehensive in-class support to teachers.
132. The college has installed new equipment and software, and the applications of computing in most courses have increased since the last inspection. However, the arrangements to teach the National Curriculum have deteriorated and the overall standards of attainment and achievement have fallen. Statutory requirements are no longer met at Year 9 and the new order at Key Stage 4 has not been introduced. Management and oversight remain inadequately co-ordinated.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

133. In the 2000 teachers' assessments, the attainment of students at age 14 was below average. This is mainly because students' attainment in German is below average on entry. The proportion of students achieving A\*-C in the GCSE examinations in 2000 was well above the national average in French. However, it was mainly girls who attained the higher levels. Boys' results were more in line the national averages. Results in German were broadly average, with girls' results slightly above average and boys' results slightly below. All students passed at A\*-G in French and over 98 per cent did so in German. This represents a good level of overall attainment. There were too few students entered at GCE A-level to make valid statistical comparisons. In French, six students were entered and all passed, five obtaining higher grades. There were also six entries for German, and again all students passed, with five of the six gaining higher grades.
134. Inspection evidence suggests that attainment on entry is average in French and below average in German. The standards that students attain follow this pattern at age 14 and are accurately reflected in teachers' assessments carried out at that age.
135. At age 16, standards are above average in French and in line with the average in German. Students in the sixth form achieve standards that are in line with course expectations in German, but above course expectations in French. Although boys attain satisfactory standards against national averages, their attainment is still lower than that for girls. There are no wide differences in attainment across the four aspects of the subject. This is an improvement since the last inspection, when deficiencies in speaking and writing were reported. Students with special educational needs achieve well and make good progress. They receive good support from teachers in their lessons and, where additional support is provided, it is effective in raising attainment. Attainment in both French and German is rising and has done so since the last inspection. There has been some instability in staffing in German, which has slowed

progress. The situation is now more stable and attainment is rising quickly, especially in Year 9 and Year 10. German has been introduced into providing schools more recently than French and this has also previously had an effect on standards that is now being overcome.

136. By age 14, students answer questions about such topics as college and college subjects, travel and transport, the weather, their families and their holidays. Students listen carefully and show a high level of concentration when the teacher or other students talk and when they listen to audio tapes. Students have good opportunities to practise speaking. The majority are confident speakers of both French and German. They carry out basic conversations with three or four exchanges and talk about their likes and dislikes. Higher-attaining students vary their use of language and adapt it to fit new situations. This is seen in Year 9 German lessons, for example, where English is rarely spoken during the lesson and students enjoy using and experimenting with the spoken language. Students' speaking skills, seen as a weakness in the previous inspection, show considerable improvement. Students develop their reading skills mainly by reading textbooks and worksheets, which are often supplemented by more challenging reading material; students' reading skills are good overall. There is a good emphasis on grammar and punctuation in written work, with the result that students try hard to produce accurate writing. By age 14, the majority of students write three or four sentences, with a good level of accuracy, describing their family or their holidays. Higher-attaining students write longer paragraphs about their homes and family life, using a wide range of vocabulary and verb tenses.
137. By age 16, students extend these topics in preparation for examinations and add others such as the differences between life in towns and villages, the world of work, sport, television programmes and the weather. The sound base of skills developed previously is extended well in Year 10 and Year 11. The majority of students develop their speaking skills well enough to carry out longer conversations, and students in Year 10 discuss their preferences for living in the town or in the countryside, for example. Students' written work shows good progress in Year 10 and Year 11. Higher-attaining students write good extended coursework about themselves, their families and their leisure activities with good descriptive language and occasional touches of humour.
138. Students in the sixth form listen to authentic news broadcasts and comment about them. Up-to-date news broadcasts are regularly recorded on video, in both French and German, for students to watch. This is a strong feature in both their cultural development and in the extension of their listening and speaking skills. Students make good use of texts from magazines and newspapers to learn and write about important events in France and Germany.
139. The quality of teaching and the learning it promotes are good overall. There is satisfactory teaching in just under half of the lessons and good or better teaching in just over half. A quarter of the teaching is very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. A strong feature of all of the teaching is very good class control that is achieved without fuss and with quiet authority. In Year 12 and Year 13 particularly, teachers have a very good knowledge of what they teach, not only in terms of the level of grammatical content required, but also in terms of the culture and politics of the countries studied. This adds considerably to the quality of students' preparation for examinations. All teachers make good use of the language being taught. This was reported as being inconsistent in the last inspection and there has been a clear improvement since then. The range of teaching strategies used in lessons is generally good and usually includes paired or group work and reading, listening and writing tasks. Teachers make particularly skilled use of question-and-answer sessions to extend

