

INSPECTION REPORT

Samuel Whitbread Community College

Shefford, Bedfordshire

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109670

Principal: Mr Roger D Owen

Reporting inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 19 - 23 March 2001

Inspection number: 192074

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of college: Comprehensive

College category: Community

Age range of students: 13 - 19 years

Gender of students: Mixed

College address: Shefford Rd
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Appropriate authority: Bedfordshire

Name of chair of governors: Dr Carolyn Devereux

Date of previous inspection: 25 November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3390	Kenneth Thomas	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How high are standards/ a) The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9184	Geza Hanniker	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
10984	Pamela Bishop	Team inspector	Science	How well does the school care for its pupils?
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education	
5704	Christine Brooks	Team inspector	Business studies	
14704	Jeffrey Cooling	Team inspector	Geography	
	Peter Hick	Team inspector	Mathematics	
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Art Design and technology	
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	Special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Music	
16950	Caroline Orr	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Equal opportunities	
1795	Joyce Sanderson	Team inspector	Drama	
30648	Brian Skelton	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	History	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Samuel Whitbread Community College is a mixed comprehensive college for students aged 13-19 and serves a number of villages and small towns in southeast Bedfordshire. The majority of students are drawn from three middle schools. The college is popular and is oversubscribed and the number of students has increased by about 24 per cent since the last inspection. There are now 1246 students on roll and this makes the college bigger than other comprehensive schools with a sixth form. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. A very small number of students, 7 only, speak English as an additional language. The attainment of students on entry in Year 9 covers the full attainment range, but is above average overall. The proportion of students with special educational needs, at 19.8 per cent, and the proportion with statements, at 2.4 per cent, are about average. About 1,800 adults attend daytime and evening community education courses.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

Samuel Whitbread Community College is good and improving. Standards are rising because there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement and teaching is good. The principal provides very good leadership and receives good support from the senior management team. Resources are well managed and the college provides good value for money.

What the college does well

- Overall standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are above average and well above average at the end of Year 11.
- Effective leadership and management are promoting enthusiastic teamwork and good standards in most areas of the work of the college.
- Good teaching succeeds in producing good attitudes and behaviour in lessons, and rising standards.
- Very good use is made of assessment information to set achievement targets for students.
- Learning support for students with special educational needs is good.
- Excellent collaborative links with other institutions and very good links with the community help to promote students' learning.

What could be improved

- Standards of attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form.
- Standards of attainment of boys at the end of Year 11.
- Provision for personal, social and health education.
- The use of the library as a resource for teaching and learning.
- Curriculum imbalances in music, religious education, drama, physical education and personal, social and health education, caused by the two-week timetable.
- Some aspects of the accommodation.

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

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in November 1996 and has made good progress since that time. Standards of attainment in the National Curriculum tests, taken at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examination, taken at the end of Year 11, have risen at the same rate as the national trend. Parents recognise that the college is improving and the roll is rising - numbers have increased by 24 per cent since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved and there is now more good teaching and very little unsatisfactory teaching. The key issues identified for action in the last inspection report have all been tackled vigorously. Strategic financial planning has improved and staff are now used more effectively. The range of courses offered in the sixth form has been increased and the sixth form curriculum is better balanced. However, there is still insufficient use of the library as a resource for learning. Senior managers' roles for monitoring and evaluation are now much clearer, although there is a need for further action with regard to personal, social and health education. The college collects and records accurate information on students' performance together with their destinations after leaving college. Guidance in Year 11 for post-sixteen choices has also improved. Plans for the improvement of

the accommodation are well advanced. Statutory requirements for religious education and information and communication technology are now being met. However, the college is still unable to meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. Appropriate attainment targets are set and the college is well placed to make further improvement.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	D	A	C	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Students achieve well at Samuel Whitbread College and results are improving at end of Year 9 and Year 11 at the same rate as the national trends. At the end of Year 9 in 2000, attainment in the National Curriculum tests was above average in English and mathematics and well above average in science. In comparison with similar schools, based on students' entitlement to free school meals, results were average in science and below average in English and mathematics. Boys achieved better results than girls in science and mathematics, while girls achieved better results than boys in English.

In the 2000 GCSE examination, results for 5 or more subjects at the higher A* - C grades were average in comparison with all schools but well below in comparison with similar schools. However, when account is taken of performance over the full grade range, results were well above average and above the average for similar schools. These results represent good progress and achievement from the start of Year 9. Almost all students with special educational needs achieved 5 or more A* - G grades. Results in the A*-C grade range were below average in English but above average in English literature. Both of these results were depressed by the well below average results of boys. The results of both boys and girls were below average in mathematics. Results in science were above average, with little difference in the performance of boys and girls. GCSE results were above average in business studies, drama, history, music, Spanish, statistics and in the religious education full course, and average in design and technology, geography, French and in the religious education short course. Results were below average in art, German and physical education. Girls achieved better results than boys in all of these subjects.

Progress and achievement in the sixth form are good. In the 2000 GCE A level examinations results were above average in most subjects. However, results in mathematics were below average. The progress and achievement of students following GNVQ courses are generally good. However, in 2000 a significant proportion of students failed to complete the Intermediate health and social care and Advanced leisure and tourism courses.

In lessons and work seen, standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are above national expectations. Very little work of below average standard was seen. In the sixth form, standards are generally consistent with course expectations. Good standards are attained in extra-curricular activities, particularly in the performing arts. Results are monitored carefully and challenging targets are set for individual subjects and the college overall.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Very good. Most students enjoy coming to college. They are very committed to their learning and keen to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. Most students are considerate and friendly. There are only a few instances of inappropriate behaviour. Behaviour in the public areas of the school affected by overcrowding is not as good as in lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Students' personal development is good. Relationships are good. Pupils show increasing maturity as they move through the college.
Attendance	Good. The college makes strenuous efforts to maintain and improve good levels of attendance.

The climate for learning is very good. Teachers establish good relationships and students have very good attitudes. Pupils show good responsibility towards each other and are helped to develop as individuals. Behaviour is good, on the whole. A minority of students are unable to exercise self-discipline when given more freedom and act immaturely and behave irresponsibly in the narrow corridors and walkways during break times. Incidents of bullying are few and they are dealt with firmly. The school is vigilant in following up absence, of which very little is unauthorised.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

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

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In 71 per cent of lessons the teaching is good or better and in 31 per cent of lessons it is very good or excellent. Teaching is at least satisfactory in 99 per cent of lessons. The overall quality of teaching is slightly better in the sixth form. Only three unsatisfactory lessons were observed.

Teaching is good in English and science throughout the college. Teaching in mathematics is good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. There is insufficient challenge in some mathematics lessons and inconsistencies in the use of homework and the marking of students' work. Particular strengths of teaching are in teachers' effective use of their subject knowledge to give clear explanations and guide students' progress. Expectations are high and teachers are good role models. Teaching in religious education is very good in Year 9 and in the sixth form. The teaching of geography and music is also very good in the sixth form. There are occasional examples of excellence in teaching in geography and religious education in Year 9 and in drama in the sixth form. Teaching of this quality had a significant effect on students' learning in these lessons. Teachers' planning is good and helps students to learn systematically.

Good use is made of opportunities to improve students' literacy skills in most subjects but insufficient attention is paid to the development of students' numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics. Planning for students with special educational needs is good, they learn well across the full curriculum and into the sixth form. Students' work is marked regularly in most subjects. Homework is used effectively to consolidate and extend students' learning in most subjects, but not always set in accordance with the college homework timetable.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Broad and balanced with well planned schemes of work. Provision for personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory. A very good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Students are fully included in the college community and participate well. Learning support is effective and helps students to cope with work in all their subjects.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The few students with English as an additional language have no language difficulties that require additional support.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Opportunities for social, moral and cultural development are good, although there are not enough opportunities for spiritual development. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met.
How well the college cares for its students	The college is caring; individual students are known well. Their progress is monitored systematically and targets are set to help them improve.

The curriculum is broad and balanced in Years 9 to 11, and provides a good range of opportunities in the sixth form. However, the two-week timetable leads to a long gap between lessons in some subjects and this affects continuity in learning. Students are well supported and they appreciate the opportunities the college provides. Arrangements for personal, social and health education are unsatisfactory. Form tutors are not fully trained and under resourced to teach the course, and the timetabling of lessons detracts from its importance in comparison with other subjects. The college has effective links with parents and parents provide good support for students' learning. The college has excellent relationships with, and makes very good use of its links with, partner schools and higher education.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	Very good. Leadership has a sense of vision, enthusiasm and is committed to continuous improvement and the raising of standards in all areas.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities conscientiously and well. They exercise very good oversight and do their best to obtain best value in the decisions they make.
The college's evaluation of its performance	Thorough, with rigorous analysis of results and systematic use of targets for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The college development plan provides a very good framework for spending priorities. Good use is made of the college's resources. However the library is under-resourced and under-used and aspects of the accommodation are unsatisfactory. The college provides good value for money.

