

INSPECTION REPORT

PRIORY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Penwortham, Preston

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 119739

Headteacher: Mr P Young

Reporting inspector: Mr A Byrne
2561

Dates of inspection: 20 – 23 May 2002

Inspection number: 191179

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 16 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Ashworth
Date of previous inspection:	13 January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2561	Anthony Byrne	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are students taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p>
9189	John Horwood	Lay inspector		<p>Students' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its students?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
1407	Peter John Scott	Team inspector	Mathematics	<p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?</p> <p>Key Stage 4 curriculum</p>
20368	Sue Macintosh	Team inspector	<p>Equal opportunities</p> <p>English as an additional language</p> <p>English</p>	
10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Science	
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
15127	Bill Goodall	Team inspector	Art and design	
Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities

11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Design and technology	
7399	Paul Roberts	Team inspector	History	
31332	John Marshall CBE	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
18846	Philip Priest	Team inspector	Music	
3687	Godfrey Bancroft	Team inspector	Physical education	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Priory Technology College is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive school of about average size (1010 students on roll). There are more boys than girls in a ratio of approximately 3:2. Students come from a widespread catchment area, about 50 per cent travel by bus. A full range of socio-economic backgrounds is represented, with a substantial degree of disadvantage in some home backgrounds. About 9 per cent are entitled to free school meals, though the figure was higher and towards the top end of the group of comparable schools at the time of the latest performance data. An above average proportion (22 per cent) has special educational needs, including 60 per cent at the higher stages of need (stages 3-5 on SEN register); just under a third of those have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Whilst 10 per cent of all students have English as an additional language, most are fluent speakers. Students of white UK heritage are the majority ethnic group; the next largest group (7 per cent) is of Indian heritage. A substantial staff turnover of 40 per cent, partly attributable to retirement or promotion, has taken place since 2000. There is considerable shared use of the site and facilities with the community. The school gained Technology College status in 2000 and has Investor in People status. Standards on entry are just about average, with more students below average than above.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Priory is a good, effective school. Standards are mainly above average and rising. Teaching is often very good and develops positive attitudes to work. Leadership is good. Overall the college provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9, very good progress in Years 10 and 11 and gain well above average results in GCSE.
- Improved performance of boys.
- Very good teaching and good behaviour and attitudes enable most students to achieve their full potential.
- The college has developed a very effective database from which to track and develop students' progress.
- An inclusive ethos and good relationships support students' personal development very well.
- Support for students with special educational needs.
- The willingness of staff to "go the extra mile" for their students.

What could be improved

- Strategic planning more closely related to evaluation and longer-term budget.
- Some aspects of timetabling.
- Developing strategies to improve the performance of other groups, besides boys.
- Wider use of information and communication technology and increasing book use in the library.
- Standards in art and in modern foreign languages in Years 7 to 9.
- Greater appreciation of other cultures, building on links with ethnic minority communities.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was inspected in January 1997 when standards were found to be high for that time; progress, teaching and leadership were all good. Action was required to improve research and literacy skills, to monitor teaching, improve long-term planning, secure continuity by reducing shared classes and address the learning preferences of boys and girls. Since then standards have improved at a good rate to well above average; progress is very good in Key Stage 4 and good use is made of independent study. Whilst ICT facilities are good, book use in the library has not improved enough, shared classes

continue to the detriment of continuity for some students and aspects of planning still require tightening up. Overall, improvement is good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
	All schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	C	B	A	A	

Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and exceed national expectations in national tests. They perform better than the average for similar schools. The rate of progress is even better in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students gaining a good range of higher grade passes (5A*-C) is above the national average and well above similar schools. The proportion gaining a good range of pass grades (5A*-G) is average, but high for schools in the same free school meal entitlement group. The number gaining at least one pass each year shows a strong upward trend since 2000.

In GCSE results and in work seen during inspection, students are above average in English, science, mathematics, design and technology, history and information and communication technology (ICT). They are average in geography, modern foreign languages, music and religious education and below average in art. Although boys' theory work reduces GCSE results to average in physical education, standards are generally good. Results have fluctuated in drama and media studies, but recent results approach average and current work is good. The low entry rate for English literature makes comparison difficult; steps to extend participation are being taken.

By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are mainly at least average, with the best outcomes seen in English, mathematics, science, drama, design and technology, ICT and physical education. However, standards are below average in art and in modern foreign languages in Years 7 to 9.

Standards in literacy and numeracy are satisfactory in both key stages. Students with special educational needs achieve well. Those with English as an additional language achieve in line with others. Students who are gifted and talented are making very good progress and in mathematics some students are sitting GCSE a year early. In specialist ICT lessons students make accelerated progress, leading to early entry for examinations.

The college sets ambitious targets based on thorough analysis of past performance and potential and has a good track record of raising standards, which has led to Achievement Awards from the DfES for two consecutive years.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students view the college positively and work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. With very few exceptions, students co-operate in lessons and there is no oppressive behaviour in free time.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students respond well to teachers' warm encouragement and get on well with each other.
Attendance	Good. The rate of attendance is securely above average.

A very strong feature of the college is the personal development of students, supported by very good relationships with teachers and their fellow students. Students with behavioural problems often respond well to the support provided, but the behaviour of a few boys, in Years 9 and 7, occasionally lets the college down.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Very 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.

Teaching is very good overall, with some outstandingly successful features, especially in Key Stage 4. Through good relationships based on high expectations and encouragement, teachers, who are often ready to "go the extra mile" to make students feel included, foster an atmosphere in which the great majority are keen to learn from teachers' expertise and from each other. Thorough marking, reference to assessment data and analysis of progress lead to target setting which is mainly effectively shared with students and parents. Teachers are highly aware of plans for students with special needs. Lessons usually have clear structure and variety leading to good progress. However, there is a lack of consistency in stating objectives at the start and revisiting them at the end. In unsatisfactory lessons seen, very occasionally in Years 7 and 9, teachers had low expectations of a few students' behaviour and used inflexible strategies that did not work. Attention is paid to developing literacy, although use of the library does not play as strong a role as it should. There is very good teaching of information and communication technology by specialist teachers, but its use is less widespread than one would expect in a technology college.

In English, teaching is good in both key stages; in mathematics it is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4; in science it is very good throughout. Very good teaching occurs regularly in drama, geography in Key Stage 4, history, ICT and physical education. Support for students with special educational needs is good. Gifted and talented students receive satisfactory teaching. Teaching is satisfactory in art, modern foreign languages and religious education in Key Stage 4. It is good in design and technology, geography in Key Stage 3 and in music. The positive attitude encouraged by the teaching means that students concentrate well and listen to the teacher and to each other. They feel respected and at ease in answering questions or contributing ideas. They know what their targets are and try hard to meet them in class and in out-of-hours study.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory, with considerable strengths and some very good innovations, but with some weaknesses in timetabling.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Very good record keeping, tracking progress and use of individual plans.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English. Arrangements to support and include them are effective.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good support for spiritual, moral and social development. Support for cultural development is satisfactory. Ethnic minority communities are very well integrated, but their cultures are not represented sufficiently.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good, based on close monitoring and support for the personal and academic aspects of students' lives.

Lack of ICT in music means that statutory requirements are not met. However, strengths in the curriculum outweigh weaknesses. Some timetabling problems, such as adequate time for subjects and classes split between two teachers, arise from trying to fit a lot in. Particularly good features are personal, social and health education and links with partners, including business contacts. Out-of-hours study and activities are very good. Each student is known well and targets and support are based on this very good relationship, but groups, other than boys, are not targeted. The approach to child protection and health and safety is sound. Parents are given clear and detailed information about progress and the school offers an open door at all times.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. Major strengths of innovation and commitment. Aspects of long-term planning and evaluation need to be tightened up and this is in hand.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Efficient committee work based on good insight; a few shortcomings in information required in the annual report.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Very good use of data and strong commitment to monitoring, but more precision required in using success criteria.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Grants and participation in initiatives well used.

Effective management reported previously has now raised standards higher and developments have wider scope. An innovative curriculum and a computer-based assessment system and strong monitoring, research and development exemplify strengths. In the rapid pace of change a few links between actions and development planning have not been explicit and long-term costing and the measures of success are not precise. Best value principles are applied in financial matters, but less clearly in other decisions. Governors support the school and represent parents well, but published information lacks a few required details. Middle management makes a good contribution to the college's effectiveness and ethos.

Provision for ICT is beginning to be very good after some delay, but use of books in the library is unsatisfactory. The college gives good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High aspirations for students• The college is approachable• Good leadership and management• Good progress made by students• The college helps to make students mature and responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The management of homework• Closer working with parents• Information about progress

Parents' positive views are fully supported by the inspection team. The inspection judged that the homework set for pupils is appropriate and information about progress is very good because of the new assessment system. The college is very good at responding to concerns raised by parents, but the use of planners is inconsistent.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Standardised tests (Cognitive Ability Tests) administered by the school in the first term of Year 7 indicate that most students have reached about the level of attainment expected of the age group, with a higher proportion that is below, rather than above, average. National Curriculum Tests at age 11 in Key Stage 2 back this up and show attainment in English as further below average than in mathematics.
2. By the end of Year 9 students have exceeded the national average in National Curriculum tests over the past three years. In 2001 results were above similar schools in English and science (based on uptake of the free schools meals) and well above in mathematics. Teacher assessments were broadly in line with test results in mathematics and science, but in English were overestimated in relation to test outcomes. Results are particularly creditable, given that there were almost twice as many boys as girls (and nationally girls obtain significantly better results) and that the proportion of students claiming free school meals was at the high end of the benchmark group.
3. In the end of Year 11 GCSE/GNVQ examinations, students gaining five or more higher grade (A*-C) passes have surpassed the national average over three years and in 2001 (with significantly more boys than girls) the proportion of higher grade passes was very high in comparison to similar schools, based on free meal uptake. The school compared less favourably with schools in which the year group had similar Key Stage 3 results, but this is mitigated by the unfavourable imbalance of gender and the very good progress in Key Stage 4 indicated by work seen during inspection.
4. The proportion of students obtaining a good range of GCSE passes (five or more at A*-G) is average in national terms and taking account of results obtained by the students at end of Year 9, but the same mitigating factors apply and the result is high for schools in the same free meal grouping. Nearly every student on roll in Year 11 passes at least one subject at A*-G and this inclusive feature has shown a strong upward trend from 2000 onwards. Evidence from departments with a good track record of matching predicted grades to results indicates that this Year 11 cohort is on track to achieve well. The school takes great pains to accurately assess, track and set targets for students. Although overall targets for Year 11 in 2002 are lower than for 2001, higher targets for the current Year 10, in 2003, reassure that variation relates to thorough analysis rather than any lack of challenge.
5. Good results have been obtained at higher levels (6+) in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3. Students' success in GNVQ courses has had a positive effect on results at age 16 in recent years. In GCSE, science, history, computer studies and geology have returned particularly good results, whilst drama, modern foreign languages, art and design and technology have performed relatively less well in the recent past. Overall, the rate of improvement achieved by the school in 2000 and then further in 2001 has brought consecutive Achievement Awards from the DfES.
6. Whilst the school keeps exceptionally good track of individual student performance and is a keen participant in the LEA/Bristol University value-added measurement project, the only pattern of differential attainment targeted for action is gender. There are signs that boys' achievement is improving and boys are moving ahead of the gender

comparison nationally, though they have some way to go to match the girls. Some ethnic minority groups are performing well, in line with trends in the LEA. They contribute well to the results, but their performance is only in line with the LEA average for the groups. This reduces the value-added factor that can be credited to the college.