students' vocabulary and to encourage them to vary their use of language. However, there is infrequent extension of teaching methods into more imaginative use of overhead projectors and the use of music, mime and poetry to further extend students' language development. Teachers provide a good range of challenging activities that are adapted to the needs of all the students. Relevant homework is regularly set. Teachers are conscious of the relative underachievement of boys and are developing a range of appropriate strategies to help overcome this. Students have good attitudes to work, especially in the sixth form where they show a high level of motivation and concentration. Behaviour in class is very good and there are very good relationships among students and with their teachers. This combination of good teaching, very good behaviour and good attitudes to work is the strongest contributory factor to steadily rising standards in the two main languages.

140. Teaching makes a satisfactory contribution to students' literacy and numeracy development. In many lessons there is an emphasis on grammar, punctuation and care over spelling. Students regularly use basic mathematics, in the language being taught, to calculate prices and weights. The use of information and communication technology is very good. Students make use of computers to produce, edit and refine their work, especially coursework. Good work was seen on display, using pictures and fonts of various types and sizes, describing characters in TV programmes. Students and teachers regularly make good use of websites to access information and to carry out set tasks.
141. The subject makes a good contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development. In lessons there is a strong moral dimension and students are taught to distinguish right from wrong and to listen to the views of others. The teachers and other staff present good role models. There is good attention to social development through the presentation of opportunities to work together and take turns in lessons. There is an extensive range of very good extra-curricula activities. Each year there are trips to Europe and these make a good contribution to both social and cultural development. There are good procedures for assessment and the data provided is used well to track students' attainment and progress.
142. The heads of department exercise very good leadership and management. The subject has made very good progress since the last inspection, particularly in the standards reached.

## **MUSIC**

143. By the age of 14, the majority of students attain standards in line with national expectations. A significant number of higher-attaining students reach very good standards. Standards are sound and often good in students' knowledge and understanding of a range of musical styles, including music theatre, and in their appreciation of world music, expressed in specialist vocabulary. Students generally listen well and some of them competently and sensitively evaluate their own work and others' performances. Among many higher-attaining students, written work is of good quality; they use skills in research and analysis well, although spelling overall is often weak. Standards in performance and composition are usually sound and often better. Nearly all students achieve well in music, including those of lower attainment. They acquire good collaborative skills through very good opportunities to work in small groups. Students' enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment are evident. For example, in a Year 9 higher-attaining class, they led to good skills in group problem-solving as students tested the vocal techniques needed to represent King Harald's Norwegian army.
144. In 2000, students' GCSE grades were below the national average at A\*-C grades and above the average at A\*-G. It was a similar pattern for the previous two years. Standards for A\*-C grades were lower than at the time of the last inspection. In 2000, students' standards in GCSE music were lower than in other subjects. Changes in staffing over the last three years have led to a lack of continuity in high quality teaching for both groups. The evidence from lessons and the students' current work suggests that this pattern is changing and 16 year-olds now reach above average standards. A significant number of higher-attaining students who have private lessons usually reach well above expectations in their performance, composition and aural skills and in their analytical understanding of musical history and genres. However, some lower-attaining students in Year 10 and Year 11 struggle with the demands of the course and a few do

not take the examination. Many of them do not benefit from individual lessons to raise their standards in performance and composition, and in their practical understanding of musical scores. Nevertheless, nearly all students achieve well as they work hard to try to improve.