Leadership of the college is very effective and staff at all levels have a high commitment to the raising of standards. Rigorous monitoring of the college's work has brought about good improvement since the last inspection. The college is a self-evaluating organisation. It has a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses and is well placed to make further improvements. The overall quality of leadership provided

by curriculum and pastoral heads is good, but there are weaknesses in leadership in mathematics. Financial planning is good and best value principles are applied in all spending. External grants and other resources, including those for special educational needs are well used. The sixth form is cost-effective. Some aspects of the accommodation are unsatisfactory. Insufficient use is made of the library as a resource for learning.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like college. • The college expects students to work hard and achieve their best. • The progress their children are making. • The approachability of the college. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information the college provides. • The amount of homework students are given. • The closeness with which the college works with parents. • Behaviour.

Parents are very supportive of the college and inspectors endorse parents' positive views. Some parents had mixed feelings about the closeness with which the college works with parents and the information the college provides. Inspectors found that the college strives hard to involve parents. The quality of information provided about the college and students' attainment and progress is good, although college newsletters could be more regular. Homework is set regularly in most subjects. Behaviour in lessons is good, but due to the immature behaviour of a minority of students, overall behaviour outside lessons does not reach this standard.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The college's results and students' achievements

1. Students achieve well at Samuel Whitbread College and results in national tests and examinations taken at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are improving at the same rate as the national trends. By the end of Year 9, standards of attainment in English and mathematics are above average, while results in science are well above average. In the National Curriculum tests taken in 2000, students were about a half a term ahead of students in other schools in English, about a term ahead in mathematics and two terms ahead in science. In comparison with similar schools, both the overall results and science results were average, while the English and mathematics results were below. However, this comparison, which is based on students' entitlement to free schools meals, is misleading in relation to Samuel Whitbread College because in many families, the total family income is above the free school meal entitlement threshold because both parents are employed in comparatively low paid occupations. The most recent county survey of disadvantage in Bedfordshire shows that two of the wards from which about one third of the college's students are drawn are amongst the most disadvantaged areas in the county. Overall, the National Curriculum test results represent good progress from the time students enter the college. There are differences in the performance of boys and girls, with boys achieving better results than girls in science and mathematics and girls achieving better results than boys in English. The 2000 teacher assessments in other subjects show above average attainment by the end of Year 9 in all subjects other than information and communications technology, modern foreign languages and physical education, where standards are about average, and geography where they are below. Standards in design and technology resistant materials and modern foreign languages are affected by the extent to which students have experienced specialist teaching and, in resistant materials, the use of workshops in their middle schools.
2. Students make satisfactory and often good progress across Years 10 and 11 and achievement in the GCSE examination is good relative to previous levels of attainment at the end of Year 9. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, 49 per cent of students achieved five or more A* - C grades compared with the national average of 47 per cent, and 98 per cent of students achieved five or more A* - G grades compared with 91 per cent nationally. The percentage of students achieving 5 or more A* - C grades was average in comparison with all schools but well below in comparison with similar schools. However, the same considerations with regard to free school meals apply, and the GCSE average points score, which takes account of performance across the full grade range, shows results are well above average and above average for similar schools. Almost all of the Year 11 students are entered for GCSE and in most years virtually all students entered are successful in achieving five or more A* - G grades. This reflects very well on the progress and achievement of students with special educational needs. In 2000, 95 per cent of students on the register of special needs gained 5 or more A* - G grades. Girls achieve better results overall, than boys in the GCSE examination.
3. The percentage of students gaining A*-C grades in the 2000 GCSE English examination was below the national average. This was due to the significantly below average performance of boys. Similarly in English literature, although the overall percentage of A*-C grades was slightly above average, the percentage of boys gaining A*-C grades was significantly below average. The percentages of both boys and girls achieving A*-C grades in mathematics were below their respective national averages, with the results of boys significantly below. GCSE examination results in science were just above national figures, with little difference in the performance of boys and girls. The percentages of students achieving A*-C grades were above the national averages in business studies, drama, history, music, Spanish, statistics and in the religious education full course. The percentages were about the same as the national average in design and technology, geography, French and in the religious education short course, while they were below in art, German and physical education. Girls achieved better results than boys in all of these subjects.
4. Results in the General Certificate of Education Advanced level examinations have varied in recent years. They were below average in 1998, well above average 1999 and average in 2000. However,

this variation in performance has largely reflected differences in standards of attainment on entry to the sixth form. External analyses of performance relative to standards of attainment on entry show that students make good progress in the sixth form and that results represent good levels of achievement. In addition to English, drama and business studies, which are consistently strong A level subjects, good results were achieved in 2000 in the sciences, art, design, modern foreign languages geography, history, sociology, general studies and physical education. Results in mathematics have varied considerably over recent years and were well below average in 2000. The standards of attainment and levels of achievement of students following General National Vocational Qualification courses are generally good. However, in 2000, a significant proportion of students failed to complete the Intermediate health and social care and Advanced leisure and tourism courses.

5. In lessons and other work seen, standards at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13 are generally above national expectations in most subjects and by the end of Year 13 they are above expectations.
6. There are seven students in the college with English as an additional language; all are at an advanced stage of language development and able to access the full curriculum.
7. Standards of literacy are above average. The English department is in close contact with the middle schools and this ensures that there is good continuity in the development of students' literacy skills when they enter the college. One English lesson per cycle is devoted to basic skills and the English department's development plan incorporates good practice drawn from the National Literacy Strategy. Staff development initiatives have helped teachers to gain a good understanding of issues related to raising attainment in literacy. These initiatives include silent reading, a paired reading scheme and reading awards, which are used to encourage students to record their own staged reading progress as they move up the college. All Year 9 students are required to own and use a dictionary. Good examples of the development of students' literacy skills are seen in most subjects. In geography students are required to read aloud and to give short oral presentations on prepared topics. In history students are required to read a wide range of source material and there is an emphasis on accurate note making and summarising techniques. In information and communication technology lessons, students are required to check their own spelling before resorting to spell checkers. In science all homework is systematically checked for accuracy of spelling. However, insufficient use is made of the library as a resource for developing students' literacy skills.
8. Oral skills develop as students move through the college and are very good by the time students enter the sixth form. Students are good listeners, speak with confidence and are able to express their viewpoints fluently. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 French lesson where students' rapid and accurate responses to skilful questioning by the teacher made a significant contribution to the very good quality of learning taking place in the lesson. Students understand and use specialist vocabulary in, for example, mathematics, business studies, science and design and technology. In Years 10 and 11, students articulate their responses to questions clearly and use language precisely when speaking. For example, in a Year 10 drama lesson, students showed increasing familiarity with the technical terms used to describe aspects of performance. Sixth form students draw on a variety of sources of evidence and use sophisticated vocabulary when discussing their work. This was seen, for example, in a Year 12 history lesson on the leadership struggle in Russia after the death of Lenin.
9. Reading standards are generally consistent with expectations and often above. Students have good comprehension skills. These enable students, including those with special educational needs, to meet all curricular demands. Students offer good analyses and responses when studying literature and make good use of their referencing skills to obtain information from textbooks. Through activities such as poetry days, book weeks, and silent reading in English, the college provides a good deal of support for personal reading. However, the library fiction stock is inadequate to support students' personal reading. Many students write fluently and attain above average standards, producing some good creative pieces of writing in all years. The use of a wide range of writing styles demonstrates the students' awareness of audience and purpose for their writing. Well constructed writing guides in, for example, English, history and geography, help all students and, in particular lower attaining students, to ensure that their written work is accurate and well structured.

10. Students' overall standards of numeracy are consistent with national expectations in Year 9 but below in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Although the mathematics department makes provision for the development of basic numerical skills, there is no college numeracy strategy that builds on the work being done in the middle schools, and in Year 9, in a systematic way. Although students have the opportunity to develop their numeracy skills through, for example, the application of formulae in science, measurement in design and technology, estimation in art and the use of tables and graphs in geography and history, many students display a lack of confidence when faced with relatively simple calculations. In science and business studies, for example, the progress of lower attaining students is being inhibited by weak numerical skills. The absence of a whole college approach to this basic skill needs urgent attention.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