7. About 100 students in the school are of ethnic minority background. They have English as an additional language, but only a few are at an early stage of learning English. The few students arriving new to the school with English as an additional language are assessed as to their level of need by an external service. Some students receive support in Cantonese, their first language, for a few months. These students make good progress overall towards their targets. Students from ethnic minorities achieve well at the school, as seen during the inspection and in records of their progress as individuals. However, the school does not analyse its data in terms of ethnic groups, which means that focused action is not taken to further improve standards achieved.
8. Whilst the school is at an early stage of working with gifted and talented students as an identified group, the thorough tracking system for individual students is a reassurance that appropriately challenging targets are set and evidence of good progress gathered in the inspection takes this group into account. Students with special needs make good progress overall. In the past two years more than 85 per cent of Year 11 students on the register of special need have gained between three and eight GCSE passes. Because teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) generally provide a good standard of support, progress is at least satisfactory and often good.
9. Standards of literacy are sufficient for students to make good progress in their work. The new Key Stage 3 strategy is being implemented and is strongly contributing to raising standards in history. Many departments display key words, but not all refer to them in their teaching yet, so students are not familiar enough with them to use them in their own speech or writing. Some departments are working to improve numeracy. Science, physical education and information and communication technology are at present successfully building on students' good levels of mathematical achievement to improve good standards further. Standards in using information and communication technology are high in specialist lessons. Contact with ICT in other subjects is too patchy to significantly improve standards.
10. Overall standards of work seen during inspection, in class and in work scrutinised indicate good levels of attainment in both key stages. An exception is that attainment in art in both key stages and modern foreign languages at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average. Given where they start from, students achieve well in Key Stage 3, very well in Key Stage 4 and very well overall.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Students have positive attitudes to the college and learning. They are polite and well mannered, showing courtesy when moving around the college and this is a very orderly community. Students concentrate well and work hard in most lessons. There were many examples, such as in a Year 10 English lesson, of students showing very good ability to work in groups. Students respond well in the great majority of lessons to the high expectations of the teacher and to the very good pace of lessons, contributing with enthusiasm to the question and answer sessions. Interviews held with representatives from all year groups consistently provided evidence that students value their educational opportunities and participation in the college community.

12. Behaviour of the students is good in most lessons and often very good, especially in Year 10 where behaviour in some lessons was excellent. In a small minority of lessons, such as in a Year 7 lower set mathematics lesson and in a Year 9 art lesson, there were some students whose behaviour restricted progress. The high level of good behaviour and attitudes provides an inclusive environment where all groups of students can learn to their full potential. It is a strength of the college that this situation includes all ages, genders and levels of competence. Around the college, including at lunch and break times, behaviour is consistently good and there is no oppressive behaviour. Bus drivers spoken to by inspectors said that they are satisfied with behaviour during journeys. Records of isolated cases of oppressive behaviour show it is dealt with firmly. There were only two permanent exclusions last year. The college has good strategies, including its recently introduced inclusion centre, to support pupils with behavioural difficulties and indications are that there will be a reduction in the number of exclusions this year.
13. Relationships throughout the college are very good and are fundamental to the success of the college. They lead to a welcoming environment where there is mutual respect and trust. Staff and students communicate very well and relationships between them are very good, allowing students to talk to tutors about individual problems. Students achieve very good personal development and are mature, confident, polite and trustworthy. They are keen to take on responsibilities such as membership of the year or college councils, or responsibilities in the classroom, as in science where they distribute and collect equipment. The part that students have to play is established as important in this college and they rise to the expectation.
14. Attendance levels are above the national average with unauthorised absence below, a situation very similar to that at the time of the last inspection. Lateness is mainly due to traffic problems for the buses. The college analyses attendance data well and follows up unexpected absence on the first day. There are no particular groups with attendance issues. The college receives good support from external agencies for the few who have poor attendance. The site requires a lot of student movement between lessons and this results in some reduction of lesson time in periods 3 and 5. Registration takes place during the morning tutor period and at the end of the afternoon – the system is efficient and secure. Staff check attendance at the start of each lesson.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. Lesson observation was predominantly of Key Stage 3 classes, due to the involvement of Year 11 in examinations. However, besides observing Year 10 lessons, inspectors discussed in depth with teachers and took several opportunities to talk with Year 11 students about the approach to teaching and learning that had been taken and Key Stage 4, work representing the full range of subjects, was scrutinised.
16. Overall, about a third of lessons feature excellent or very good teaching and the proportion is higher in Key Stage 4. Over three-quarters of lessons are based on good or better teaching. There is a very small element of unsatisfactory teaching in Key Stage 3 only, occurring occasionally when lesson planning or class management are not strong. Students' learning is good or better in more than three out of four lessons in Key Stage 4 and consistently at least satisfactory. There is a small element of unsatisfactory learning in Key Stage 3, associated mainly with a minority of boys in Year 7 and Year 9; the school is aware and is taking actions to improve their involvement and co-operation. Learning is usually good in Key Stage 3.

17. The key strength of teaching and learning is the consistently very good relationship between students and teachers. Teachers have high expectations of the students and students learn well because of the praise, encouragement and support they are given. Students are encouraged to listen to each other and work collaboratively in lessons that are clearly structured and conducted at a good pace. Teachers for the most part use assessment very effectively to help students to understand how well they are doing and to set appropriate targets for achievement; helpful marking and reference to very clear individual education plans for students with special needs play an important part. Learning support assistants (LSAs) are well briefed on how to support students and contribute well to the general ethos of wanting to succeed. In Year 8 drama a student with special needs had his attention gently but firmly maintained in a small group discussion by the LSA using appropriate physical contact to draw the student into the group with an including gesture of arm around shoulder, or sometimes hands directing the head towards others. In some lessons, such as Year 9 geography, very good ICT resources are available to engage students' interest. A range of approaches to learning, conducted at good pace, sustains interest in most lessons. Teachers are usually passionate about their subject as well as about helping students to succeed and this enthusiasm inspires good learning. There is very effective use of homework and "out-of-hours" study activity and clubs. Teachers are generously disposed to give extra time and help beyond lessons. Students are very open to learning from the teacher and from each other. Overall, this constitutes an atmosphere in which students feel that learning is worthwhile; as one student remarked, "It's 'cool' to learn".
18. Teachers deal adequately with matters of literacy and numeracy as they arise and recent training has prompted more focused attention on these skills. However, some strategies are not fully utilised. For example, key words for the subject are displayed, but attention is rarely drawn to them and some students do not understand them. In history a strong line has been taken on literacy and the emphasis is assisting students' understanding and ability to express themselves.
19. In a Year 10 geology lesson, students were fully engaged by information arising from a range of sources – video, projection of information from a website and the teacher's own expertise. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson and a Year 7 English lesson, teachers used a similar technique of underpinning students' understanding of ideas by short, progressive steps, with repeated, fast-pace reference to and consolidation of key points. A science teacher adapted complex ideas about thermal energy transfer by helping a lower ability set in Year 9 to understand the properties required in a survival suit. In Year 10 science the teacher maintained students' confidence in answering challenging questions through praise and good behaviour. A Year 8 ICT lesson was well managed to allow access to a wide range of facilities, as students combined image and text from Internet sources to create a website. In the inclusion centre a small group of Year 7 boys were sensitively encouraged to explore points of view about behaviour in order to help them improve their own conduct, at the same time learning to express themselves and to listen to others. Students become very involved in learning; a Year 10 drama group displayed total commitment and concentration in refining an improvised play; a top set Year 9 mathematics lesson was conducted at a 'blistering pace' which the students coped with well.
20. A good example of students learning collaboratively was seen in Year 8 history where students worked in groups to apply knowledge they had previously gathered in a variety of interesting ways. The teacher had taken care to equip them with a sufficient range of information to have a worthwhile and insightful discussion about causes of the English Civil War. The quality of a teacher's explanation of vocabulary and terms in poetry

enabled Year 7 students to reach above average levels in discussing the concept of empathy.

21. Students at all levels of ability make good progress in Key Stage 3, very good progress in Key Stage 4 and very good progress overall.

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

22. The curricular provision is satisfactory with many strengths and meets statutory requirements, with the exception of not using information and communication technology in music. The breadth and balance of planned learning experiences within the curriculum are satisfactory. There are strengths but there are also areas for attention, which are to some extent addressed by plans for next year approved recently by the governing body. This is likely to improve curriculum continuity and coherence by avoiding split classes and by redistributing some curriculum time. The curriculum will match more closely the prior attainment of the students and aim to be relevant to their individual needs. A marked strength of the present curriculum has been the management of change in recent years, whilst providing a very effective foundation for rising standards, personal development and harmonious relationships.
23. Whilst the curriculum has been improved since the last inspection, there are still some Year 7 and Year 8 subject groups who have two teachers. Sometimes discontinuity has been worse when staff absence has occurred. Parents were right to draw the attention of the inspectors to this weakness. It undermines equal opportunities and, particularly for lower-attaining students, retention of subject content in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and religious education. The weakness is exacerbated by the timetable of 50 periods over two weeks, which can mean a teacher only has contact every second week. This issue promises to be resolved when the college moves towards a 25 period weekly timetable in the new college year.
24. A high proportion (80-90 per cent) of students continue their education after the age of 16 at one of two local colleges of further education. Very good curriculum links between the institutions are ensuring that appropriate curricula are being developed for the 14 to 19 age group. Intermediate GNVQ courses broaden access to further education. In science, design and technology and history links with the local primary schools are good. Curriculum links in English and mathematics with the contributory primary schools are less well developed. Students benefit from the technology college status, which has brought opportunities relating to industrial experience and some excellent facilities, which have been recently provided. There is a very good partnership with local industry. Additional links to the local community through governors and other external organisations enrich opportunities.
25. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) within the college is very good. It is taught to all students for one hour each week. Planning and resources are very good. In Year 7, tutors teach their tutor group to assist relationships. In other years, tutors teach specialist topics and receive appropriate training if necessary. The course includes advice and guidance on drugs and sex related issues. Personal development issues are addressed well, as shown by the good social skills of the students. Observations during the inspection judged provision as very good. Students interviewed were very supportive of the course and parents commented on the mature perspective their children gain on topical issues.

26. Careers education is good. The careers library is well provided with a range of information. Careers education is taught progressively within the personal, social and health education course from Year 7. All students undertake a well-organised programme of work experience early in Year 11. There are effective links with, and strong support from, small employers and larger companies. The design and technology department uses industrial software to emphasise industrial practice.
27. Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. Many activities are planned but the willingness of most students to improve their learning means that many take place spontaneously at break, lunchtime and after school, when staff readily give of their time to help students with difficulties and others who wish to extend their learning. Most departments have an open-door policy outside lesson times and this is known and used by students. Classes in college holidays provide revision sessions when students prepare for external tests and examinations. A course in the summer holidays for identified gifted and talented students was particularly successful. Booster classes, homework clubs and additional lessons all feature. Visits are regularly arranged, for example to the Globe theatre, art galleries and historical visits, and the school readily engages in competitive activities on the playing fields and in poetry, public speaking and mathematical competitions. The provision for music extra-curricular activities is improving after a decline. Charities benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities including 'readathons' and sponsored spelling. The extensive range of sport has high rates of participation and these have been recognised by the receiving of the 'SportsMark' award.
28. Technology college status has seen specialist teaching of information and communication technology with students reaching very high standards. Less successful has been the use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning other subjects, where opportunities are not always widely exploited, for example in the teaching of art and music. The college has made a good start in supporting students' use of literacy across the curriculum. A co-ordinator has been appointed and in-service training for the teaching staff has taken place. Progress is already being seen in some departments; for instance, in history, students write for a variety of purposes. Some departments, for example religious education, provide good opportunities to develop speaking, listening and reading aloud. The development of students' numeracy in all subjects in the curriculum has until recently been unplanned. However, following a very recent school-based staff development session, a curriculum audit identified opportunities for numeracy in subject schemes of work. Science, physical education and information and communication technology at present exploit successfully students' good levels of mathematical achievement to extend their learning further.
29. The college provides well for students with special educational needs. The Code of Practice is observed thoroughly. Good liaison with the primary schools ensures that students' difficulties are known as soon as they come into the school and reviews and assessments are carried out regularly. Support is provided through learning support assistants and some small group withdrawal for specialist tuition. An inclusion centre helps around 50 students with a range of difficulties to improve their social and personal management skills. Good use of individual education plans means that most teachers are aware of how to provide for these students in lessons.
30. The college pays satisfactory attention to equal opportunities and curriculum access through its very good systems to monitor and take appropriate action on the progress of individual students. A close watch is kept on issues arising from the imbalance in the

number of girls and boys on the college roll. Equality of opportunity, regardless of gender or ethnic group, is maintained when forming sets for teaching.