145. A-level results in 2000 were well below the national average in the higher grades but above average for grades A-E. In 1999, A-level results were well above national averages. Most of the current A-level students are on course to attain above average results. Attainment in performance and composition is very good. All students progress very well, for example, in producing increasingly more sophisticated compositions, and in their use of information and communication technology for composition, research and essay writing. Standards in harmony, musical history and musical analysis are at least good. All sixth form students have excellent attitudes to music, and the industrious, high-quality self-management of their work clearly raises standards in both achievement and attainment.
146. The quality of teaching is good overall across the age groups. Very good specialist expertise, along with good planning and lesson structure, are used well to teach musical knowledge and skills, such as composition techniques. Teachers know their students well and challenge and support their learning. This leads to impressive preparation for GCSE and A-level examinations and good independent learning to aid further studies. It also enabled a Year 10 student with special learning needs to make good progress in composition and performance. Teachers are very good role models. They use a calm, respectful and good-humoured manner to establish very good relationships and to make learning fun both in class and in clubs such as the orchestra. There are consistently very good opportunities for students to reflect on world music and to develop self-confidence and team skills both in lessons and in a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Eleven staff provide good support and challenge for 100 students who have individual instrumental lessons.
147. Very good leadership and management, and good monitoring and evaluation within the department, identified at the last inspection, continue to raise standards in music. The staff are very hardworking, and promote cultural awareness very well through regular college concerts and performances. The students' musical education is further enriched through participation in county and community music groups. The support of non-music staff and the very good facilities and displays contribute to the excellent ethos for learning in this popular subject.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

148. Students' attainment overall is above expectations. Standards achieved have steadily risen since the last inspection and a significant minority of students reach the very highest standards. For example, four boys represent the county at rugby and in netball ten girls train with the East Hertfordshire development squad. The standard of college teams is good. Both boys and girls attain equally high standards and improve as they move up the college. This is largely due to good teaching.
149. At age 14, students' attainment is in line with expectations. Standards in activities such as dance and gymnastics are satisfactory. Most students are competent in ball-handling skills, show satisfactory body control and have sound basic knowledge of the principles of movement. Variations in the quality of students' experience at middle school are evident in their work and this accounts for the wide variations in attainment in Year 9. For example, a significant minority of students are unfamiliar with basic technical language, such as the names of muscles. Students' achievements, including

those with special educational needs, are satisfactory. They make steady gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. Pockets of underachievement are largely due to a settling-in period in mixed teaching groups in gymnastics and dance. Planning and evaluating skills are developing well, as seen in a lesson where students were able to identify good use of levels, time and flow in dances based on the theme of sport. Extensive participation in college team games, inter-house competitions and other extra-curricular activities have a very positive effect on the attainment and progress of all students, particularly the higher-attaining students.

150. At age 16, students' attainment is above expectations. The majority are making good progress. All students are meeting course requirements in the GCSE examination course, and their estimated grades are approximately in line with national averages. Students' achievements over Key Stage 4 are good. They make significant strides in acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills. The standard of team games such as football and netball is good. The majority of students are developing high-level skills, techniques and tactics. In a Year 11 netball lesson, girls moved around the court with speed, agility and effective use of space. Pockets of underachievement, for example among Year 10 boys, are mainly due to immature behaviour rather than the quality of teaching. A small minority of students, mainly those with Statements of Special Educational Need, under-achieve due to weak literacy skills which hinder their progress.
151. Standards in the sixth form are good. Although physical education is not compulsory, about half the students continue with a wide range of activities. A good programme of competitive sport helps raise levels of attainment. Students following the Community Sports' Leaders Award course make very good progress: a sixth form student supporting a Year 9 class competently and confidently led games practices.
152. The quality of teaching is good. It is more effective at Key Stage 4, where the strengths and weaknesses of each student are better known to teachers, than in Year 9, where teachers are still assessing the students' competence in various activities. In half of all lessons seen teaching was good or better and one in four lessons very good. In the remainder it was satisfactory.
153. Key strengths of teaching lie in the extent of the teachers' knowledge of what they teach and in their skill in communicating to the students what they have to do and how to improve. A further strength lies in the teaching of basic skills, thus enabling students to progress steadily to higher level tactics and techniques. Clear planning of lessons ensures that students are progressively challenged physically and intellectually. The constructive management of lessons results in an orderly, safe and calm learning environment where the students thrive. Students with special educational needs are skilfully integrated into lessons in a way that ensures that they make good progress.
154. In very good lessons, teachers adapt work according to the effect it has on students. For example, in a Year 11 lesson the teacher skilfully adapted planned groupings and activities to improve students' understanding of blocking tactics in games. In almost all lessons, informal feedback is insufficiently linked with formal assessment procedures. Students have little awareness of National Curriculum levels or what they have to do to attain them. Teaching practices across the department vary. In some lessons students are encouraged to lead warm-ups, while in others these are generally teacher-led. The hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of teachers result in high levels of student participation and interest, good behaviour and very good social development.