11. The attitudes of students, including those with special educational needs, are good and this is evident in most lessons. They are purposeful and ready to make a prompt start at the earlier than usual starting time of the college day. Students show that they are keen to learn and make very good efforts to achieve their learning goals. They sustain concentration, respond well to challenges and are prepared to persevere when work is difficult. When interviewed, students showed that they are proud of their college and this was also evident in the views expressed at the pre-inspection parents' meeting and in parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire.
12. Students' personal development and the quality of the relationships amongst all groups are good. Students work, study and play well together and are prepared to listen to and show respect for the views of others. The mutual respect between teachers and students is a significant contributory factor to the progress that students are making. Students use their planners effectively to organise their work and show that they are able to work independently when given the opportunity. They take on responsibilities with enthusiasm; for example, as members of year or college councils and when organising charity events. Sixth form students play a leading role in the college and support teachers and younger students by organising activities such as the student proms or helping lower attaining students with their reading. They also help with the leadership of outward-bound groups and take leading roles in assemblies. The personal development of students is enhanced by opportunities to take part in informed discussion on contentious issues; for example in a Year 13 geography lesson on strategies for development in less economically developed countries. The preparedness of students to listen to, and show respect for, the viewpoint of others was also very apparent in a Year 9 religious education lesson on the Holocaust and the dilemmas faced by individuals when confronted with social injustice. Students listened very carefully to each other's opinions and were able to arrive at moral standpoints through reasoned discussion. Boys and girls readily collaborate with each other and work well together. Students are very supportive of each other and students with special educational needs are well integrated with their peers. Parents attending the pre-inspection meeting commented very favourably on this aspect of college life. Students also form very good relationships with teachers and other adults and the vast majority reciprocate the courtesy and respect they receive.
13. The college has a clear code of behaviour, which is based on mutual respect and on individuals taking personal responsibility for their own actions. Students respond well to this approach and behaviour is good. Students gradually acquire the norms of behaviour, which improve as students get older. In only a few lessons was behaviour unsatisfactory or poor and most of these lessons were in the lower years. Immature behaviour disrupted learning in a Year 9 music lesson, for example, and learning in a Year 10 science lesson was disrupted by the response of a small number of students to the immature behaviour of one boy. Teachers work hard to ensure that in the majority of lessons students behave well and that there is an orderly and purposeful atmosphere for learning. The majority of students also behave well in the public areas of the college. However, a minority are unable to exercise self-discipline when given more freedom and act immaturely and behave irresponsibly in the narrow corridors and walkways during break times. Although tutors deal effectively with individual students, the lack of an effective personal, social and health education programme means that the college is missing an important opportunity to contribute to students' social development.

14. The college makes strenuous efforts to provide support for students and avoid the need to use exclusion from the college as a sanction. These efforts include the use of supervised withdrawal, which is proving to be an effective means of managing students whose classroom behaviour is unacceptable. Nevertheless, the behaviour of a small number of students is such that it inevitably leads to exclusion from college. As a result, during the last college year there were 18 fixed period and 3 permanent exclusions. These figures are below the numbers of exclusions found in secondary schools of similar size. The college takes a serious view of bullying and the procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying are included in the staff handbook. Both students and parents reported that there have been occasional incidents of bullying but stressed that these had been dealt with effectively by the college and were confident that any future incidents would also be dealt with effectively.
15. The attendance rate is good and has been above the national average since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the college continues to make strenuous efforts to improve attendance. The college works closely with the education welfare officer, who is based at the college, and receives good support from parents. In recognition of the work done to improve attendance the college was recently given a Department for Education and Employment 'Truancy Buster' award. Students are generally punctual at the start of morning and afternoon sessions and most lessons start on time.
16. The college has sustained the good attitudes and behaviour noted in the previous inspection report. However, the provision for personal, social and health education, including citizenship, remains an issue to be tackled.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

17. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. This finding endorses the view of 83 per cent of the parents who responded to the questionnaire. The quality of teaching in Year 9 is good or better in 67 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 27 per cent of lessons. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good or better in 69 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 28 per cent of lessons. The overall quality of teaching is slightly better in the sixth form where teaching is good or better in 77 per cent of lessons and very good in 40 per cent. There were only three unsatisfactory lessons, one in music, one in modern foreign languages and one in health and social care. Teaching in religious education is very good in Year 9 and in the sixth form. The teaching of geography and music is also very good in the sixth form. Teaching in English and music in Year 9, in mathematics in Years 10 and 11, and in art, mathematics and information and communications technology in the sixth form is satisfactory. Teaching in all other subjects is good throughout the college. Three excellent lessons were observed, one in geography and one in religious education in Year 9, and one in drama in the sixth form. The quality of the teaching in these lessons had a significant effect on students' learning.
18. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and draw on this effectively to plan their lessons, provide clear explanations and give appropriate guidance to students. This was seen in an excellent Year 9 religious education lesson, for example, where very good subject knowledge enabled the teacher to extend students' understanding of the origins of barriers between people by relating the parable of the Good Samaritan to the Holocaust. In drama, the skilful use of teachers' subject knowledge inspires students to want to share these interests and skills. Specialist information and communications technology teachers use their subject knowledge well to give clear explanations and provide good individual support. The good subject knowledge of geography teachers is used effectively to provide a firm base for students' learning. Good subject knowledge is a feature in modern foreign languages, where teachers' good accents serve as appropriate models for their students. The very good subject knowledge of music teachers enables them to explain concepts clearly and offer appropriate challenges to higher attaining students. In business studies, the good subject knowledge of teachers enables them to develop and extend students' understanding of business theories and principles, and their application to modern business.
19. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory, overall. The English department lays a very good foundation for the development of literacy skills and most teachers have an awareness of the importance of developing students' literacy skills. For example, there are opportunities for

students to plan, draft and rewrite their own work in English, geography, history and business studies. Support for the development of students' writing skills through the use of key words is provided in, for example, English, mathematics, art, business studies, design and technology and music. Students' reading skills are developed and consolidated through opportunities to read both silently and aloud in many lessons. The college is well advanced in the development of a literacy strategy to build on this good practice and develop these skills in a systematic way in all subjects. Students develop their numerical skills in many subjects. In mathematics teachers include activities to improve recall and students' mental agility in their lessons to develop numeracy skills. Numeracy is also developed through measuring and judging proportion in art and design and technology, and in interpreting data in geography, business studies and science. However, the college has yet to begin to develop a college numeracy strategy and students' numerical skills are not being developed in a systematic way in all subjects, even though numeracy has been identified as a general weakness for many students.

20. Lesson planning is good. Teachers plan their lessons effectively and in many cases share their objectives with students. As a result, most students are clear about what they are doing and are fully involved in their learning. This was evident in a Year 9 English lesson, for example, where a small group of students with special educational needs made good progress in the learning of spelling rules because the learning activities were carefully planned to match the needs of students. Careful lesson planning was also a feature of excellent teaching in a Year 9 geography lesson on population migration, where a detailed knowledge of students' levels of attainment enabled the teacher to plan a sequence of activities that stimulated interest and motivation, and led to very good learning in the lesson. The review of objectives at the end of lessons to check the level of students' understanding is a feature of much sixth form teaching. This was evident, for example, in a Year 13 history lesson on Chartism and the impact of religion on society between 1815 and 1830. Lessons are generally well planned in modern foreign languages to ensure that students have the opportunity to apply new knowledge in speaking or writing tasks. However, an assumption that learning was taking place without checking students' understanding contributed to unsatisfactory teaching and learning in a Year 13 German lesson. Good lesson planning in information and communications technology helps to ensure that classrooms are ready when students arrive so lessons get off to a brisk start. The close matching of activities to the attainment levels of students is a good feature in the planning of lessons in business studies. In a Year 10 lesson on advertising, for example, activities were well planned to extend the higher attaining students and adjusted so that average and lower attaining students were also fully engaged in the lesson. This has a positive effect on students' levels of achievement.
21. Teachers have generally high expectations, which are communicated clearly to students. This leads to good progress and achievement in most subjects. For example, in an excellent Year 11 drama lesson, lively and challenging teaching led to students making rapid progress in understanding the contribution of gesture and body language to performance. The high level of challenge was also seen in a Year 13 English lesson on the soliloquies in 'Hamlet', where students were able to engage in high level discussions of the importance of the speeches to the play. The best teaching in music is characterised by lessons that proceed at a good pace with increasingly challenging activities, which engage all students. In modern foreign languages, teachers make good use of the foreign language to challenge students and raise expectations. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 French lesson where students were stimulated by the fast pace of the lesson and clearly enjoyed the rapid question and answer sessions. In the few lessons where this does not occur, the pace is lost and some students lose interest. Insufficient challenge is offered to higher attaining students in some mathematics lessons in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. In most areas of design and technology students respond positively to the demands of teachers and concentrate on their work with the consequence that good progress is made in the development of students' planning and practical skills.
22. Teachers use a good range of strategies to enable students to learn and develop skills. Paired and small group work is used well in many subjects. In a Year 12 GNVQ health and social care lesson, for example, good use was made of paired work to carry out observations of children's behaviour in the nursery. Students on the course were keen to say how much they enjoyed learning through the group work, which forms an important part of the course. Small group work followed by presentations to the class was also used effectively in a Year 13 sociology lesson to draw together the information students had summarised on stratification and differentiation. In

modern foreign languages students benefit from regular opportunities to work with different partners in oral work. Small group work is used effectively in English to discuss and extend students' thinking, to undertake investigations in science and to discuss ideas and solve problems in business studies and social science. In a Year 9 religious education lesson a game was used very effectively to stimulate students' interest and examine prejudice and discrimination in society. Group work is also used effectively in physical education to develop students' skill levels.