31. Provision for the one in 10 students from minority ethnic backgrounds is good. Interviews show that these students feel that the school is sensitive to their needs. The college does not target the achievement of minority ethnic groups as such. The few students at an early stage of learning English, mainly Cantonese speaking, have very good support. Following assessment by the local education authority, they are supported in their own language for a few months, after which support transfers to the special needs department, which sets targets for their language development.
32. Provision for the personal development of students is good. However, the coherent overview achieved after the previous inspection has slipped into the background. The provision for cultural development is satisfactory and for spiritual, moral and social development it is good.
33. Worthwhile spiritual opportunities are provided for reflection in a number of subjects. A religious education lesson in Year 8 began with silent meditation. In science, students are led to wonder at the natural world and man's place in it. Mathematics recognises order and pattern in numbers and the beauty of symmetry in the tessellation of Muslim art; there, too, students grapple with the notion of infinity. In religious education, students learn not just the facts of different religions but about the impact they have on the daily lives of their adherents. In learning about the First World War, students contrast the horror of war with the beauty of some of the poetry written about it. Students listen to music to discover what feelings it arouses in them. In other subjects, however, little thought is given to the potential contribution to students' spiritual development. The college makes a good attempt to provide for collective worship with assemblies supported by reflective moments in tutor time.
34. The college has a strong moral ethos and high expectations of students' behaviour and attitudes towards all members of the college community. Clear moral messages are expressed through assemblies, tutor periods and PSHE and the staff are very good role models. Moral issues are discussed deeply in religious education; students examine moral dilemmas raised by the advances of science such as abortion, cloning, euthanasia and the uses of nuclear energy. In history students discuss the slave trade, the employment of children in the 19th century, the causes and the effects of war, the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust. Physical education emphasises the need for rules and the notion of fair play.
35. The college attaches importance to students' social development and sense of community. Students learn to co-operate in pairs and groups. They learn about social and environmental issues in PSHE, history and geography. They have the opportunity to take responsibility through the year and college councils. Students are proud to belong to the college and a number have opportunities to represent it in sport and music; in so doing they learn their responsibilities to attend practices and to put the interests of the team or group before their own convenience. They develop their role as responsible citizens through care of the college environment and through fund-raising activities. Work experience raises the awareness of the older students to the world of industry and commerce.
36. Students learn about their own culture and those of other countries through English, history, geography and modern foreign languages and have the opportunity to take part in musical and artistic activities.

37. The college does not, however, celebrate the cultural diversity of the college population. Although a number of subjects make references to the indigenous cultures of North America, Africa and Australasia, surprisingly little is done to celebrate the culture of India, which is part of the heritage of the largest ethnic minority in the college.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

38. The college has sound procedures in place for child protection. The child protection officer is well trained in procedures. All staff receive thorough training in child protection issues and are well aware of what to do if issues arise. The college has a sound approach to health and safety, but procedures and advice on risk assessments require updating. The site is large with many access points, a matter requiring risk assessment and action. Fire drills and tests are carried out on a regular basis and good records are kept. Accident reports are completed and external agencies are involved as required. Routine health and safety inspections are carried out on a regular basis. The college keeps good records of any racist incidents but there have been very few of these.
39. The welfare of the students is underpinned by a very effective pastoral system that ensures close tutor/student relationships. Students have a change of tutor for the final two years but there is an effective handover of information between the two tutors. Planners are used to support personal organisation. There is some inconsistency in the use of planners by staff, students and parents.
40. A real strength of the college's systems is the new assessment system which has been developed within the college. It is computer based and user-friendly. The staff enter personalised data for each student to form their annual report, as well as progress grades and targets. Data retrieval is available to enable progress over time to be reviewed. The system generates very good interim and end of year reports for parents. The system is new and not as readily accessible as intended, but this is soon to be rectified. Within some departments such as modern foreign languages the assessment systems are well used but in art and geography assessment is not used well enough. Individual tracking has led to a high level of awareness of targets by students and parents and strong motivation to succeed, but groups other than boys are not picked out for strategic intervention.
41. The college monitors attendance very closely. The attendance figures are above average, demonstrating that the procedures are effective. The college receives good support from the education welfare officer who spends several hours each week in college. Procedures for lateness are secure.
42. A new behaviour policy was introduced last year and has been largely successful. Occasional inconsistencies in implementation have been monitored and further guidelines prepared. The approach to eliminating oppressive behaviour is very good and the policies are clearly effective. The few occasions where incidents have arisen have been dealt with quickly, sensitively and effectively. A strength of the college has been its approach to inclusion with the introduction of the new unit and provision of initiatives involving external organisations to support students with behaviour and attitude problems. The positive impact is reflected in a reducing trend in exclusions.
43. Whilst student care was good at the time of the last inspection, and this has been maintained, there have been significant improvements in several areas such as assessment and the provision to support students with behavioural difficulties, leading to a judgement of good progress since the last inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

44. The partnership between parents and the college is good. A home/college agreement is in place and students use a planner, which has to be signed by parents and teachers. The planner contains information about day-to-day requirements, as well as a record of work to be done. The use of the planner is in the main satisfactory, but there are some inconsistencies amongst staff, parents and students. The format was changed last year, but further improvement in their use is desirable.
45. Parents' views of the college expressed through the questionnaires and the parents' meeting are very supportive – there is general satisfaction. There was a high return of questionnaires. The most pleasing aspects of the college for parents are approachability, high expectations, good leadership and management, good progress made by the students and that the college helps students to become mature and responsible. The only areas in which some parents would like to see improvements are clearer arrangements about homework, the closeness of working with parents and the information about progress. Individual comments from parents were all considered and taken into account in the relevant sections of this report. Many parents commented positively on the commitment of staff. The comments on homework were mixed, with equal numbers of parents reporting too little and too much. Observations by the inspection team conclude that homework is very well used within the college. Information to parents is very good and the college does all it can to invite partnership with parents and those parents who make the effort will not be rebuffed. The college has an open-door policy to ensure good parental access.
46. Communication with parents is very good. There are regular newsletters, which are very well presented and informative, letters and leaflets on specific matters of interest to groups of parents, as well as an informative college brochure. Reporting on progress is very good. The college provides good guidance on how to interpret assessment data and the format of the reports is very helpful. Comments are personalised and informative. The governors' annual report to parents contains good information for parents but requires improvement to ensure inclusion of better information on targets, forthcoming parent governor elections, college security and individual governor responsibilities for special educational needs, literacy and numeracy.
47. There is a Friends' Association at the college, which organises some social events and fund-raising but it is not well supported by many parents. Most parents demonstrate commitment to their children's education through financial contribution for musical instrument tuition and college visits and transporting to and from the college. The good partnership has been maintained since the last inspection, although support for the association has decreased.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

48. This aspect of the school is good. The effective management reported in the previous inspection has improved standards further and taken on developments that are wider in scope. The head teacher is a good leader, deeply involved in watching over the welfare of students and staff. He has provided a fixed point of continuity during a period of major change in staffing. He commands great respect from governors with whom he works closely and effectively.
49. He delegates effectively to an energetic, loyal senior team. The team's capacity for enterprise and innovation is strong, evidenced by the rapid development of the Key

Stage 4 curriculum and the school's computer-based assessment system. Day-to-day management is sharp, based on vigilance and regular internal communication. Very good support is offered to heads of department in terms of access to and interpretation of performance data. However, in the rapid pace of change a few gaps, which need to be closed, have opened up. Senior management can demonstrate clear links between initiatives and the main college development plan, but these actions are not always explicitly written in alongside precise success criteria. The strong programme of monitoring and evaluation in the school, based on a rolling programme of departmental reviews, does not clearly lead to adjustments in the development plan. Good ideas about an inclusive response to gifted and talented students, developed from the successful summer school, are not yet adequately incorporated in the plan.

50. Improvement planning has not been sufficiently supported by longer-term budget projections to determine the scope and constraints of development. However, governors and senior management are taking steps to incorporate this aspect into their planning. Best value principles are applied thoroughly to straightforward financial deals, such as catering, but not on a wider basis of evaluation. Nevertheless, the college achieves good value for money. Day-to-day financial management, regularly scrutinised by governors, is very good and an efficient rolling programme of maintenance is operated. The school is astute and successful in bidding for extra funding.
51. The governing body operates an efficient committee system supported by liaison, co-ordination and appropriate reference to full meetings. Governors demonstrate astute understanding of the school's needs in identifying as their major concern the supervision of the change in staffing and subsequent consolidation. Governors seek to involve parents through regular communications and took due account of parents' views in a recent decision not to proceed with an offer to site a mobile phone mast at the school. Their annual report has a few shortcomings in terms of information required to be published, but in the main governors' statutory duties are discharged satisfactorily. Despite efforts to recruit, there is insufficient representation on the governing body of the ethnic minority communities from which some students come.
52. The school uses student data well as a basis for analysing performance and setting targets. Target setting is extended to include staff through the well-established performance management system.
53. Middle management is good. Heads of year and the special educational needs co-ordinator contribute strongly to the ethos and effectiveness of the school. Leadership by heads of department is good, except that structures and procedures for management within expressive arts are not clear enough to have maximum impact. Management structures are systematic; however, the link between the management board and the heads of subject group has caused some complications. This is being reviewed. There is a strong culture of staff involvement in school improvement and teams, with clear goals and reporting deadlines, research and develop practice. The college's use of DfES Best Practice Research Scholarship has provided helpful structures for staff to work within. The willingness of staff to spend extra time with students and provide exceptionally good support characterises the commitment to improve and succeed that pervades the school. The college is fully accredited with Investor In People status and has taken care to keep open two-way communications with staff.
54. Accommodation is adequate, though open access to the site and joint use of playing fields pose some hazards. Science accommodation badly needs the upgrades scheduled by the LEA after some delay. After some technical delays during installation,

ICT resources are mainly very good, but some areas do not have adequate access to them. The school uses new technology well for administrative purposes and particularly well in constructing a database of student progress. Although stock in the library has been renewed since the previous inspection, it is not extensive. Wider reading of fiction is supported through English classes, but on the whole the use of books in the library has not improved sufficiently since the previous report. There is no arrangement to introduce pupils to regular use of books, borrowing is recorded manually and does not capitalise on available technology to interrogate borrowing patterns, pupils tend not to use books to support learning and at lunchtimes the popular attraction in the Learning Centre is computers, not books. Teaching is thoroughly monitored and staff are extensively involved in working parties to develop good practice. Extensive change in staffing has been managed satisfactorily, except that in drama there is over-dependence on the contribution of a single member of staff. The provision of technical support staff is rather limited. Whilst LSAs are effective and well managed, there are not enough to provide as much support as is desirable.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

55. Having seen the college through major changes of status and staffing, governors and staff should now build on the inclusive ethos of success and enterprise and make improvements as follows:

- (a) Improve strategic planning by:
 - Developing precise success criteria related to outcomes, not processes
 - Representing more explicitly ongoing initiatives, such as changes in science and work with the gifted and talented
 - Using longer-term financial projections to check feasibility.(Paragraphs 49, 50)
- (b) Improve timetabling by:
 - Ensuring adequate time is allocated for art and a second foreign language and in the proposed arrangements for science in Key Stage 4
 - Reducing the negative impact of classes being shared by two teachers.(Paragraphs 22, 23, 56, 60, 61, 80, 83, 87, 101, 120)
- (c) Build on good use of data to analyse the performance of identifiable groups, such as ethnic minorities and gifted and talented students, and develop good practice to support achievement.
(Paragraphs 6, 7, 8, 31, 40, 97, 99)
- (d) Extend use of information and communication technology in subjects, especially in music, and improve the use of books in the library.
(Paragraphs 9, 28, 54, 59, 63, 70, 77, 80, 86, 89, 94, 117, 123, 126, 128, 129, 143)
- (e) Improve standards in art and in modern foreign languages in Key Stage 3.
(Paragraphs 83, 84, 118, 119, 120)
- (f) Enrich the curriculum by giving more prominence to the cultures of ethnic minority communities represented in the college.
(Paragraph 37, 94, 129)