155. Departmental leadership is good and teachers work very effectively as a team. They pool their expertise to the benefit of the students. However, insufficient monitoring and support of the work of the department at senior management level result in lack of consistency in implementing college policies. Lack of indoor accommodation also adversely affects the quality of learning, particularly in wet weather when groups double up.
156. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Teaching has improved from satisfactory to good, despite the appointment of two newly-qualified teachers. Teaching of planning and evaluating skills has improved. Student participation in extra-curricular activities has increased significantly. An examination course has been introduced at GCSE but not at A level. There has been no change in indoor accommodation, including the changing rooms and showers: these remain unsatisfactory.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

157. By the age of 14, the majority of students reach standards that are in line with the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus in their knowledge and understanding of key aspects of world faiths and of some moral issues, such as suicide and racism. Due to an imbalance in curriculum coverage and teaching of world faiths, and an increasing emphasis on philosophy, students' understanding of Christianity and other monotheistic faiths is less secure than their grasp of Hinduism. Attainment and achievement in the development of reflective and listening skills are good and sometimes very good. Achievement overall is generally satisfactory, although it is restricted by a significant amount of passive learning.
158. Some higher-attaining students develop a sound understanding of Freud's theory of the origins of religion. They also show good skills in research and analysis, expressing their views clearly and concisely both orally and in writing. Lower-attaining students in Year 9 concentrate well and achieve well orally, as they actively and maturely participate in a study of atonement. However, their knowledge and understanding of ideas such as the Trinity are weak.
159. In 2000, GCSE results at grades A\*-C and A\*-G were well below the national average. Students' attainment in religious education was also lower than in other subjects. In 1999, however, A\*-C grades were above average, so there is no identifiable trend of decreasing standards. The majority of current 16-year-olds reach standards which are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. Since the last inspection, there has been no increase in the time given to teaching non-GCSE religious education and standards are unsatisfactory in all aspects of the course. Many 14 to 16-year-old non-GCSE students lack interest and are inattentive, leading to serious underachievement. There is, however, a significant increase in the number of students taking GCSE. A clear majority of students are on line to obtain average standards, with a significant number reaching above average levels of attainment. Nearly all GCSE students reach expected standards in their grasp of Hinduism and ethical issues such as the problem of evil. Some students have a good understanding of the differences between Hinduism and Christianity. Impressive essays by some higher-attaining students show a good development of ideas, for example on the origins of the world; these are clearly and logically reasoned. Weak literacy for many lower-attaining students, however, hinders fluent and accurate written expression of their views, although their oral skills are often good. Achievement for GCSE students is satisfactory and sometimes good.
160. In 2000, A-level results for the 17 entries were well above the national average, both in

the higher grades and for grades A-E. In the previous two years, A-level results were also impressive and above average. The majority of current A-level students reach standards which are above average and a significant number attain well above that standard. By Year 13, students have a very good understanding of set texts, including the use of Sanskrit in the Bhagavad Gita. They are usually skilled in writing essays and are excellent independent learners. Year 12 students are less secure in their knowledge, but are developing good discursive and analytical skills. Sixth formers are very motivated and hardworking high achievers.