23. Classroom management and organisation are good. In most lessons effective classroom management and organisation leads to lessons being conducted at a good pace with learning tasks well matched to the needs of students. Teachers expect good standards of behaviour and work hard to ensure that the learning environments within classrooms are orderly and purposeful. The majority of students respond well to the demands of teachers and relationships are good. In some otherwise satisfactory lessons, because learning activities are not sufficiently varied or closely matched to the attainment levels of students, concentration is not maintained for the full sixty-minute period and productivity in the lesson declines. In a few of these lessons, for example, in a Year 9 English lesson and a Year 9 music lesson, weaknesses in planning and class management contributed to inappropriate student behaviour and a lack of progress in the lessons. In one Year 10 science lesson, progress in learning was seriously disrupted by the challenging behaviour of one student, even though the teacher worked hard to keep the majority of students engaged in the lesson activities. The behaviour was such that even the most experienced teacher would have had difficulty in maintaining order in the classroom.
24. Teachers make good use of a variety of resources to stimulate students' interest and to make explanations clear. For example, teachers use the overhead projector and video clips well to make presentations and illustrate ideas. This underpins the development of new knowledge and skills and encourages progress. In art, effective use is made of examples of artists', students' and teachers' work to illustrate teaching points and stimulate students' thinking. Visiting speakers are well used as part of the general studies programme in the sixth form. The careful selection of resources to suit the learning needs of individuals is a feature of geography lessons; this ensures that all students, including those with special educational needs, are fully engaged in learning activities for the duration of the lesson. In English, geography and GNVQ courses, good use of is made of information and communications technology for students to draft, edit and refine their work. In business studies, students successfully use information and communications technology to create spreadsheets to carry out calculations. However, because insufficient use is made of information and communications technology as a resource for learning in several subjects in Years 10 and 11, and in particular in science and mathematics, students are not provided with enough structured opportunities to use the technology to support learning. In the majority of lessons teachers make good use of time and set deadlines for tasks to be completed. The setting of strict deadlines for the completion of several small group activities in a Year 12 psychology lesson, for example, ensured that the lesson proceeded at a good pace and students' interest and enthusiasm were maintained throughout.
25. The marking of students' work is well used in several subjects, for example in drama and geography, to give students clear information on the standard of their work and on what they have to do in order to improve it. Marking in English and business studies is closely linked to GCSE grades and A level course requirements so that students have a good understanding of the standards they are achieving. Similarly, marking is well used to provide students following the GNVQ courses with accurate information on the standards they are achieving. However, marking in mathematics is inconsistent and does not provide students with the guidance necessary in order to improve the quality of their work and raise standards. Student self-evaluation and peer assessment are features of much of the teaching in the sixth form. Although 26 per cent of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that students are given insufficient homework, inspection evidence indicates that homework is well used to consolidate and extend learning in most subjects. In English and geography, for example, homework is set regularly and generally well matched to the attainment levels of the students. In mathematics, however, insufficient use is made of homework to consolidate and extend learning and homework is not monitored to ensure that it is completed satisfactorily and on time.

26. The quality of teaching of students with special educational needs is good and in withdrawal lessons it is very good. Students are generally taught in normal classes. In most of these lessons, teachers are aware of the targets in students' individual education plans and take account of these in lesson planning. When individual support is being given, teachers are skilled in using strategies to enable students learn most effectively. For example, lesson activities are often short with achievable learning objectives so that concentration is maintained and students' learning is reinforced through experiencing success. In an individual withdrawal English support lesson, the student made good progress in learning about the plot and characters in 'An Inspector Calls' because of the skilful way the teacher introduced new ideas. In a Year 10 art lesson the effective support of a learning support assistant enabled an Asperger's student to make good progress in composition. Similarly in a Year 9 science lesson, a student with special educational needs made good progress because the learning assistant broke the work down into a series of small tasks that the student could complete satisfactorily. There are few students with English as an additional language. All of these students speak English fluently and have no language needs that require additional support.
27. The college has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection report. The quality of teaching was then judged to be good or very good in half the lessons seen, with a higher proportion in Year 9 than in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. The strengths identified in the previous report have been sustained, while improvements have been made in the areas of weakness. Teaching is now good or better in about seven-tenths of lessons and there is more very good teaching and very little unsatisfactory teaching. A wider range of teaching strategies is now being used to cater for students' different levels of attainment, classroom management has improved and lesson time is being used more effectively. The college is well placed to continue this improvement.

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

28. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good for all age groups. The curriculum is broad and balanced at all key stages and statutory requirements are met. The college has made good progress in its curricular provision since the last inspection. The curriculum is better balanced and provides a more relevant curriculum experience for all students, particularly those in the sixth form.
29. The teaching time of 25 hours a week meets government recommendations. The teaching day of five one-hour periods is suited to the needs of most subjects and the arrangement of completing four periods lessons before the lunch break ensures that most teaching and learning takes place in the most productive part of the day. However, the structure of the timetable over a two-week 50 period cycle, leads to a long gap between lessons in some subjects and this affects continuity in music, religious education, drama, physical education and personal social and health education. The timetable structure also has an adverse effect on the timetables of some teachers who have all of their non-contact periods grouped in the first week of the cycle and none in the second.
30. The curriculum in Year 9 is good and builds on the very good links with the middle schools. Other than in mathematics and modern foreign languages, students in Year 9 are taught in mixed ability groups. This arrangement suits subject teaching needs and setting arrangements in mathematics and modern languages are sufficiently flexible to allow movement between sets as the need arises. The National Curriculum subjects, together with religious education, information and communications technology and personal, social and health education form the basis of the curriculum in this year. However, arrangements for personal, social and health education programme are unsatisfactory. Although the programme outline includes reference to sex education and drug and alcohol misuse, these topics are not covered in a consistent way by all tutors. The programme is taught in alternate weeks and on a 'floating lesson' basis so that it replaces a different scheduled subject lesson each time. This arrangement does not allow for continuity and distracts from its importance in comparison with other subjects. Also, form tutors are not fully trained and they are not provided with the necessary resources to teach the course.

31. In Years 10 and 11, students benefit from a suitable curriculum and follow a broad core of English, mathematics, a double award in science, religious education, a modern foreign language, a design and technology subject, physical education and personal, social and health education. Students also select from a good range of fifteen GCSE and GNVQ options. A small number of students are disappointed from science, design and technology or modern foreign languages to follow a more appropriate vocational curriculum, involving the development of basic skills and preparation for work.
32. Curriculum provision in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection. The college has tackled the issue of the size of sixth form teaching groups and although there are some small teaching groups in music and modern foreign languages, teaching groups in other subjects are sufficiently large and the sixth form is cost-effective. Students are now provided with a very good range of 21 A/A/S level subjects together with three Intermediate and three Advanced GNVQ courses and the timetables of sixth form students are better balanced in terms of taught and independent study. A very good general studies course, which includes religious education, has been introduced and excellent use is made of visiting speakers to stimulate students' thinking on a range of social issues. The key skills course covers communication, the application of number and information and communications technology and is taught successfully in Year 12.
33. Curriculum planning is good in most subjects and good progress has been in the revision of schemes of work to ensure that they conform to recent changes in the National Curriculum. The college strives to increase student involvement and interest in college life and to motivate them to achieve high standards. For example, curriculum planning in English and science has taken account of the need to raise the standards of boys. Assemblies are well planned and the 15-minute morning registrations are used mainly for individual tutorial work. However, neither morning registration time nor the fortnightly tutor period are being used effectively for the teaching of the personal, social and health education. The individual tutorial work, which takes place in morning registrations, usually involves only a handful of students while the remainder engage in social conversation. This does not make for a purposeful start to the college day. Both the teaching of personal, social and health education and the use of tutor time were reported to be weakness at the time of the last inspection. Homework is set regularly in most subjects, but not always in accordance with the college timetable with the consequence that students have too much homework on some nights and very little on others.
34. Curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is good. A balance of individual and small group withdrawal classes led by learning support teachers, and learning support assistants in subject lessons, enables the majority of the students on the special educational needs register to follow the full curriculum. Special provision for students with Asperger's Syndrome, funded by the Local Education Authority, means that they can study in a secure environment with the help of specialist teachers. Students with physical disabilities have access to all parts of the college buildings and are well integrated into the general life of the college. Very good provision is made for a gifted student of primary school age who is following GCSE courses, and for a student with Down's Syndrome. Where necessary, individual timetables are negotiated for students with a range of short and long-term difficulties, in order to make sure they are included in mainstream education. The learning support department also provides advice for subject teachers on the preparation of suitable teaching materials for students with special educational needs and of the most effective ways to support these students' learning. Paired reading sessions with volunteer sixth form students help Year 9 students to improve their reading skills. Although the college is making good progress in the development of strategies to develop students' literacy skills, little progress has yet been made in the development of a college numeracy strategy.