Additional minor issues for action

- Ensure the governors' annual report contains all required information.
(Paragraphs 46, 51)
- Continue efforts to improve the behaviour of the very few students who are disaffected, or who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.
(Paragraphs 12, 16, 60, 87, 93, 122, 126)
- Improve the use of students' planners.
(Paragraphs 39, 44)

KEY STAGE 4 CURRICULUM

56. In Year 10 and Year 11, the move towards a one-week cycle means that there is in some ways less flexibility in subjects and courses offered to pupils. To partially overcome this, and to match more closely the needs of the pupils, the otherwise common curriculum is to be organised in three bands to meet differing needs of pupils. Two bands will have the opportunity of choosing two optional courses including GNVQ courses, from a wide, yet realistic, selection. These courses are proving popular. The largest group following a GNVQ course are those pupils from Year 9 onwards who follow an innovative approach in information and communication technology. The third band of some 40 pupils will follow a course linked to the local college of further education in which basic skills with appropriate accreditation will be taught. For this band there will be increased time for the teaching of literacy and numeracy and different arrangements for modern foreign languages. A co-ordinator has been appointed and details of the course are currently being developed. The strengths of this planned arrangement are many, but there are concerns in the curriculum time allocated to science in each band and the feasibility of the wide range of courses, including the separate sciences, double science, single science, modular science, and possibly GNVQ science. Senior management are seeking to address these concerns. Drama will cease to become an option for Year 10, due to staffing changes, but intentions are to resume the option in 2003. This change has meant that pupils electing to follow a course in drama from September 2002 have had to reconsider their choice.
57. Between 80 and 90 per cent of each year group continue their education after the age of 16 at one of two local colleges of further education. There is very good curriculum liaison between staff in the college and those in the further education colleges. Curriculum links are developing as both types of educational establishment move closer together to provide joint courses to develop appropriate curricula for the pupils and students in the 14-19 age range. The college provision for foundation GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism, information and communication technology, business education and health and social care are ensuring a good grounding for those pupils who seek to continue their studies in further education.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	133
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	40

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	9	42	49	24	8	1	0
Percentage	7	32	37	18	6	1	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1010
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	98

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	27
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	222

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	100

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4

National comparative data	8.1
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National comparative data	1.1
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	131	73	204

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	85	99	100
	Girls	57	55	56
	Total	142	154	156
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (72)	76 (69)	77 (65)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (38)	53 (47)	36 (32)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	105	98	101
	Girls	64	55	58
	Total	169	153	159
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (74)	75 (69)	78 (65)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	38 (38)	52 (46)	36 (31)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	105	85	190

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	54	97	104
	Girls	56	81	85
	Total	110	178	189
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	58 (56)	94 (91)	99 (96)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results	GCSE point score
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Average point score per student	School	45.2
	National	39.0

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	74
Pakistani	9
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	11
White	880
Any other minority ethnic group	7

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	2	0
Pakistani	1	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	41	1
Other minority ethnic groups	1	1

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	58.1
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	353

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.0
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.75
Key Stage 4	21.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	2703009
Total expenditure	2672682
Expenditure per student	2656
Balance brought forward from previous year	43452
Balance carried forward to next year	73779

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26.0

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1010
Number of questionnaires returned	224

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	57	5	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	40	52	7	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	29	57	7	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	58	20	3	1
The teaching is good.	23	70	4	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	58	12	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	47	4	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	42	3	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	23	53	17	3	5
The school is well led and managed.	42	48	2	1	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	55	4	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	44	8	1	13

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

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **good**.

Strengths

- High rate of entry and good level of pass grades in English GCSE.
- Good progress in Key Stage 3.
- Use of assessment and marking to help students reach targets.

Areas for improvement

- Numbers entered for English literature GCSE.
- Consistency in structuring lessons.
- Strategies for groups of lower ability or containing some pupils whose behaviour is difficult, or where some girls do not contribute.
- Expertise of non-specialists to teach drama.
- Classes taught by more than one teacher.

58. In National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds in 2001, standards reached were above average, as they were the previous two years, for both girls and boys. They were also above average in comparison to similar schools. Standards on entry to the school are average for the age group, so students make good progress over their first three years. This is an improvement in standards since the last inspection. The GCSE results in 2001 were above the national averages for English and English literature. This is particularly good achievement as nearly all students (96 per cent) in the year were entered for the English examination, more than nationally (84 per cent), and nearly all gained an E grade or above. Fewer students are entered for English literature (68 per cent, compared with 94 per cent nationally), but the proportion is an improvement from the previous inspection and the trend is to increase entry. Girls outperform boys in both English and English literature, as they do nationally. GCSE results in drama and media studies have fluctuated considerably over the last three years, being particularly low in A*-C grades obtained in the year 2000 in both subjects. However, 60 per cent of students in 2001 obtained an A*-C grade in media studies and 67 per cent in drama, both close to the national averages.
59. The above average achievement in national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results at the end of Year 11 are reflected in the above average standards seen in lessons and in written work. Spoken responses show that students listen to the teacher and each other, and develop a good understanding. Standards in reading are good. Students interpret a wide range of genres; for example in Year 9, they show good understanding of the plot and the characters in *Macbeth*, describing Lady Macbeth as 'devious' and 'cunning'. Younger below average readers have regular opportunities in lessons to read in pairs and to an adult which helps them to gain confidence and improve. The lack of lessons in the learning centre (the library) limits research and synthesis of information. Standards in writing are good. 'There was blood everywhere. I just had to get rid of it,' writes a Year 7 student as a particularly effective example of how to grab the reader's attention in the first sentence. By Year 9 the majority of students write appropriately for an increasing range of purposes in a range of styles. Their writing is usually technically correct, with good use of a variety of sentence structures and connectives, a wide range of vocabulary and appropriately organised into paragraphs. Teachers' comments and grades reflect good progress as the

students' writing improves over the year. This is as a result of the good teaching, the often detailed, written comments and relevant targets in students' books. In GCSE coursework students' writing is well supported by evidence from the text. Essays on media techniques demonstrate very good high order skills of interpretation and evaluation.

60. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection when it was satisfactory and is now good overall and never less than satisfactory. In the most effective lessons teachers use a range of very good strategies in a well-paced lesson that keeps students involved and learning at a very good rate. Many teachers use probing questions, making students think and extend their ability to express themselves. Teachers have high expectations that increase students' confidence in their ability to achieve well. They manage students' behaviour well and consistently, based on good relationships. In a few lessons teachers manage some students with challenging behaviour at the expense of interesting and varied learning. With some lower sets students' learning would benefit from having a wider range of books to read and worksheets that are very clear and explicit. Many lessons follow a common structure so students know what they are learning and why, but this is not consistent. For example, in some lessons no specific learning aims are shared with the class at the beginning of the lesson, or returned to at the end, for students and teachers to see the learning that has taken place. Due to the gender imbalance in the school, girls are in a minority in each English class. Some girls contribute little and only when encouraged to do so by the teacher, but this is not always picked up by the teacher. In a few lessons students are passive and slow to contribute in spite of the teacher's efforts. Classes taught by more than one teacher do not benefit to the same extent from continuity, good relationships and tracking progress.
61. Teachers make good use of homework to consolidate and extend students' learning and understanding. Teachers' marking of coursework is consistently good, giving clear guidance on how to improve, as does much of the marking, based on the policy, which is shared with students. Teachers' helpful comments and target setting work well in helping students to improve the standard of their writing over the school year. Most teachers assess some pieces of writing using National Curriculum levels, so students know how they are performing and improving, but a few make no reference to them in their marking. For students with more than one English teacher, there are some inconsistencies when different teachers use different grading systems.
62. Students with special educational needs are well supported in lessons by their teachers who have copies of their individual education plans. Teachers use the plan to set targets for the student and review the student's progress towards their targets regularly. This works well and students make good progress in relation to their targets in most lessons. Most students with English as an additional language have learned in English since primary school and make equally good progress as others. Of the few more recent arrivals, two students receive some in-class support from a learning support assistant. They have individual education plans, which focus on their particular language development needs. Gifted and talented students are challenged appropriately and encouraged to extend themselves. Skills of literacy developed in this subject area are beginning to be further developed by other subjects, but teaching does not sufficiently use the full range of strategies.
63. No use of computers was seen in lessons during the inspection, though there is some word processing of work in students' books. Most use was evident in coursework for English GCSE and media studies. Students' literacy skills should be developed through the use of available information technology.

64. The school offers drama in Years 7 to 9, and as an option in Year 10. Standards as seen in lessons are good, with students achieving above the average. They make good progress in lessons and over time. The teaching by the specialist drama teacher is of a consistently very high quality, with a thoroughly organised scheme of work. The skilled teaching catches students' imagination and develops their oral skills and social confidence. It encourages personal development through the exploration of emotions and empathy. The high level skills of the experienced teacher are not sufficiently used, however, to develop the skills of other teachers in the English department, to establish drama on a wider basis. The status of drama is precarious because of over-dependence on one member of staff.
65. The school offers media studies as an option for GCSE. Coursework in Year 11 and teacher assessments show that students are achieving well, which strongly indicates an improved percentage of A*-C grades in 2002 as a result of consistently good teaching. Teaching is lively, knowledgeable and enthusiastic and students apply themselves well in lessons and to their sustained pieces of coursework. They use specialist vocabulary appropriately in discussions and in their written work. Their written work also shows good use of information technology with different techniques to enhance their work.
66. Leadership and management are good. The department makes very good use of the data available to monitor and track students' progress. Regular updating alerts teachers to students not making the progress expected. Examination results are analysed to suggest areas for improvement. The head of department has proposed a scheme of work for Key Stage 3, incorporating the teaching objectives from the new national literacy framework. The implementation of the literacy framework is already having an impact on ways of working such as use of whiteboards in Year 7 and increased usage of overhead projectors to the benefit of students' learning. Some teachers use very effective starter activities in their lessons which engage students' attention and concentration. Further joint work on detail is required to ensure coverage, continuity and progression for students over the year. It will also enable the head of department to monitor teachers' planning for consistency and quality, which does not occur at present. Also needing improvement and attention are the library provision, the split classes in the lower school, with some students having up to three English teachers, and the lack of drama opportunities for students next year. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**.

Strengths

Standards are above average and continuing to rise

Good teaching by an experienced and committed team of teachers

Most students' attitudes to learning in Years 7 to 9 are good and, in Years 10 and 11, very good