161. Teaching is satisfactory overall, as at the last inspection. It is generally good in Year 9 and in the sixth form, including general studies. It is unsatisfactory for 14 to 16-year-old non-GCSE students, and one lesson was poor. In two-thirds of the lessons seen during the inspection, teaching for GCSE students was barely satisfactory. Except for non-GCSE religious education in Years 10 and Year 11, specialist teachers have very good expertise in Hinduism and philosophy and their emphasis on students' thinking, rather than simply learning facts, leads to a very good and sometimes excellent development of reflective skills. Students' attitudes to religious education are usually positive, often good and excellent in Year 13. Students respond well to the specialist staff, who are very good role models. Relationships are very good. However, the over-use of a lecturing style leads to a significant amount of passive learning.
162. Religious education is an increasingly popular GCSE and A-level option. Since the last inspection, there has been a reduction in the range of teaching styles, limiting the development of students' understanding and range of skills. The department is led and managed satisfactorily, though it lacks some key procedures such as formal and consistent assessment to set targets and track students' progress.

## **LATIN**

163. Latin is taught to the higher-attaining students from the start of Year 9. The course leads to an examination at GCSE level. The lower-attaining students are offered a course in basic Latin, and are taught in one period each week. These are very successful courses, playing a significant part in extending the students' linguistic and cultural horizons.
164. Standards achieved overall by the students following the examination route are above those found nationally on similar courses. A significant minority of these students reach high levels of attainment. At GCSE, attainment has been above the national average and is second only to French in the standards achieved in the college. Attainment at A level has also been good. These high standards have been maintained over the last few years. The students following the basic course are quick to acquire a knowledge of some of the fundamental elements of the language and make very good progress in their work. Through the enthusiasm of their teachers they have come to appreciate the impact of Latin on other languages. They understand, too, that the language developed in a particular cultural context. At the heart of the standards achieved by the students are the very good quality of teaching, the highly effective management of the department and the support given to the development of the subject by the headteacher and senior managers.
165. In lessons and work seen, higher-attaining students in Year 9 began to read, understand and appreciate passages from classical texts, often translating the less complex sentences accurately. The majority of the students on the examination course use accurate grammar in translating simple sentences from Latin to English. They all have a good knowledge of Roman civilisation. For example, they described

and reacted to some of the elements of Roman entertainment. They sought to place these activities in a moral context and in the context of some of the less savoury activities of their own society. The students in Year 11 all reveal a good range of vocabulary and accurate grammar. In their study of the Roman poet Virgil's Aeneid, they show a good understanding of the devices of epic poetry. This knowledge is further extended by the teachers' very good use of homework. For instance, one task invited the students to explore some of the features of Virgil's vivid descriptive language. This they found challenging and stimulating. Students working towards the A-level examination extend their knowledge of epic poetry and show a refined understanding of some of the complexities of Latin grammar. Students in all years have a clear understanding of some of the key influences of Latin on other languages as revealed, for instance, in English suffixes and prefixes.

166. The quality of teaching is very good overall. The teachers' excellent knowledge of their subject and the skill with which they teach Latin as if it were a living language are key elements in the successful development of the subject. The students respond by taking their work very seriously, working with real enthusiasm. Most of them are very quick to extend their knowledge of the language. As they move through the years they show an increasing sophistication in their understanding of classical texts. One lesson in Year 11 and another in Year 12, for instance, were marked by the students' readiness to ask demanding questions, with the assurance that the answers would be of a high order: they were not disappointed. These lessons were also characterised by high expectations of grammatical accuracy, with the consequence that students, in turn, set high expectations for themselves. Lessons are hives of productive activity. Although information and communication technology is rarely used to support the students' learning, there are plans afoot to remedy this.
167. Very good leadership and management of the department are underpinned by excellent documentation and a strong belief in the significance of classical languages for the intellectual development of the students. The teaching of Latin adds considerably to students' use and understanding of language. It also helps in the acquisition of disciplined approaches to learning. The persistently high standards achieved in examinations are clear indications that this is a subject that has gone from strength to strength since the last inspection.