35. The college makes good provision for careers and vocational education. The programme is well co-ordinated by a senior member of staff who works closely with heads of year, tutors and the careers and guidance service. In Year 9 all students are introduced to the resources and information provided in the college's guidance centre and they have the opportunity to participate in a college-industry day. Information about GCSE and vocational courses is clearly presented so that students can make appropriate choices for Years 10 and 11. During Years 10 and 11, the good links established by the college with the local business community enable all students to have access to a two-week programme of work experience. This is well organised, carefully monitored and for most students enriches their learning and understanding of life and work beyond the classroom. Careers guidance in the sixth form is very good and benefits from the college's well-established links with universities, local colleges, training providers and employers.
36. The college has very good links with the community. It is a successful provider of adult education and large numbers of adults participate in courses at the college. There is a college nursery and many organisations make use of the college's facilities. The college ensures that students derive maximum benefit from this close association; for example, by offering students the opportunity to gain first aid certificates. Many staff take part in the adult education programme; for example, to develop their information and communications technology skills. The college draws on a wide range of visiting speakers to promote intellectual debate about current issues; for example, a representative of a large pharmaceutical company recently debated with the students the rights and wrongs of testing drugs on animals. Close collaboration with local business and industry has enabled the college to improve provision of work experience since the last inspection. The college also has good sporting links with a number of local sporting clubs and associations, which ensures that students have the opportunity to continue participating in sport after leaving college.
37. The college provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities in which a large number of students participate. The range of extra-curricular activities offered by the college not only considerably enriches the curriculum, but also extends the range of students' cultural experiences and opportunities to achieve. Students respond well to these opportunities and standards are high. Dance and drama are particular strengths of the college and students are provided with numerous opportunities to take part in college productions. Some of these productions have been in collaboration with the middle schools. Musical activities include a variety of ensembles and groups. There are numerous trips and visits to theatres. There are also visits to other countries including Italy, Greece, Germany, Iceland, France, Switzerland and the USA. An exchange visit with a college in Japan is proposed for later this year. A high proportion of students take part in some form of extra-curricular sport. There is a very good range of inter-house competitions and the college fields teams in most areas of competitive sport against other schools with a good level of success. There are also many subject-based clubs that support students' learning and personal development.
38. The college has excellent relationships with partner schools and higher education. The Ivel Schools Association, for example, includes the college, the middle schools and their lower schools and supports continuity in teaching and learning when students progress from one school to another. In order to do this, heads of department meet regularly with their opposite numbers in the three middle schools to plan the curriculum content of Years 7 to 9. The modern foreign languages department, for example, has recently successfully shared some excellent in-service training on teaching methods and approaches. The Ivel Schools Association also seeks to make maximum use of resources and to obtain best value for money; for example, by managing and carrying-out the ground maintenance at the participating schools, using equipment and personnel based at the college. Students from Sunnyside special school use the youth club's facilities, which are located on the college's premises, and some of the college students join them on a voluntary basis. The college is an active member of the Bedfordshire Upper Schools Improvement Partnership, which supports a fulltime co-ordinator and two researchers with the aim of focusing on and disseminating good educational practice. The college also has a strong partnership with Luton University, which benefits the students in the sixth form in particular, providing them with impartial advice about choices and applications to universities. The college is also a highly successful provider of school centred initial teacher training.
39. Overall provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Staff are committed to creating an orderly environment, based on respect, trust and shared moral values. There is a positive ethos in the college. However, there is little monitoring of these areas of students'

development to ensure that they are systematically threaded through the curriculum and that these important dimensions are made explicit and reflected in all departmental planning.

40. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. The religious education department has created an ethos within which imagination, inspiration and contemplation are valued. Students are provided with very good opportunities to reflect on matters beyond the material and the routine. This is evident, for example, in lessons when they are asked to reflect on issues such as 'If God exists why was the Holocaust allowed to happen'. Spiritual development is also promoted in drama, music and art. The sixth form 'issues' course also includes topics that have clear spiritual dimensions and contributors to the course include notable clerics such as the Bishop of Bedford. Assemblies provide some opportunities for students to develop personal belief, spiritual awareness and time for quiet reflection. However, there is insufficient awareness of the contributions that every subject can make to the spiritual development of students. The college has increased the number of assemblies and this has increased opportunities for students to take part in collective worship. However, the college is still unable to provide a daily act of collective worship.
41. Provision for moral development is good. The college encourages a sense of right and wrong. Staff and prefects provide good role models. The majority of students understand what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and respect and consideration for other people and for their property. The college promotes a culture of self-discipline and, although a small minority of students lack the maturity necessary to behave in a self-disciplined way, most behave sensibly in the dining area and other public areas of the college. This is particularly evident when students queue in an orderly manner to board the college buses at the end of the college day. The respect with which they treat the college buildings and amenities is evidenced in the lack of graffiti around the college. Moral issues are discussed in many subjects of the curriculum. History contributes to this area through, for example, the exploration of the morality of slavery and the Holocaust. In religious education, students consider a range of ethical issues, such as animal rights and euthanasia. In physical education students are encouraged to respect one another's performances and to abide by the rules of fair play. Many assemblies address moral themes and issues and are used to reinforce the college's values.
42. Provision for students' social development is good. Students are provided with many opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and to show initiative. These opportunities feature regularly in lessons and include not only such things as collaborative work in English, drama, dance, music and physical education, but also through service on the college council and the paired reading scheme. Through regular surveys, students are provided with the opportunity to express their views on what constitutes good teaching and to contribute to college and department reviews. The results of these surveys are taken into account in college development planning. Many issues of social consequence are covered across the curriculum. For example, the impact of environmental issues on people's lives is tackled in science and social science and the social consequences of decision-making in business and industry are considered in business studies. Students are offered numerous opportunities for social development through activities such as organising charitable and social events, work placements and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided by the college. A particularly good feature of students' social development is the consideration that is shown towards students with physical impairments and the good quality of relationships that exist between these students and their peers. However, insufficient contribution is made to students' social development by the personal social and health education programme.
43. Provision for students' cultural development is good. The college strives to develop in students an appreciation of their own cultural traditions in many subjects of the curriculum and most obviously through English literature, drama, music, art, history and geography and social science. This work is well supported by educational visits to places of diverse cultural and historical interest. Students also learn about some of the diversity and richness of other cultures. For example, the work of authors from different cultural backgrounds is studied in English. In history, students gain insights into different civilisations. A wide range of artistic traditions are drawn on to stimulate students' creative thinking. In religious education both Christian beliefs and tradition and those of other cultures and faiths are explored in a sensitive way. However, more could be done to support this aspect of students' cultural development and preparation to live in a culturally diverse society.

44. Overall, provision for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has improved since the last inspection and makes a good contribution to students' personal development.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

45. The college takes its responsibilities for child protection and students' welfare very seriously and complies with all recommended procedures for child protection. The college provides a supportive environment in which to learn, and responsibilities for child protection are clearly defined. The staff handbook gives information and guidance to staff on the care and protection of students, together with the names of designated members of staff and names and addresses of the appropriate authorities. Links with the relevant child protection agencies are very good and there are effective procedures to ensure that all matters relating to the protection and welfare of students are dealt with thoroughly. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities for health and safety. A recent health and safety inspection by the Local Education Authority was followed up by an audit, which showed that all issues raised in the report were being tackled. Subject departments take their responsibilities for health and safety seriously and students are given clear guidance on safe procedures for using tools and machinery and for lifting equipment. A sufficient number of staff hold first aid certificates and all accidents are properly recorded. The college's policy for medicine administration is well prepared and detailed.
46. Continuity in care is a feature of the college pastoral system, which is built on the role of the form tutor. Students are in contact with their form tutors every morning for registration and form time and for their fortnightly personal, social and health education lessons. This enables tutors to develop a very good knowledge of individual students and their particular social and educational needs. Tutors hold formal interviews with the students in their tutor groups once a term when they discuss their aims and aspirations. An important part of these interviews is the negotiation of targets to be achieved before the next interview. The targets are recorded in students' planners so that both parents and tutors can monitor progress towards them. Heads of year play important roles in ensuring continuity in care. They establish close links with the middle schools and this helps to ensure continuity when students enter the college in Year 9. Both parents and students believe that the transfer arrangements are effective and that the college's induction procedures are very good. Heads of year stay with their year groups from Years 9 to 11. They meet with their year tutor teams once a week and provide tutors with good support for their individual tutorial work. The head and deputy head of the sixth form provide very good support and guidance for students in Years 12 and 13. The very good quality of the support and guidance provided to students makes a significant contribution to their progress and achievement as they move through the college. Students are provided with good support and guidance as they approach the end of Year 11. A member of the senior management team interviews Year 11 students about their progress and future intentions, and parents are invited to attend these interviews. There is a follow-up interview with a member of the sixth form team for any students who request it. Students entering the sixth form are then re-interviewed to confirm their choices in early September. The college's very good links with other institutions, the careers service and local employers ensure continuity at the time students leave college.
47. The college has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions are below those found in other schools of similar size. The code of behaviour requires students to 'treat everyone, including yourself, with respect; there is no excuse for rudeness, disrespect or insolence'. Students are encouraged to be self-reliant and to take initiative and responsibility. They understand that if they are unable to do this, an escalating series of sanctions will be applied. These include detentions and a withdrawal system, where students exhibiting disruptive behaviour may be withdrawn to work individually and under supervision for a limited period. The college anti-bullying policy commits the college to taking action when any student threatens, intimidates or attacks another student verbally or physically. A detailed record of all incidents is kept.
48. The college attaches high priority to regular attendance and attendance is above the national average. Nevertheless, the college strives hard to further improve attendance. The college works very closely with the education welfare officer and parents are contacted by 11 o'clock on the first

day of absence. Teachers encourage students by awarding commendations for behaviour, attendance, and punctuality and these are recorded in their National Record of Achievement and progress files. One member of the senior management team has completed a college based Master of Business Administration research study into reasons why students absent themselves and the findings are being used to guide policy and practice. The college has received national recognition for the work done to reduce truancy.