Monitoring performance, using ICT, is very effective

Areas for improvement

Consistency in planning lessons in Years 7 to 9

Use of ICT to further learning

Continuity in Years 7 and 8 because some groups have more than one teacher

Planning for the future curriculum of students taking GCSE early

67. Students' attainment in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 was above the national average, as in every year since the last inspection. When compared with similar schools, students' attainment was well above. In 2001, there was a significant improvement in students' attainment when compared with improvements in the subject standard nationally. Overall there has been no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls since the last inspection. However, in 2001 the boys showed a marked improvement on their performance of the previous year. As in most years since the last inspection, standards reached by Year 9 pupils in mathematics in 2001 were higher than those in English and science.
68. GCSE results in 2001 were above the national average. Slightly more than one in two students reached the higher grades (A*-C) whilst nationally slightly less than this fraction obtained the same grades. Early indications show that the number of students obtaining A*-C grades is set to rise this year. In recent years, girls have been more successful than boys in reaching the highest grades (A*-A) whilst boys have performed better than girls in the A*-C range. Overall, students' performance at the highest grades (A*-A) is lower than the national picture. With very few exceptions, all Year 11 students are entered for GCSE and the proportion obtaining the full range of grades (A*-G) in 2001 was well above the national average.
69. Entering Year 7, students' attainment is broadly in line with national expectations. In Years 7 to 9, students, including those with special educational needs, the gifted and talented and those from ethnic minority groups, make good progress and, by the end of Year 9, their achievement is better than expected. This situation results from a combination of good teaching, close monitoring of the achievement and progress of individual students and classroom work that is challenging but realistic. In Years 10 and 11, students achieve highly and their progress is rapid. Students of all levels of attainment in Year 10 and Year 11 have a mature attitude towards learning and a capacity to work hard to meet the high level of expectation demanded by very effective teaching. The significant progress of the higher-attaining students means that about one in five students is entered successfully for the GCSE examination at the end of Year 10, whilst other students are very well prepared for the examination in Year 11. Most students have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basic rules of arithmetic when they enter the school. Skills associated with the rules are consolidated, extended and repeated, for the lowest-attaining students, of whom a few have poor retention, to ensure that all have a firm grounding before embarking upon more demanding mathematical ideas. In a few classes in Year 7 and Year 8, where more than one teacher takes a class over a two-week timetable cycle, curriculum continuity is impaired and this does not help those with low retention, especially those who have low attainment. In a Year 8 lesson on space and shape for the lowest-attaining students, excellent use of PowerPoint resources allowed the teacher to carefully structure the learning in short steps. Students learned successfully how to use a rule, protractor and compasses to measure and bisect angles and lines, and they understood new technical words such as arc, intersect and perpendicular. The achievement of a few boys is reduced in some lower sets in Year 7 and Year 9 because their immature behaviour impedes their learning.
70. Teaching and learning are good overall and, in Year 10, the quality is high. Analysis of students' class and homework in Year 11 confirms the high levels of teaching and learning observed in Year 10. The experienced team of teachers has a very good understanding and knowledge of the subject and uses simple, yet efficient, methods of assessment to help individual students to monitor their progress. They have very good classroom management skills. In Year 10, teachers' expectations, assisted by the well-motivated students who are prolific in their productivity, mean that learning is very

effective. Students' maturity enables them to manage their own learning, supported by teachers' high expectations and the use of worthwhile homework. Students' skills in the use of computers are good, but the teaching does not exploit these skills to improve and extend independence in learning. Teachers make themselves readily available at times outside the curriculum to provide extra tuition for students who may have found difficulties in understanding work. In Years 7 to 9, teachers have extended their methods of preparing, planning and teaching lessons to include those recently introduced into numeracy lessons in primary schools. Progress is being made but there is a lack of consistency amongst teachers in applying the principles, for example in providing a thinking activity at the beginning of a lesson, displaying lesson objectives and identifying key words to be introduced and learned. In other subjects, whilst recent training has drawn attention to numeracy, the skill is not routinely emphasized yet.

71. Leadership is satisfactory and management is good. The management is conscientiously undertaken and teaching is monitored on a regular basis and appropriate action taken. The committed team of teachers has co-operated to minimise problems caused by recent and current staff absences. There is a shared commitment to improve standards and evidence shows that this is succeeding. Areas for development are accurately identified and prioritised in a clear and useful department development plan, which is closely aligned with the school development plan. The work of the department reflects closely the aims and ethos of the school. A weakness in leadership is that, as yet, there is no clear rationale for the course to be offered in Year 11 to those higher-attaining students who take GCSE in Year 10. At the time of inspection it had yet to be decided whether to commence an AS level course or widen the GCSE base with, for example, a statistics course. This indecision reflects adversely upon the otherwise good leadership, vision and direction of the department and has implications for the students' continued study of mathematics after they leave the school. The department uses newly introduced technologies very effectively to monitor and evaluate students' progress and enhance teaching methods. The use to extend students' independent learning has been recognised and suitable resources have been ordered. Accommodation and resources for learning are satisfactory. The school library contains very few books with a mathematical content.
72. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. There is a greater focus on raising standards. Differences between boys' and girls' performance are addressed with some success. Higher-attaining students are making better progress and lessons are benefiting from a wider range of teaching methods. Teaching and learning are monitored and have improved. There is less note taking, more challenge, higher expectations and better classroom control. Students are given more appropriate opportunities to ask and answer questions. An issue remaining is aligning assessment of students' class work and homework more closely to National Curriculum levels of attainment.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **good**.

Strengths

Students make very good progress through Years 10 and 11.

Teaching is very good with some outstanding features.

Students' behaviour and attitude to science is very good.

Areas for improvement

Use of information and communication technology to support learning.

Grading work clearly and target setting.
Unresolved problems of time allocation, setting and split classes.
Resources and accommodation.

73. In 2001, national test results for students at the end of Year 9 were above average. Results for boys and girls were similar. When compared with similar schools, results were well above average for Level 5 or above, but average for Level 6 or above. Since the last inspection, results have improved at a rate which is similar to science results nationally overall, but they fell in 1999 recovering again thereafter. Given the attainment of these students on entry to the school, progress has been good.
74. Students in Years 7 to 9 are making good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. Overall progress and achievement in lessons, including that of students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, are good.
75. Students make very good progress through Years 10 and 11. Overall, examination results in 2001 were well above average, even though they were below those achieved in 2000. Results compare favourably with those for English and mathematics. When compared with results in similar schools, they were also well above average. GCSE results in the separate sciences, for which about 13 per cent of students in Year 11 were entered, were above average overall. The results for girls were considerably better than those for boys, particularly at the higher grades A* and A. Results in the GCSE dual award examination were well above average for the number of students gaining grade C and above. In this course, results for boys were similar to those of girls. Almost all students in Year 11 achieved at least grade G passes in science. There is good evidence to suggest that, on the basis of current achievements, students will do better in 2002 than previously.
76. The work of students currently in Years 10 and 11 is well above the national average. Higher-attaining students in Year 11 have a very good understanding of Ohm's Law and the factors, such as temperature, which can affect resistance. They have a good understanding of balanced equations, and calculations based upon them, and have a good understanding of dominant and recessive genes.
77. The standard of literacy is, overall, above average. Higher-attaining students cope well with extended writing, use scientific terms with confidence, and their spelling is good. Lower-attaining students are less confident and tend to be more restricted in the range and extent of their written work. Higher-attaining students speak with confidence and understanding and are able to describe and discuss their work with a good degree of accuracy. The standards of numeracy, whilst being good overall, are variable. Higher-attaining students use mental arithmetic well and can represent observations graphically. Lower-attaining students, throughout the school, have more difficulty with some basic number work, but the presentation of information in tabular and graphical form is often good. Even though there were good examples of students using ICT to help them to search the Internet and to present the written elements of scientific investigations, the use of ICT to support teaching and learning is still unsatisfactory. The recent provision of new computers and improved planning for the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool indicates that this situation is likely to improve in the near future. Reports often indicate strengths and weaknesses. However, they do not yet provide focused, subject-specific, targets for improvement in each component.
78. The quality of teaching is very good overall with some excellent features. Teachers give very effective explanations and ask questions which challenge or assess students'

knowledge and understanding. They state clear objectives which students understand. Classroom management and organisation are effective and the pace usually matches the needs and tasks of students. Lessons are well planned and students learn progressively. Exercise books are usually well marked. However, neither the level achieved nor advice on how to improve is given on marked work. As a result, students have little knowledge of how well they are progressing or how they can improve their work.

79. The behaviour of students and their attitude to science are very good. Students listen well to their teachers, respond positively to the various activities and show interest and enjoyment. When given the opportunity to do so, students work very well independently and in groups, think out problems for themselves and concentrate hard. Most students answer and ask questions well and have the confidence to discuss scientific concepts with their teachers and with other students.
80. While the provision of time for the teaching of science is adequate overall, that provided for the teaching of the separate sciences in Years 10 and 11 is below the minimum recommended for these subjects. New curriculum proposals, due to be implemented in the next academic year, intend to address this, but arrangements are not finalised and, unless adequate time is allocated, this threatens standards. Organisation of teaching groups in Key Stage 4, where students are in bands based on performance across a range of subjects, limits the performance of some who are misplaced on the basis of ability in science. The new scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 is very good and ensures continuity and progression in students' learning. It includes good planning for the use of computers as a teaching and learning tool. Schemes of work for students in Years 10 and 11, whilst satisfactory overall, require further development to ensure that planned use of ICT is included. The provision for students with special educational needs, including those who are gifted or talented, is generally good. Individual education plans are good and are well used by teachers to support students with special educational needs. They include subject-specific requirements for improvement in science. However, the provision of sufficient learning assistants to support classroom teachers is unsatisfactory.
81. Leadership and management are good. Educational direction is clear and focused and most innovations are likely to lead to further improvements. Development planning is effective and manageable, but planning for long-term development with longer-term targets, costing and focused success criteria, has yet to be carried out. Procedures for assessment are very good overall, and are used well to set targets and to identify underachievement. Individual teachers keep very good records of students' progress and use them to guide future teaching. Monitoring of the quality of teaching by lesson observations takes place and this is beginning to be used to develop good practice within the department. The number of teachers is good, but their deployment is unsatisfactory because several teaching groups, particularly in Year 8, have more than one teacher. This has a negative impact upon continuity. The current provision of technical support, resulting from the long-term absence of a part-time technician, is unsatisfactory. This also reduces the effectiveness of the department. Resources, in terms of equipment and books, including those in the school library, are inadequate. The provision of laboratories for a school of this size is poor. In addition, several of the laboratories, some of which are too small to accommodate larger groups, are in urgent need of refurbishment. Consequently, the working environment for both students and teachers is far from satisfactory. The state of laboratories was raised as an issue in the last report. The Local Education Authority has confirmed a refurbishment programme.

82. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Provided that proposed curriculum changes are reviewed and that improvements in the number and quality of laboratories are made, coupled with more use of information and communication technology, the capacity for further improvement is good.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

Good teaching and learning for GCSE.
Improved leadership.

Areas for improvement

Standards, progress and curriculum in Key Stage 3.
Some unsatisfactory teaching when classes do not concentrate.
Assessment not used to identify areas for improvement.
Provision of books and access to facilities, including ICT.

83. The results of the end of key stage assessments by teachers for Year 9 in 2001 were above average; 80 per cent of Year 9 were judged to have attained level 5, the national expectation, and 27 per cent Level 6 or higher. The girls were judged to be achieving much better than the boys. However, the work observed in lessons suggests that these marks were generous. Students arrive at the college with little experience of art and design, and many are at Level 3. They have an hour a week to study in Years 7, 8 and 9, half as much as other non-core subjects. This results in a narrower range of activities of the National Curriculum being covered than usual. Overall standards by the end of Year 9 are below national expectations in the lessons observed. The standards vary, and some Year 9 students produce good work based on expressionist painters, with strong design and colour, but others have work unfinished and of poor quality. The Year 7 students have made good progress since they entered the school. It is not yet clear, though, how the different experiences of students will build up to a coherent pattern of art and design, as students change classes and teachers. Drawing skills are developed as they experiment with pencil and pastel, and they co-operate well in printing in the project on Australian aboriginal art. All have sketchbooks, but work in them is inconsistent; some are developing their use well, inserting resources and developing ideas thoughtfully, but others are very weak, with little work of value in them. The Year 8 students who are studying Claes Oldenburg have produced very good three-dimensional models at home, clearly giving time and consideration to their work.
84. Whilst some Year 9 students are busily developing their work from research and imaginative drawings in their sketchbooks, in other classes work is copied or traced. This does not help them to develop. Many of these students are not concentrating and their work is untidy, unfinished and of a poor standard. The classes working on the "wave" project are developing good interpretations of Japanese prints into surfboard designs, paintings and posters through investigation and an understanding of the artist's work. Their use of homework is good; it is set regularly, often including research on the Internet for artists or art movements, and it extends the work in class well. In none of the classes was the wide gap in attainment between boys and girls indicated by the end of key stage assessments obvious. Most classes are predominantly boys, about twice as many as girls. The teachers are developing projects and strategies to motivate boys in this subject.