## SIXTH FORM

168. The sixth form is a strength of the college. A-level results are good and though a smaller than the national average proportion achieve a vocational qualification, the results represent at least a satisfactory level of achievement for those who follow vocational courses.
169. The work observed on the vocational courses reaches standards at least in line with national expectations. The teaching seen in business studies AS/level, GNVQ, and GCSE classes was good. Students respond well, and usually make good progress in increasing or consolidating their knowledge and understanding of business practices such as marketing and recruitment, and in refining their examination skills. In leisure and tourism, good teaching supports students effectively in the development of greater clarity in the use of key concepts. The students on this course classify different types of customer. Overall, they achieve standards that meet the requirements of the course and they show a sound understanding of problems and solutions in communicating with different groups. A strength of this course is the students' confidence and skill in using information and communication technology to support their work.
170. The only teaching of general studies observed during the inspection was a very good lesson for students in Year 12 on the history of the use of hallucinogenic drugs. The teaching was underpinned by a very good knowledge of the historical and scientific context of the debate about these substances. The students were provided with an intelligent context in which to frame their own judgements. They, in turn, showed considerable moral discrimination in their discussion. The teaching of classics is a further strength of the sixth form.
171. The curriculum offered is broad, well balanced and appropriate for the range of abilities and interests of the students. Twenty-six subjects are offered in the sixth form, 20 of which are at A or AS-level. Currently two GNVQ courses are offered at intermediate level. Specialist study is well balanced by a general studies course taken to A or AS level by most students, and compulsory for all students up to the end of the first term of Year 13. This course provides sufficient elements of religious education to satisfy requirements and offers students a suitable broadening of their education, together with opportunities to consider and discuss general issues. The curriculum also enables students to continue and extend their physical education to include new sports, such as badminton. There are plans further to broaden the scope of the sporting opportunities available.
172. Responsibility for the pastoral care and guidance of sixth-formers is shared between the house pastoral system and the two sixth-form tutors, each responsible for a year group. This division of responsibility is effective. The main responsibility for academic monitoring and guidance, including guidance on university applications, lies with the sixth-form tutors. Though the college offers few opportunities for students to take on formal responsibilities, except as part of the house tutor groups, the students themselves choose to take on responsibilities such as work for Amnesty International and organising charity appeals. There is something of a chasm between Year 12 and Year 13 students, exemplified by the separate seating arrangements in the social area. The college is rightly considering ways of achieving more integration between the two year groups.
173. The physical provision is very good. Students have a very large and well-furnished social area on the ground floor of the separate sixth-form block, with easy access to an

equally large study area on the first floor. This is also well furnished and generously equipped with computers and study facilities, including a careers library. The large single space might be more effectively used if it were sub-divided with some partitioning.

174. The sixth form is well managed. The director of the sixth form, who has been recently appointed and is a member of the senior management team, works closely and effectively with the sixth form co-ordinator, who takes specific responsibility for general studies while sharing other management and guidance duties with the director. These arrangements work well. Students' academic attainment and progress, and their career or higher education intentions, are well monitored and recorded and appropriate measures are taken when students are not making the expected progress. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is good. Private study periods of Year 12 students are carefully supervised by a rota of staff, while Year 13 students are effectively prepared for the independent learning required of them at university by being trusted to plan their own working time.
175. Development planning is sound. Thought is being given to how best to introduce key skills into the sixth form curriculum from September 2001, and other plans are being considered to enhance the provision further and to respond to proposed central government initiatives in vocational qualifications.
176. Great care has been taken to balance the demands of the sixth form with the needs of the rest of the college. Given the care with which the funding is managed, the good quality of teaching and the very good examination results at A Level, the sixth form provides good value for money.