49. Overall, procedures for assessing students' progress and attainment are very good. The college has a clear and practical assessment policy outlining what is good assessment practice and defining the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Departmental policies are based on the college policy but additionally reflect subject specific needs. Together these documents provide a sound framework to support the assessment of students' achievements they proceed through the college. Statutory requirements for assessment and reporting are met.
50. A strength of the college is the attention paid to the analysis of examination and test results. An annual cycle of testing, grading, target setting and reporting is well planned and effectively implemented. There are careful procedures for assessing and for monitoring students' progress and students are left in no doubt about their levels of attainment and targets. This is particularly strong in the two years leading up to the GCSE examination. The college is rigorous in its use of YELLIS, a national data gathering and analysis system, which provides reliable predictions about students' performance in the GCSE examination. Students meet with their tutors once a term to check progress. There are good arrangements for year and subject heads to meet to consider the outcomes of the reviews and for form tutors to check regularly with students how well they are doing and whether they are doing well enough. The value of this is that both pastoral and curriculum teams work closely together to support students' progress.
51. All assessment information is collected, analysed and shared with subject departments. Departments are expected to use these analyses to evaluate individual student performance, compare the outcomes of different teaching groups and set the college's performance against national figures. However, insufficient use is made of this information in planning teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics. Marking is effective and regular in most subjects and linked to GCSE or A level grades in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. However, there are inconsistencies in marking in mathematics and in the examination courses in physical education. Marking also provides students with guidance on what they need to do to improve the presentation of their work but not enough guidance is given on what students need to do in order to improve their subject specific skills. The college meets statutory requirements for reporting students' assessments at the end of Year 9.
52. The college has systematic procedures for the identification and assessment of students with special educational needs. Individual education plans are carefully prepared and students' progress in relation to the targets specified in them is closely monitored. Detailed records of students' progress are maintained by the learning support co-ordinator and all annual reviews of statements of special educational needs are well documented.
53. Overall reports to parents are good. Parents are kept fully informed of their children's progress through consultation meetings and interim and annual reports. The quality of these reports is good and they include details of the programmes of study in each subject, together with well balanced information on academic and personal development, targets for future work and a personal statement written by the student, which includes an assessment of their achievement and progress.
54. Satisfactory progress has been made in the care the college offers students since the last inspection. All of the strengths have been maintained and support for students with special educational needs has improved. However, the weaknesses in support through the personal, social and health education programme remain and better use could be made of the very good assessment information collected by the college in planning for future teaching and learning.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. The college has established effective links with parents and parents provide good support for students' learning. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and comments made at the pre-inspection meeting with parents show that the majority of parents have positive views of the college. This was supported by the results of the 'College Survey 2000', which was a survey of parental opinions about various aspects of the quality of education provided by the college. Parents feel that because their children are expected to work hard at the college and to achieve, they are making good progress. Parents also say that their children like coming to college and the popularity of the college is indicated by the fact that the number of students on roll has increased by almost 25 per cent since the last inspection.
56. The Parent and Staff Association is well supported by both parents and teachers. It sees its main function as fund raising for educational purposes and the organisation of social events for the benefit of students, parents and staff. At its meetings it also discusses topical issues such as the causes of truancy and ways of dealing with it. It also helps the college to strengthen its relationship with the community by organising events, such as the hobby and model show, where both amateurs and professionals exhibit products.
57. The college is welcoming to parents and, in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, most parents expressed satisfaction about the ease with which they can make contact with the college and the way in which the college deals with questions or problems. Tutors develop a good knowledge of students and their families and this provides a considerable support to students' learning. Links with parents of students with special educational needs are good. Regular meetings with parents are organised and all are invited to contribute to the setting of targets in the individual education plans of their children. However, some parents are not always satisfied with the outcomes of issues raised with the college and expressed dissatisfaction with the way the college works with parents. A number of parents also expressed dissatisfaction with the information the college provides, the amount of homework and behaviour. Inspection evidence shows that the college provides good quality information to parents. An informative college prospectus is provided for parents of students entering the college in Year 9 and another later in the year when parents and students are considering the option choices to be taken in Years 10 and 11. A similar high quality sixth form prospectus is provided when students are considering their post-16 option choices. The information provided in these documents is clear and provides parents and students with a sound basis for choice. The governors' annual report to parents is informative and complies with all statutory requirements. Through students' planners, reports and parents' evenings the college attempts to keep parents informed about college events and their children's progress. There are regular consultations on students' progress at open evenings and parents are contacted at an early stage if their children cause any kind of concern. Occasional newsletters are sent to parents, giving useful information about college events and students' achievements, but these are irregular and parents feel, and inspectors agree, that the college does not do enough to keep parents regularly informed of college events and their children's achievements.
58. Homework is set regularly in most subjects and used effectively to extend and consolidate students' learning. However, the homework timetable is not adhered to in all subjects and because of this homework is sometimes distributed unevenly over the two weeks of the timetable cycle. In some week students are overloaded while in others they may have very little. The majority of students respond well to the college ethos, which places emphasis on self-discipline and mature behaviour in an adult learning environment. However, although teachers work hard to ensure that behaviour in lessons is good, a minority of students display immaturity in their behaviour in the public areas of the college and some behaviour at morning break and lunchtimes falls below that observed in lessons.
59. The good partnership with parents noted in the previous report is being maintained and the effective links that the college has with parents makes a positive contribution to the progress that students make.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

60. The overall leadership and management of the college are very good. The principal and senior management team provide very good leadership and a clear educational direction for the college. The college has a positive ethos and provides a well-ordered learning environment in which there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement and the raising of standards in all areas. Central to the realisation of this commitment are the processes of college improvement planning and self-evaluation, which are very good, and have a clear impact on the raising of standards in the college. This is evident in standards of attainment, attitudes and behaviour, personal development and relationships, all of which are good. College improvement planning reflects the college aims and all curriculum and pastoral development plans identify relevant priorities and cover both medium and long-term goals. Plans are costed effectively and have clearly defined targets, tasks, success criteria, staff responsibilities and timescales. All college plans serve as working documents and are directly linked to action to improve the quality of education the college provides. The college is very well placed to continue its improvement.
61. The college's commitment to continuous improvement is underpinned by an open-mindedness and willingness to identify, adapt and apply good practice from a range of sources in order to monitor and evaluate its work. Teaching and learning are seen as being at the centre of all improvement and the carrying out of lesson observations form an integral part of the college's self-evaluation procedures. Through these observations and departmental reviews, the senior management team and others with management responsibilities, are very clear about the college's strengths and weaknesses. Surveys of staff, student and parent opinion are undertaken to identify areas of improvement and, following these, six improvement groups have been established which are presently tackling issues such as the use of group work and classroom management. Previous issues have included that of the underachievement of boys. The groups form an important part of college development planning and all teachers are expected to belong to one of the groups. The groups have been properly resourced by providing group facilitators with an extra non-contact period and a small budget to support the groups' activities. The commitment of the college to improvement is also evident in the way in which a college-based Master of Business Administration course has been developed in collaboration with the University of Leicester. About a third of the staff are enrolled on the course and are very much involved in investigating and seeking solutions to issues identified within the college. Six teachers have won £3000 "Best Practice Research Scholarships" from the DFEE.
62. The college has established a comprehensive assessment database and provides detailed analyses of students' performance information to curriculum and pastoral team leaders and subject teachers. Procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of examination data, for example, are good. The senior management team analyse examination results and seek explanations for any discrepancies in performance between subjects and over time, and identify target areas for improvement. Year leaders closely monitor the use that form tutors make of assessment information to identify any areas of underachievement by individual students and set targets for improvement.
63. The overall quality of management provided by heads of department is good. Very good management and leadership in science, geography, history, modern foreign languages, drama, business studies is helping to ensure that there is a constant focus on strategies to further raise standards in these subjects. In most subjects, heads of department engage in rigorous monitoring to ensure that teaching and learning is effective and that college and department policies are being implemented consistently. However, a lack of rigour in monitoring and evaluation is adversely affecting standards in mathematics at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. There are also weaknesses in the co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of personal, social and health education. The management and co-ordination of special educational needs is very good and there is a strong sense of teamwork amongst all concerned with the teaching of students with special educational needs. The requirements of the Code of Practice are clearly understood and the governing body is kept well informed on special educational matters.
64. The governing body is very effective and highly supportive. With the exception of the provision a daily act of collective worship, it meets its statutory responsibilities. Governors take a keen interest in the work of the college and provide the college with a substantial amount of specialist help and advice. Positive relationships exist between the governing body and the senior management team. Governors receive regular detailed reports from the principal and other senior

members of staff, and have a good level of awareness of the college's strengths and weaknesses. The quality of financial management and planning is good. The college has successfully managed a deficit budget for the past three years and it is forecast that the budget will show a prudent surplus at the end of the present financial year. Governors are actively involved with the principal and the senior management team in financial planning. The college has effective procedures to ensure that the principles of best value for money are applied in the use of its resources and all additional funding received by the college is used for the intended purposes. The college has had difficulty in coming to terms with the requirements of the county auditors and the most recent auditors report identified a number of ongoing issues that the college had yet to resolve. These issues were to do with technicalities of financial reporting and the way in which financial information is stored on the computer. An action plan has been agreed with the county auditors to attend to all of these issues.