85. The standards achieved in GCSE examinations have been low compared to the national averages. Thirty-five students took the general paper of the art and design examination in 2001. Of these, 54 per cent gained grades A*-C; this is below the average for comprehensive schools, which is 64 per cent. However, the results of the girls were good, those of boys relatively poor. The standards over the past three years have been broadly similar, although the gap between boys and girls has fluctuated. An analysis of data indicates that students are not achieving as well in art and design as they do in the other subjects they study. The results are broadly the same as at the time as the last inspection.
86. Standards observed in the present GCSE classes and review of the work done for this year's GCSE examination are satisfactory. Students are developing drawings in their sketchbooks more confidently. Individual students are working productively on personal projects, often with a similar starting point, but moving off into very different approaches and outcomes. Several students who will achieve lower grades in the GCSE are still producing good displays of their work, showing application and effort. The use of a local potter, a parent at the school, to demonstrate techniques and fire the pots, is an effective initiative. Many boys are taking advantage of this opportunity, and much more three-dimensional work is being done with the present Year 10. The lack of an extensive range of books and high quality reproductions, in the department and in the library, means that most research is on the Internet, where there is a lot of information, but the images are of poor quality and printing out a hard copy is expensive and lowers the quality even further. Homework is much better in the GCSE classes than at the time of the previous inspection. Students realise the value of putting time and effort into their research, and their drawing skills have increased as a result.
87. The quality of teaching in art and design is satisfactory overall, but is inconsistent. It is good in the GCSE classes seen. Teachers support the students well with extensive discussion and challenge. The two teachers plan and deliver different topics to their classes. Even when a class is shared because of the fortnightly timetable, the teachers still deliver separate projects. In the best lessons in Key Stage 3, students are challenged to produce personal responses based on research about the work of artists such as Munch, Oldenburg and Hakusai. There is some very good direct teaching of skills and techniques using the resources available. Teaching is unsatisfactory when the work set is too complex, with little direct instruction, such as when asked to "humanise" an animal for a nursery rhyme design, the Year 9 students are confused and fall back on copying and tracing images from books. They lose motivation to try their best, and standards are low. The attitudes to art and design are positive when the work is stimulating.
88. Leadership of the department is good. There is a clear vision of what the targets for the subject are, and what needs to be done to achieve them. The management of the department is satisfactory. The head of department has set appropriate priorities in the development plan; the most important has been to sort out the accommodation and establish a positive ethos for learning after two years of temporary arrangements for the management of the subject. She is planning regular reviews of work and results. There is inconsistency in planning across the classes, so students do not have similar experiences throughout Key Stage 3. Close liaison between the teachers on a coherent plan to address the requirements of the National Curriculum is essential. The new head of department is developing a detailed and thorough assessment of students' work, but it does not yet inform the planning process so that the teachers can refine their schemes of work and develop their teaching. There is good provision for students with individual needs, particularly those with special educational needs. Students with English as an additional language have no problems in the subject, and most are fluent

English speakers anyway. Provision for art and design is similar to what it was at the time of the last inspection, but it is beginning to improve. The profile of the subject is now being raised through displays of GCSE work around the school, and many students and teachers were observed looking through them.

89. Resources for art and design are overall satisfactory. There is tremendous potential in the space and facilities available, but much of it is cluttered and inaccessible with piles of materials and old folders. Work is limited by lack of access to the kiln, the printing table or textiles areas. ICT facilities are good, but again are not being used due to a lack of suitable software. Use of these facilities would extend the range of work available, particularly for the gifted and talented students. The condition of the tables, chairs and cupboards is very poor; most were past their useful life when they were handed down to the department. The overall atmosphere is one of untidiness and disorganisation, despite two terms of clearing up by the new head of department. This communicates itself to the students, whose work is also sometimes untidy and poorly presented.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Strengths

Standards and good progress in both key stages.
Use of information technology to support teaching and learning.
Good relationships with teachers and positive attitudes.
Leadership, management and commitment of the department.

Areas for improvement

Unsuitable pace and challenge in a few lessons
Provision of technician support.
ICT resources in food and textiles technology and textbook provision.
Multicultural influences on product design and development.

90. Students arrive in the school with below average levels of attainment in design and technology. During their first three years progress is very good and results at the end of Key Stage 3 exceed expectations when compared to national standards. There is very little difference in the performance of girls compared to boys. Students with special educational needs make good progress. The attainment of students with exceptional talents is good. GCSE examination results dipped in 2001. However, results, when taken over three years, are improving. Standards of work seen during the inspection showed above average attainment.
91. With an intake from a large number of primary schools, students' experience of design and technology tends to be varied. Practical skills are not a strong element in their overall average level of attainment on entry to the college. However, the programmes provided by the department enable the students to quickly develop a sound understanding of the design process. A broad range of tasks gives a good grounding in practical and design skills, enabling students to achieve a good level of accuracy and finish in their work. Year 7 students develop designs using specific computer-aided design software, then produce the design in three-dimensional form using computer-aided manufacturing equipment. Students gain a very good insight into automated production. Year 9 students develop further the skills gained and apply them in both resistant and compliant materials. Students are aware of the need to consider the commercial implications of product development; for example, in textiles they are able to calculate production methods and the associated costs. They understand the need for profit. Other Year 9 students, including those with special educational needs, are

competent users of professional standard graphics software, being able to manipulate scanned images when analysing existing packaging examples. Across the first three years in the school experience of different construction processes and study of materials and their characteristics prepare students well for the next stage of their technology education. The emphasis throughout the three years on quality design techniques, linked with sound research, results in well-presented folders. Middle and lower attainers find the research and evaluative aspects of the subject more challenging but still perform at a higher than expected level. Positive attitudes and very good relationships with teachers and peers make a considerable contribution to the very good standards achieved. Literacy skills in particular, together with numeracy skills, are developed as an integral part of subject-specific skills.

92. Students in Years 10 and 11 continue to display good attitudes towards design and technology subjects. Most are able to pursue their choice of subject, although demand in some areas exceeds capacity, for example in electronics. The good progress made in the first three years provides a strong foundation for the GCSE courses. Year 11 students taking electronic products are developing a good range of complex products. For example, a student combines electronic expertise with construction capability to make a working traffic control device. Students studying graphical products make very good use of information and communication technology to enhance their work. One higher-attaining Year 10 student, with English as an additional language, produced graphics work of a quality towards professional standard. Challenging projects are evident in resistant materials where students use their knowledge of the full range of materials to complete major projects. Department policy is supportive of students' choice in not restricting on size or design where possible. However, costs are sensibly controlled. Despite there being no opportunity to observe Year 11 lessons, a range of products were on display which, together with folders and photographic evidence, confirmed high standards. From discussions with students attaining at all levels, it is clear that they appreciate the quality of advice and assistance they receive from teachers.
93. The quality of teaching is good within the department, with almost all lessons seen being satisfactory and most being good or very good. This is undoubtedly a major contributor to the improved standards. In very good lessons, teachers have precise aims and their learning objectives are clearly thought through. Students are challenged, with teachers maintaining a good pace throughout. Students demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm for the subject resulting from the commitment of staff. All staff have very good specialist knowledge which they use both in lessons and during the extra-curricular sessions. Where teaching was less effective, activities did not match the full range of student needs, which resulted in poor levels of concentration and minimal learning. Whilst expectations are generally high, there are a few occasions when the pace is either too slow or pitched at a technically demanding level that leaves some students struggling. There is, however, little doubt that the teachers strive for maximum student success.
94. The subject area is very well led and managed by a highly competent, committed head of department. He has the benefit of working with a cohesive and supportive team, including a very effective technician. However, the level of technician support is inadequate, particularly in food and textiles technology where unnecessary pressure is placed on staff to prepare and clean areas prior to teaching. The staff make very good use of assessment information to set appropriate National Curriculum target levels in Years 7, 8 and 9. Students identified with special educational needs are supported well through subject-specific targets. The department is aware of the need to develop written targets for all students and is working on this area currently. Students in Years

10 and 11 are aware of their progress and are provided with target grades matched to GCSE criteria. Teaching is monitored informally in addition to the annual performance review observation. As a result of technology school status, the subject has gained some benefits in staffing, accommodation and resources. However, food and textiles lack sufficient computers to fully support learning and CAD/CAM facilities are just adequate. Textbook provision requires improvement in all areas. Equipment available is used to very good effect. Students receive a broad curriculum of experiences at Key Stage 3, which serves to inform their choices at Key Stage 4. Some development is required in the area of multicultural influences, given the ethnic diversity within the school community. This was a department well placed to embrace technology college status and continues to be so.

95. Since the last inspection standards have continued to improve across all years. This improvement has also been reflected in the overall performance of boys. Teaching has improved in number of personnel and quality, partly as a result of the technology college status. The strong leadership that was identified at the last inspection remains, as do the continually developing links with industry and the community. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

Curriculum provision, particularly fieldwork and ICT, which broaden learning opportunities.

Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11.

Relationships with students and behaviour management which lead to very good attitudes.

Areas for improvement

Leadership strategies to draw on the strengths of all members of the department.

Use of assessment data to improve students' progress.

Provision for gifted students to fulfil their potential.

Disadvantages arising from split classes.

96. By the end of Year 11 standards of attainment are average, both in exam results and in the work seen. GCSE results for grades A*-C have been average, except for 2000 when they were above the national average. Overall, results have improved over the past four years. Each year a number of students have been entered for the SEG Certificate of Achievement and, in 2001, 60 per cent of the entries gained a merit grade. By the end of Year 9, standards are also average, with girls performing better than boys.
97. In Years 7 to 9 these standards of attainment reflect satisfactory achievement for most students, who came into the school with average attainment. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also satisfactory. The small proportion of students at an early stage of learning English is making satisfactory progress, with appropriate help. Students with special educational needs make progress because teachers know them well and, in most lessons, provide work suited to their needs. Teachers use individual education plans effectively to target the right sort of help towards these students. Gifted and talented students are not specially identified and opportunities are missed to provide them with more challenging work.
98. Attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students work very well in lessons because of the management skills of the teachers and the good relationships they have with students. Any lack of concentration or temptation to misbehave is quickly corrected. The atmosphere in lessons is positive and conducive to learning. Group work and fieldwork expeditions make a good contribution to students' personal development.
99. Teaching and learning are good overall; they are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Some excellent and very good teaching was seen, particularly in Year 10, and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. Most lessons had interesting and original themes, such as a Year 8 enquiry into the *Sea Empress* pollution disaster, and a Year 10 virtual journey by computer along the Los Angeles River, brilliantly introduced by a clip from a Hollywood film showing a car chase along the river channel. Without exception, teachers generated enthusiasm that they passed on to their students. Some challenging tasks encouraged students to think for themselves, using their own experiences as a basis for learning, for example with a Year 8 group planning the positioning of alternative power generating centres. Some less good lessons took too little account of the learning styles and needs of students of different genders and abilities within the teaching groups, so that weaker students were sometimes unsure of what to do and stronger students were not extended. Planning was not always carefully thought through; for example, a piece of adult travel writing was not suitably simplified for Year 7 students. Homework is well used to extend the work in lessons. Much

teaching effort goes into providing for average and lower-attaining students and not enough into providing enough additional depth of study for potential higher attainers.

100. Literacy and numeracy are both well taught throughout, though some opportunities were missed for students to read aloud. Students were always keen to speak, ready to listen to each other and confident in expressing themselves orally. Procedures for assessment are good and are an integral part of the curriculum, but the results of assessment are not well used. National Curriculum levels are inaccurately applied and students are neither told their interim levels nor given enough guidance on how to improve. ICT is integrated into lessons wherever suitable and interesting fieldwork expeditions extend learning.
101. Management is satisfactory. The daily running of the department is well organised with all documentation and a development plan in place. Schemes of work have recently been revised but contain no guidance as to how the various themes can contribute to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Performance management is linked with other informal lesson observations, but this does not at present lead to considered sharing of best practice in the classroom, combining and building on the varied strengths of all members of the department. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory, with some monitoring of teaching and learning, better GCSE results and new schemes of work. However, a number of split classes disadvantage teachers and students, provision of suitable work for the more able is inconsistent and several of the action points in the interim review of 2000 have not been addressed. Leadership has not been sufficiently dynamic in taking the department forward, recognising where improvement is needed and building on its undoubted strengths.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

Strengths

Achievement in Key Stage 4, including boys.

Response of students of differing levels of prior attainment.

Teaching provides frequent opportunities for active participation in various ways.

Support for literacy.

Areas for improvement

Rate of progress throughout Years 7 to 9.

Grasp of chronology in Years 7 to 9.

102. In the GCSE results of 2001, the proportion of A*-C grades was above the national average. In contrast to national results, a higher proportion of boys than girls gained A*-C grades. The overall trend in level of performance since the previous inspection has been upward, although the proportion of A*-C grades awarded in 2001 was significantly lower than in 2000. Strategies that have been used this year to sustain this improving trend include the use of revision cards and extra revision sessions after school and in the holidays.
103. In work seen, standards by the end of Year 9 match the national expectation. Students' knowledge of all of the study units is secure in range and depth. Organisation and communication of knowledge are very good. In speaking about the subject, students are able to explain clearly what they have learned and to say what they have enjoyed studying. During work scrutiny, some outstanding presentations of work, in varied style and format, were seen in notebooks, particularly in those of students in Year 9.

Students markedly develop their skills of historical enquiry and gain a good understanding of cause and effect relationship. Their ability to acquire a perception of differing interpretations of history is well developed in their study of cottage industry in Year 9 and of the closure of the monasteries in Year 8. However, progress in gaining the required knowledge and understanding of chronology is unsatisfactory.

104. By the end of Year 9, higher- and average-attaining students write about the subject at a good standard of literacy, with some extended writing prominent in the work of Year 9 students. Students with special educational needs make good progress when a support teacher or assistant aids them; when they do not receive this support their progress is satisfactory. The progress in lessons of students with English as an additional language is at the same level as that of students in general. Higher-attaining students make good progress through the extension work that is provided for them in some of the study units.
105. Standards of work of students aged 16 are good. Independent enquiry skills are further developed; this is evident in the impressive coursework that is produced in Year 10 on the Black Death. Students make profitable use of a range of sources and they demonstrate an ability to evaluate these sources on the basis of their impartiality and reliability. They write with satisfactory understanding of key terms and concepts, especially those relating to political movements and parties in Weimar Germany. Notebooks show that they organise presentation, have the required ability to summarise and condense and have a good standard of literacy.
106. Students' response is very good and they are keen to make progress. Students at differing levels of prior attainment make a very pleasing effort with their work. A high level of commitment to the demands of the GCSE course is evident in lessons, in notebooks and in coursework. Behaviour is almost invariably very good and high concentration levels are sustained at different periods of the day. Students relate very well both to their teachers and to each other. Working together, they support each other's learning very well, giving their ideas and responding to peers. In role-play exercises they take initiative and use imagination. Take-up rates for the subject in Year 10 are good and compare favourably with others in the humanities area.
107. The quality of teaching overall is good, with a significant amount that is very good in Years 7 to 9. Although only one lesson could be seen in Years 10 and 11, the evidence from this lesson and that from work scrutiny, together with the GCSE results, indicate that teaching is good at this level also and that it is the major factor in raising the level of students' attainment from average at the age of 14 to above average at the age of 16.
108. All of the teachers are enthusiasts for the subject and possess a secure knowledge base. Skilful and varied methods of lesson presentation engage the interest of students and promote their very good level of response. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, the students were asked to consider how a germ would react to the various discoveries and developments that have been made in medicine since the 17th century. This exercise allowed them both to recollect and to apply their prior learning in a stimulating and unusual manner. Similarly, in a Year 8 lesson, students working in groups were asked to deduce how certain people of differing background, occupation and religious conviction might have viewed the sequence of events immediately preceding the English Civil War. Lessons are conducted at a good pace, allowing sufficient time for different activities to take place within them and ensuring that students' learning is nearly always good and sometimes very good. Teachers manage students very well, giving them frequent opportunities for active participation in lessons in various ways. There is a notable concern to ensure that students become aware of the different ways

of looking at history that, together with their early introduction to the skills of source evaluation, accounts in substantial manner for their successes in the GCSE examination. The marking of students' work is scrupulous, setting suitable targets for improvement as well as giving praise for pleasing work and effort. Occasionally, the questioning of students could be more extended to give them a broader grasp of aspects of the topics and study units.

109. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The school's aims and values, especially where the raising of standards is concerned, are well reflected in the work of the department and a shared commitment to improvement is clearly evident. There is a detailed development plan for the current academic year that includes targets in line with the school's priorities as well as additional departmental targets. The head of department monitors the quality of teaching through classroom observations. A very good range of learning resources has been assembled to suit the requirements of students at differing levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs. There is developing use of ICT, such as CD-ROMs.
110. Several strategies for the promotion of literacy are being used effectively in accordance with the Whole College Literacy Policy but those relating to numeracy are not yet sufficiently developed. The curriculum contributes well to personal development and is enhanced in each year through a planned programme of visits to museums, historical sites and heritage centres.
111. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection. There is more use of artefacts and fieldwork. Excellent displays of work and related materials in each of the main teaching rooms are well used in support of learning in combination with other resources. The leadership and management have improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Strengths

Students' attitude and proficiency.
Accelerated progress through a good range of examination courses from Year 9.
Better than average resources.
Consistently good teaching.

Areas for improvement

Other subjects' use of ICT.

112. Standards by the age of 14 are good and above expectations. By age 16 standards are very good. In 2001 GCSE examinations, A*-C grades were well above the national average. The performance of boys improved well in recent years and, against the national trend, has now overtaken that of girls. A very small number of students have taken and been successful in GNVQ Intermediate ICT in the last two years.
113. All students have regular ICT lessons and, by the end of Year 11, complete an examination course in ICT. In lessons seen in Years 7 and 8, attainment was at least satisfactory and often good, sometimes very good. An innovative decision has been taken for all students to embark on GCSE or GNVQ in Year 9. Year 7 develop and refine skills for searching the Internet in a structured way. Keyboard skills, which are at least satisfactory, help students to work quickly. The majority are able to select appropriate text and images to incorporate into their own presentations. By the end of

Year 8 most students have at least a sound and often good ability to use spreadsheets and databases to record and analyse information. The overall picture is one of students improving in confidence as they develop skills and knowledge through a well-structured course. The quality of learning enables students to make good progress in Years 7 and 8, which enables them to embark upon an examination course in Year 9. Learning and attainment in the exam courses are good or very good. There are currently classes following GCSE or full GNVQ Intermediate courses in Year 9. The GCSE group will begin an AS course in ICT in Year 11, the other group will cover the Intermediate GNVQ over three years.

114. Students have a positive attitude in ICT lessons, which improves further in Year 9 as they become more focussed and face the challenge of an examination course. They are keen to learn new skills and to make good use of the increasing range of software that they use. Most students respond enthusiastically in whole-class sessions and to homework tasks, which frequently involve the detailed planning of computer-based activities.
115. In Years 10 and 11 students are following a GCSE or a GNVQ course. Standards are often very good and some excellent work was seen during lessons and in examination coursework. More advanced functions of spreadsheets and databases are much in evidence. Imaginative and well-presented web pages have been constructed for specific clients and audiences. Some exceptional coursework has been produced by a group which is taking GCSE early with a view to beginning an AS course in Year 11.
116. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good overall and some is excellent. Lessons are well planned and most have a good pace. Students of all abilities are appropriately challenged and those with special educational needs are well supported. Although many non-specialists are required to teach ICT to Years 7 to 9, the detailed scheme of work provided helps to ensure a common approach and common experiences for students. On examination courses, all teaching is by specialists and is very good. Students at all levels are very well supported, enabling them to make good, and often very good, progress on an appropriate course. The task of providing ICT courses for all students throughout the college is facilitated by a better than average level of ICT resources. The newer ICT rooms have been very well furnished and equipped with a view to catering for community needs outside college hours. These resources are now backed up by a good level of effective technical support, following a period when network problems delayed developments.
117. There has been a very good improvement in ICT provision since the last inspection, including a significant increase in the quantity and quality of resources. The level of ICT use across the curriculum has increased and is good in some subjects, notably PE. However, some subjects are not yet making best use of available ICT resources to enhance teaching and learning. There are several subject areas that would benefit from additional resources to meet their curricular needs. The music curriculum does not meet requirements; the department does not have computers or access to appropriate software. The cross-curricular use of ICT needs to be more rigorously monitored to ensure that all subjects take full advantage of the high level of ICT proficiency among students.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

Procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress
Effective leadership by head of department

Areas for improvement

Speaking skills and writing in Years 7 to 9,

Time allocation for a second language,

Attitude of a minority of boys,

Tasks to meet the differing needs of students in the same class,

118. In 2001, the standards indicated by the National Curriculum teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well below average and well below the average of the previous two years. When taking into account the high proportion of students entered, standards in GCSE French in 2001 were slightly above average, but were well below the average of the previous two years. A contributory factor was the staffing difficulties experienced that year and the previous year. German results in 2001 were above the national average, but well below the average of the previous years.
119. By the end of Year 9, standards in French are below average. Listening and reading skills are good, because of the constant use of French for communication in the classroom. Standards in written French are weak. Although the perfect and future tenses are covered at the beginning of the year, they are not regularly revisited and students do not have enough opportunities to become confident in using them. Standards in speaking are modest; higher-attaining students are able to take part in prepared dialogues on topics such as ordering restaurant meals and buying tickets at the station, but pronunciation and intonation are not strong. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs can only reply in short phrases and the pronunciation is weak. For the most part, students do not have the opportunity in class to speak at length and take part in exchanges requiring a number of utterances. Occasionally, students do have the opportunity to make presentations, but this does not happen with sufficient regularity from Year 7.
120. Students in Year 7 who have started German as their first modern foreign language are making good progress. Their listening skills are developing well; they can exchange personal information and they are beginning to understand the case system. Students in Year 9, for whom German is the second modern foreign language, are making barely satisfactory progress, largely because they have only one period a week. In the case of one class this is compounded by the negative attitudes of a small number of boys.
121. Evidence about attainment in Years 10 and 11 is drawn mainly from students' exercise books and coursework. Standards in listening and reading comprehension in French are good, whilst written expression is satisfactory. Higher-attaining students write accurately, using both the future and past tenses, but for the most part the range of structure and vocabulary employed is too narrow to earn the very highest grades. In German the range is even more restricted. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs write simply and with weak accuracy. In German, the range of writing is again narrow, reflecting the lack of time given to the subject in Years 8 and 9. Overall achievement is satisfactory in both languages.
122. In general, students listen carefully to the teacher and are ready to volunteer to speak; their behaviour is usually good. However, the attitude of a small number of boys in each of the year groups seen was unsatisfactory and their challenging behaviour disrupted several lessons. The department is aware of the problem and is setting up an action research project to develop new materials and approaches through which boys can be more successfully engaged in language learning.

123. The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall and almost half was good or very good. Where teaching was strongest, lesson objectives were made clear at the start of the lesson and reviewed at the end; planning was good and the teachers produced a range of activities in all four language skills; the pace was brisk and expectations were high. In a few lessons, teachers have difficulty in coping with the challenging behaviour of a small minority of boys. This occurs when teaching is less successful because tasks are not varied to suit the differing attainment and abilities of students. Greater use should be made of ICT in the teaching, though some students are using word-processing software.
124. Procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress are very good. Regular assessments in all four skills using National Curriculum criteria are compared with results of standardised tests to determine whether students are underperforming. Where necessary extra support is given, particularly in the months preceding the GCSE examinations. The department also takes into account students' self-assessment when modifying the curriculum.
125. The department is well led with a very clear vision for its future direction. Departmental documentation is comprehensive and schemes of work, currently being revised, are useful tools for teaching. Examination results are analysed to guide the future direction of the department. Performance management is firmly established and teaching and learning are both monitored. Accommodation is satisfactory, though some rooms are small for the larger groups. Most of the rooms are thoroughfares, and the furniture is sometimes shabby. However, very good displays of students' work improve the appearance of the rooms and serve as encouragement to the students. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

Teachers' encouragement of students

Use of assessment

High standards of performance at GCSE

Areas for improvement

Lack of ICT means the full curriculum is not covered

Representation of the faculty in management structures

Progress and achievement of current Year 9

Opportunities for listening to music and learning concepts

Range of library resources

126. Standards in music are average when compared to those of other schools. Teacher assessment of 14-year-olds in 2001 placed a majority at Level 5, the expected average level, and a few beyond this. Girls did significantly better than boys overall as they do nationally. There are no figures for previous years. From lessons and work inspected, standards are improving, with much less difference between the attainment of girls and boys. Students show developing skill in using keyboards, following notation and identifying features of music they hear. Year 7 students record their improvised pieces to create moods, using classroom instruments. An able group in Year 8, studying African music, quickly learn rhythmic patterns, invent their own and perform a complex, polymetric piece with evident delight. There was little continuity of specialist teaching of music for Year 9 students until this year, and progress is slower for many. They can choose appropriate chords from notated versions of a choice of pop songs, and play these in pairs fairly fluently. In all years students are encouraged to share and to write their personal reactions to music encountered and develop a good sense of the part music plays in different cultures. Most students with special educational needs participate fully and make good progress, but a few with behavioural problems affect the atmosphere of some lessons adversely and slow the progress of all. No unsatisfactory work was seen in the sample of written work.
127. Numbers opting for GCSE music are usually in double figures. While results have fluctuated in the last three years, the proportion gaining grades A*-C matches the standard nationally. About half of the 17 candidates in Year 11 are expected to gain A*-C grades, below the national average. Since staffing problems have been resolved students have made very good progress. While no teaching of Year 11 could be seen, conversations with a sample of students reveal very positive attitudes to the course and good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses. Coursework seen and recorded performances heard confirm the anticipated standards. The six students in Year 10 have developed ability as performers, a few well beyond the standard expected. They have good listening skills and a developing knowledge of how music works in various cultures and styles. They recognise their handicap in composition, a negative factor in annual results, through the lack of computers with appropriate software. Many GCSE students devote much time to music beyond college hours, some in town and county ensembles. A few go on to study music in further education.