65. Subject teachers are appropriately qualified in their main teaching areas and support staff make effective contributions in lessons. Arrangements for the professional development of staff are very good and the college holds the Investor in People Award. Close attention is paid to the identification of individual teacher development needs and how these can be matched to college development priorities. Arrangements for the support and professional development of both newly qualified teachers and students undertaking initial teacher training are very good and highly valued by participants, as are the induction arrangements for all new members of staff. There were three temporary teachers in history during the week of the inspection. The effective support given to these teachers, two of whom do not hold history qualifications, meant that there was no adverse impact on teaching and learning in the subjects. The number of specialist teaching and non-teaching staff is sufficient to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. The skilled and experienced secretarial and clerical staff provide a welcoming college office and contribute very effectively to the administration and organisation of the college.
66. The college has worked hard to improve the quality of the accommodation since the last inspection but with limited success. The college has continued to grow since the last inspection when it was described as crowded. There are now about 25 per cent more students on roll, without a corresponding increase in accommodation. As at the time of the last inspection, teaching is hampered by restricted specialist facilities in music and much of the accommodation for science is old and inconvenient. The increasing demands on hall and sports hall for year tests and examinations causes interference with the physical education curriculum, particularly when unfavourable weather conditions make it impossible to use the outdoor facilities. Overcrowding is most obvious in the narrow corridors and walkways and has an adverse effect on behaviour outside lessons. Toilets are in an unacceptably poor state. There are plans for new classrooms to be built to replace the mobile classrooms by the start of the next college year and a future planned extension to the college includes additional accommodation and a complete refurbishment of the existing buildings.
67. Resources for learning are below the national average and there has been little improvement in the proportion spent on resources for learning since the last inspection. However, the management of the distribution of resources to departments is good. Funds are allocated after a careful analysis of the routine annual requirements of all departments with a sum kept aside for the funding of curriculum development projects. The money available is spent wisely and there is sufficient equipment and numbers of books to support learning in most areas of the curriculum. Only two departments have insufficient resources, to the extent that the breadth of curricular opportunities offered to students is affected. In art, there are insufficient resources for ceramics and in music there is a shortage of percussion instruments. In addition, there are shortages of textbooks, in history, mathematics and modern foreign languages. The provision of resources for learning in other departments is satisfactory and the particular requirements of students with special educational needs are well attended to. Resources for information and communications technology are good. The computer rooms are open to students before college, at lunchtimes and after college for independent study. Computers are well used and well looked after.
68. Students' access to books outside lessons is unsatisfactory. The library, as was the case at the time of the last inspection, remains an under-developed resource for learning. However, it is now open during normal lessons, for the whole of the lunch break and after college for about an hour. During the lunch break, the library is well used by students of all ages for reading, doing

homework and working on computers and the Internet. A group of six hard-working student librarians volunteer their services regularly to help the librarian. At other times, relatively few students, even sixth formers, use the library. Apart from the library induction classes for all students at the beginning of Year 9, few whole classes use the library to develop research and investigative skills. Small groups of students are sent occasionally from science to find out facts on their own.

69. There has been little improvement in the library book stock since the last inspection when it was described as inadequate. There are particular deficiencies in history, modern foreign languages and science. There are, however, adequate numbers of books for art and design and for most sixth form courses. The fiction stock is inadequate for a college of this size. A cull of old books has made the presentation of fiction books more attractive to students. The lack of a computerised system for stocktaking and security means that there has been no overall check on the number and loss of books during the last three years. No returns can be made to departments to inform teachers how often students take out available books, and not all departments take the opportunity to request new books to match changes in subject syllabuses and schemes of work.
70. Overall leadership of the college is very effective and staff at all levels have a high commitment to the raising of standards. Rigorous monitoring of the college's work has brought about good improvement since the last inspection. The college is a self-evaluating organisation. It has a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses and is well placed to make further improvements.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

71. All of the following issues feature in college development planning. In order to raise standards further and the quality of education provided, the governors, senior management and staff of Samuel Whitbread Community College, with the help of the Local Education Authority should:

- Raise standards in mathematics by ensuring that:
 - expectations are sufficiently high and the level of challenge offered to boys in Years 10 and 11 is more closely matched to their potential.
 - there is rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning within the department to identify and share good practice and tackle weaknesses.
 - procedures and timetables are established for the monitoring of students' progress and attainment, and for making judgements about whether students are doing well enough.
 - all students' work is marked regularly and that marking provides students with clear guidance on how to improve the standard of their work.
 - homework is set regularly and used to consolidate and extend students' learning.
 - there is a college numeracy strategy, led by the mathematics department, that builds on the work being done in the middle schools, that the strategy is implemented effectively in all subjects, is closely monitored, and that the effects of the strategy on improving students' standards of numeracy are carefully evaluated.

(paragraphs: 3,4,10,19,21,25,34,51,63,85-87,89-93,95,108,113)

- Raise the standards of attainment of boys by ensuring that:
 - there is a college strategy to raise the standards of attainment of boys.
 - the strategy is implemented effectively in all subjects.
 - the implementation of the strategy is closely monitored and the effects on the raising of standards of boys carefully evaluated.
(paragraphs: 2,3,72-73,85-86,140,155,170)
- Improve provision for personal, social and health education by ensuring that:
 - there is a broad and balanced personal, social and health education programme that includes health education, sex education and attention to drug misuse and citizenship.
 - tutors are provided with appropriate training and resources in order to be able to teach the programme effectively.
 - there is a clear understanding of the role of the personal, social and health education co-ordinator for the monitoring and evaluation of the teaching of the programme and that the allocated curriculum time is used effectively by all tutors.
(paragraphs: 13,16,30,33,54,63)
- Increase the use of the library as a resource for learning by ensuring that:
 - the use of the library is incorporated into the work of all subjects.
 - the book stock is replenished so that there are sufficient books to support teaching and learning in all subjects and that the fiction stock is adequate to support students' personal reading.
 - books are systematically organised on the library shelves.
 - there is an effective system for controlling the book stock so that losses are minimised.
 - lending is monitored so that departments can be informed how often students take out books.
 - all departments request new books to match changes in subject syllabuses and schemes of work.
(paragraphs: 7,9,68,77)
- Revise the two-week timetable in order to remove the curriculum imbalances in music, religious education, drama, physical education and personal, social and health education.
(paragraphs: 29, 137, 188, 195)
- Continue to make representations to ensure that the plans for improvement to the college accommodation are fully implemented. In particular, urgency is required in improving facilities for music and science and ensuring that toilets are maintained in an acceptable state.
(paragraphs: 66,99,116,188-189)

In addition paragraphs 67,106 (resources) and 24,161,164 (information and communications technology) include weaknesses which have not formed the basis of 'Key Issues' identified above; the school should consider including these in the governors' post-inspection action plan.

PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	216
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	46

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	30	40	28	1	0	0

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

Information about the college's students

Students on the college's roll	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the college's roll	993	253
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	45	0

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	29	2
Number of students on the college's special educational needs register	232	16

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	7

Student mobility in the last college year	No of students
Students who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	41
Students who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	48

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
College data	7.0
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	167	146	313

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	114	136	133
	Girls	113	102	101
	Total	227	238	234
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	73 (45)	76 (74)	75 (76)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	30 (7)	45 (44)	40 (25)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	94	144	142
	Girls	98	116	115
	Total	192	260	257
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	62 (66)	83 (78)	83 (66)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	17 (19)	58 (47)	44 (25)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	100	128	244

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	47	112	113
	Girls	73	126	126
	Total	120	238	239
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	49 (50)	98 (94)	98 (96)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45 (43)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	78	86	164

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	11.7	19.1	16.3	1.7	2.6	2.1
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	College	45	60
	National		82.5

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	5
Black – other	3
Indian	5
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1231
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last college year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	18	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	80.1
Number of students per qualified teacher	15.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: : Y9 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	542.5

Deployment of teachers: : Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.3
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Average teaching group size: : Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.3
Key Stage 4	21.2

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2989507
Total expenditure	2975239
Expenditure per student	2700
Balance brought forward from previous year	-37802
Balance carried forward to next year	-23534

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1246
Number of questionnaires returned	200

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	60	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	36	54	4	2	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	12	62	15	3	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	51	16	8	4
The teaching is good.	18	65	7	1	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	48	20	8	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	38	49	8	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	42	48	8	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	19	48	25	3	5
The school is well led and managed.	23	56	9	2	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	29	54	10	2	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	49	10	2	19

Other issues raised by parents

Written comments were included with 29 (14.5%) of the questionnaires returned. Parents expressed strong support for the school and satisfaction with their children's academic and social progress. A small number of parents' comments related to difficulties caused by the two-week timetable, a lack of challenge for some students and inadequacies in the accommodation.