128. Teaching is good and often very good. Features that enable good learning include pace and variety within lessons, with good management of students so that concentration is maximised and interest maintained. Teachers know the students well, their backgrounds, learning difficulties, or special talent. There is constant encouragement through praise and the setting of challenging, appropriate tasks. Students in all years are helped to be aware of their progress and how to improve. Teachers have sound subject knowledge and skill and use this to good effect for students' learning. The greatest limitation to learning is the absence of computer-aided music making. Teachers should do more to prepare themselves for effective use of the resources required – equipment and software – when the college, in keeping with its technology specialist status, provides these. Other areas for improvement include creating opportunities for more frequent listening, however short, and for the secure learning by younger students of concepts as well as technical terms. The very easy relationships with GCSE students, mainly an asset, occasionally leads to over-relaxed learning conditions. Instrumental teachers employed by the college, but financed by parents, provide good service. Efficiency could be improved by grouping in some cases. Ensembles draw in students from all years. They make a valuable contribution to learning in music and to the personal development of participants.
129. Following a period of staffing difficulties, music is under new leadership and management. This has had a number of positive effects for improvement, including the preparation of schemes of work and the establishment of a faculty of expressive arts. Staff from music, art and drama now meet regularly. They have agreed assessment procedures and are working with students towards a joint stage production. Since the last inspection, curriculum time has been equalised for all years and is satisfactory. Monitoring of students' progress is now good. Certain deficiencies in resources – keyboards and some African instruments – have been made good and some appropriate professional development has taken place. However, there are important areas for further improvement. Standards of attainment, including in extra-curricular work, have not yet regained the high level described at the last inspection. Department documentation does not cover ICT or literacy. Stewardship of accommodation and resources is careless in the storage of instruments and maintenance of smaller spaces. Recording facilities are barely adequate. The library is severely deficient in music texts and has no CD-ROMs, nor music for listening. There is no technician support for the faculty. The head of music and faculty is not currently a member of the management group of the college so the arts are not fully represented in this important forum. The faculty needs to develop strategies which impact on the content of the curriculum for example to help students to appreciate common concepts and procedures in expressive arts, as is done in sciences. Extra-curricular groups should include the opportunity to experience the music of other cultures. Most importantly, computer-aided learning must be enabled as a matter of urgency, so as to raise standards, reflect current practice in the music world, and to comply with statutory requirements.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **good**.

Strengths

Teaching, learning and relationships that lead to high standards.

Use of the department's website and other ICT resources.

Arrangements to assess the attainment and progress made by pupils.

Resources and extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

Boys' theory work for GCSE.

Allowing sufficient time to apply skills.

Clarity about lesson objectives and achieving targets.

Undertaking risk assessments for activities provided by the department.

130. When students start at the college their attainment is below that expected for their age. By the end of Years 9 and 11 they attain standards that exceed those expected for their ages. The proportion of students attaining A*-C passes in GCSE examinations is usually higher than that found in other schools. This year it is likely to match the very high standards found in 1998. This is because the teaching provided for these students is good and they are supported well in their learning. For example, the department has an excellent website, devised by students with the support of their teacher. This enables students to access a wide range of up-to-date information about the subject, supporting their research well. However, the number of boys attaining the higher levels in GCSE examinations remains lower than the number of girls. Many boys perform very well in the practical aspects of the course, but their theory work is not developed to the same high level.
131. Standards are similar to those found at the time of the last inspection. However, improvement is good, because the quality of teaching has improved and arrangements for assessing and recording students' attainment and progress are good.
132. Teaching is good. The very good relationships between teachers and their students and the enthusiasm with which teachers work make a significant contribution to the good progress made by students in all year groups. As a result, students are well motivated and work hard. In cricket, boys bat, bowl and field well, often showing correct technique. This is because teachers provide appropriate practices for students to develop their skills. In rounders, girls catch and throw well, bowl accurately and many strike the ball for substantial distances. Girls also improve their running skills significantly because they learn to sprint with good style and to pace themselves appropriately over longer distances. Gifted and talented students and students with special educational needs make good progress alongside others. However, in some lessons, students do not always have sufficient time to apply the skills they have acquired during earlier practices.
133. The school provides an appropriately broad and balanced range of activities. Students in Year 7 learn to swim well, benefiting significantly from using the shared swimming pool on the college site. There is an excellent orienteering map of the school site. This helps to provide students with good experience in outdoor and adventurous activities. The range of practical activities available for students taking examinations is also good. For example, they visit the LEA's outdoor centre in the Lake District, where many learn to canoe successfully.

134. Good use is made of information and communication technology to enhance students' learning in the subject. Students are able to access the department's website to check the activities they will be doing and are reminded to bring the correct kit. Good use is made of a digital camera for teachers to monitor standards and to help students to evaluate the quality of their performances. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to students' learning in literacy and a good contribution to their learning in numeracy. Key vocabulary for the various aspects of the subject is displayed prominently in the changing rooms. However, students' attention is not drawn to this often enough. Students measure the distances they jump and throw and time running events in athletics accurately. Sometimes they use information and communication technology to record their findings and compare their results with the estimations they made earlier. This makes a good contribution to their acquisition of basic skills in numeracy.
135. The quality of leadership and management of the subject is good. Schemes of work provide teachers with good guidance and ensure that sufficient time is allocated to each activity appropriately. Arrangements to assess the students' attainment and the progress they make are good. Teachers also use questions very effectively to extend students' understanding and to help them to evaluate the quality of their work and decide how they might improve further. The latter part of lessons is used well for this purpose and enables students to assess the progress they have made accurately. At the end of each unit of work students set targets for their improvement in the future. This also helps their understanding. However, this does not always work as smoothly as it might because teachers do not always make it clear, at the start of lesson, what they expect students to learn. The learning objectives for lessons are not always included clearly in teachers' day-to-day planning. Annual reports outline the progress students have made very clearly, but do not always give enough advice about how they might improve their performance in the future.
136. The department expects high standards and students respond well. For example, the vast majority of students always bring the correct kit and happily adhere to the guidance for taking showers following activities. Teachers ensure successfully that students are aware of the safety measures for each activity and students observe these well. However, the department does not currently undertake regular risk assessments for each of the activities it provides.
137. The provision for the subject benefits greatly from the good accommodation. There is a spacious sports hall, a large all-weather games area, a swimming pool, a gymnasium and a fitness suite. These are used very effectively. There is also a playing field. However, this is poorly drained. Consequently, there are times when it cannot be used. Resources for learning are also good. This is partly because of the effective efforts of the department to raise additional funds for the purchase and replacement of equipment.
138. There is a good programme of extra-curricular activities. These are attended by substantial numbers of students and do much to enhance students' learning in the subject. Considerable success is achieved in competition with other schools, particularly in athletics, association football and hockey. Strong links are established with many local sports clubs. These enable students to participate successfully in a range of sports beyond the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **good**.

Strengths

Good specialist teaching and assessment in Years 7 to 9

High standards in full course GCSE

Leadership and management

Positive attitudes of most students

Very good contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Areas for improvement

Results in short course GCSE, particularly those of boys

Timetabling and staffing arrangements

The use of ICT in lessons

139. At the end of Year 11, the whole year group have the opportunity of taking the short course GCSE in religious education. Just under half the candidates achieved A*-C grades in 2001, with girls doing very much better than boys. The gap between boys and girls was greater than it was in their GCSE subjects overall. The results were similar to those in 2000, although the gender difference was even greater then. A small number of students opt to take the full GCSE course in most years, and nearly two-thirds of them achieved grades A*-C in 2001, although there are no candidates in 2002.
140. From work seen during the inspection, similar results can be expected in the short course GCSE in 2002. The standard of work seen at the end of Year 11 was close to the national average, but with girls performing better. Students make competent notes, but their writing is not distinguished by much original thinking. Some students do not take sufficient pride in their work to do well. The small group in Year 10 who are taking the full GCSE course have higher standards overall, although the results of a test they did on Hinduism suggest they still have much work to do. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are about average, compared to national standards, but it must be said that students achieve well in the restricted time of one hour per week.
141. The achievement by the end of Year 9 is partly due to the positive attitudes of students in Years 7 to 9, who have very good relationships with their teachers and with each other. They are attentive in lessons, and work conscientiously on the written tasks they are set. They are sensitive to moral issues, and exhibit a thoughtful approach to many of the issues raised in lessons. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, but would be better if more students, particularly boys, felt more positive about the subject.
142. Good teaching also contributes to the progress students make. The teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good, sometimes very good. Good teaching was also seen in the full GCSE class in Year 10, and teaching is at least satisfactory in the short course lessons. On the basis of the students' written work, it can be seen that teachers in Years 10 and 11 – some of whom are non-specialists – follow a tightly-focused programme of study to cover the syllabus. Risks are not taken, and the work that results is characterised by consistency more than by creativity. The specialist teaching in Years 7 to 9 lays a good foundation for future work, with appropriate writing tasks forming the backbone of class work and homework. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject, and employ a variety of methods to ensure good learning. There is wide use of worksheets, which helps to structure the written tasks, but there is also judicious use of textbooks and video films. Lessons are well planned and paced, and teachers manage their classes well. In two lessons, good use was made of meditation as a starter activity, which served not only to introduce the topics effectively, but also helped students to relax and put aside distractive thoughts. In this and other ways, the subject makes a very good contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The

use of support staff is fairly limited, but teachers support well those students who need extra help, including some for whom English is an additional language. Different worksheets are sometimes used, but the more usual approach appears to be for the teachers, who know their students well, to intervene when their support is needed. The sensitive approach of teachers contributes to the good relationships, and enhances the learning. Students know how well they are doing, because their work is marked well and teachers comment aptly on their achievement.

143. The head of department has been in post since the beginning of this academic year, and came after a period of some upheaval – in staffing and accommodation. She is pulling things together at this juncture, and her good leadership and management have already had an effect. She copes well with having several non-specialists to support and monitor, and with a timetable that is less than ideal, including some split classes. Resources are adequate, and include audio-visual equipment, but more books and artefacts, supported by library stock, are needed for some aspects of the syllabus. ICT should be used more widely than it is. The department now has its own teaching base, including an office and two specialist rooms, but is housed in a less than inspiring block that cries out for improvement or replacement. On such features depends the future image of the subject with students.
144. There is no doubt, however, that the provision for religious education has improved since the last inspection. The GCSE short course is now available to all in Years 10 and 11. Standards in the full GCSE course remain high, and are higher now in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is now good or better in Years 7 to 9, whereas before there was some unsatisfactory teaching. There is capacity for further improvement and an enthusiasm to succeed.