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

ENGLISH

72. Standards in English are above average overall. When students enter the college, their attainment in English is broadly in line with national expectations. In National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2000 performance was above the national average. However, standards in English at the end of Year 9 have fluctuated historically and have been well below the average for similar schools, based on entitlement to free school meals, in two of the last four years. In the last reporting year, however, attainment at the end of Year 9 was above the national level with nearly three quarters of students achieving Level 5 or better and almost a third attaining Level 6 or better. Standards in English at this age are not as high as they are in mathematics or science. Girls attain higher standards than boys in English. The progress and achievement of students with special educational needs and the few students who speak English as an additional language are consistent with their peers.
73. Attainment in the GCSE English examination is just below the national average with about half of the students gaining grades A*-C as compared to 56 per cent nationally. This represents a decline from the 1999 figure of 59 per cent. The attainment of girls is broadly in line with the national average, but the overall percentage of A*-C grades is depressed by the boys' results, which are significantly below average. Almost twice the proportion of girls as boys achieve grades A*-C in English. A similar pattern occurs in English literature where the achievement of girls is broadly in line with the national average while that of boys is well below.
74. At GCE A level results have fluctuated over recent years. Despite a decline in 2000, attainment remains above the national average. In the last year, all students entered for A level communications studies achieved a pass grade. In A level English literature, 15 out of 16 students gained pass grades and approximately a third of candidates achieved the highest grades of A or B. In GNVQ Advanced Media Studies, all students completed the course satisfactorily and half achieved a merit or a distinction.
75. Standards of literacy are above average. The English department is in close contact with the middle schools and this ensures that there is good continuity in the development of students' literacy skills when they enter the college. One English lesson per cycle is devoted to basic skills and the English department's development plan incorporates good practice drawn from the National Literacy Strategy. Staff development initiatives have helped teachers to gain a good understanding of issues related to raising attainment in literacy. These initiatives include silent reading, a paired reading scheme and reading awards, which are used to encourage students to record their own staged reading progress as they move up the college. All Year 9 students are required to own and use a dictionary. Good examples of the development of students' literacy skills are seen in most subjects. However, insufficient use is made of the library as a resource for developing students' literacy skills.
76. Speaking and listening skills are consistent with expectations in Year 9, and rise gradually to be well above expectations in the sixth form. Students answer questions and take part in discussion enthusiastically. They do not call out, but listen to one another attentively and build on one another's contributions to discussion. The pace of teacher led question and answer sessions is usually brisk and students respond well. Follow up questions are often directed at the next volunteer, so teachers do not always push students adequately by asking for evidence or textual reference to support points made, or for better expression. Students learn when to use Standard English in more formal contexts and in Years 10 and 11, are confident in the use of technical terms; for example, in the discussion of literature or media topics. At this age the majority of students have the skills to manage their own discussion groups effectively and productively.
77. Standards of reading are consistent with expectations, overall. Examples heard in lessons ranged from above average to below. Teachers offer very good examples, but during the week of the inspection students were often not given enough opportunities to read aloud. Reading lessons are part of the Year 9 curriculum. Students are taught some research reading skills, but

the library is under-used as a learning resource area except at lunchtimes. Students are expected to read from the computer screen as well as from the printed page and have good opportunities for research reading from CD-ROMs and from the Internet in the English department's own computer suite. Good examples of Internet research were seen in sixth form work. Good work was also seen in Year 11 lessons where students were advised on how to read examination questions carefully.

78. Written work is above expectations and is generally well presented. Some students use information and communication technology skills to word-process their work. The quality of writing of most students is consistent with expectations in Year 9 and rises to be above by the end of Year 11. Written work of outstanding quality was seen from the highest attaining students in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Students with special educational needs receive effective support and make good progress with their writing. Creative writing is fluent in Year 9 and standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally good. Students are clear before they start about the aims of a piece of writing and the standards by which it will be assessed. Drafting and planning skills are taught. Students learn to write in an appropriate range of genres and styles, including Standard English for academic work. Written work is marked regularly and carefully, but corrections of spellings and expression are not always done by students and opportunities to raise standards are being missed in this area. Comments contain a good balance of praise and clear guidance about what needs to be done to improve. Marking in Year 9 is related to National Curriculum levels for major assignments. The correction and improvement of written work are more effectively dealt with Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, marking is more frequently related to examination grade criteria so that students know the standard of their work. The best-written GCSE work is well structured and argument is thoughtfully developed. At A level the marking is detailed, constructive and always related to examination criteria so that students can define their own targets to attain a higher grade.
79. The quality of teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, and satisfactory in Year 9. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject. Teaching materials produced by the department are of a high quality. Resources and lesson time are well used and lessons have a sense of purpose. Teachers manage groups of students well and their teaching methods are appropriate and effective. The best lessons include a range of activities to develop all English skills: listening and speaking, reading and writing. Good use is made of pair work and group work in which students are expected to take responsibility for their own progress and to evaluate their own achievements and those of others, but insufficient use is made of simulations, role plays and situations involving language for speculation, hypothesis and evaluation. Teachers have developed considerable sensitivity and skill to build good relationship with their students. A genuine sense of mutual respect is evident in discussions, which are well managed by teachers. Teaching in the lessons observed did not always challenge the most able students. Classes in Year 9 are mixed ability and most teaching groups in Years 10 and 11 contain a wide spread of ability. Activities for these groups were often not sufficiently varied in difficulty to raise standards by providing suitable challenges for the different levels of students' attainment. Satisfactory use is made of homework to consolidate and extend learning. There was evidence in students' written work of reading for research and of extended written home work, but during the week of the inspection, all homework tasks required the completion of tasks started in lessons.
80. Provision for students with special educational needs is good and enhanced by close liaison with the learning support department. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of this close liaison and because learning support teachers have a thorough understanding of how to meet students' needs. Many students with spelling difficulties have progressed by more than six months in one term and 58 per cent of students on the Year 9 paired reading programme have improved their reading ages by over 12 months in one term.
81. The curriculum offers equality of access to all and provides students with a wide range of learning opportunities. An increase of curriculum time in English from five lessons to six is helping to raise standards in Year 9. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 and the courses offered in the sixth form meet public examination specifications. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has been adapted in an attempt to tackle the problem of boys' underachievement; schemes of work have been amended and the calendar of activities changed. The range of course offered in the sixth form is

very good and offers good choice and good access. The range of extra-curricular activities is good for all ages and includes a debating club, a 'booster club' for Year 9, a poetry festival, a reading awards scheme, mock trials and a range of educational visits and theatre trips. Students respond well to extra-curricular opportunities and are well supported by their parents.

82. The English department is competently managed and well led. The handbook clearly sets out aims and procedures and there is a clear sense of educational direction. Resources in English are adequate and are well managed. Classrooms are attractive and grouped near an office and a small area where teachers can work together. Responsibilities are delegated well and the sense of shared enthusiasm and teamwork is a strength. The quality of teaching is monitored by the head of department through a system of paired observations. Newly qualified teachers receive excellent support from the department and from the school mentoring system. Assessment procedures are well managed for all ages and good records are maintained of students' progress, which enable teachers and students to determine academic targets. Since the last inspection, the English department has made good progress in several key areas. There is now a strong team of specialist English teachers and the subject has more curriculum time. Good contacts have been developed with feeder schools. Standards at the end of Year 9 have improved and steps are being taken to tackle the issue of boys' underachievement. New courses have been successfully introduced in the sixth form. The department has made good progress in the use of information and communication technology. Its capacity to improve further is good.

MATHEMATICS

83. Standards of attainment in the National Curriculum tests in mathematics taken at the end of Year 9 are consistently above average and have been rising steadily over the past four years. In 2000, results were above average in comparison with all schools, but below average in comparison with similar schools. These results were similar to those obtained in English, but below those obtained in science. Boys consistently achieve higher standards than girls. Comparison of standards of attainment at the start of Year 7 with the results in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 show that students' progress and achievement are good.
84. Inspection evidence indicates that the overall achievement levels of students in Year 9 are either at or above national expectations. Most mathematics lessons begin with mental arithmetic exercises, which help to develop students' numeracy skills, which are consistent with national expectations by the end of Year 9. Students in a lower attaining group, for example, could calculate the mean, median and mode for a range of numbers and were able to explain their work. In a middle attaining group, students had a good understanding of Pythagoras' theorem and were able to apply the theorem to calculate the lengths of the sides of right-angled triangles. A higher attaining group of students co-operated well in small groups and were able to apply mathematics accurately to real-life situations.
85. Results in GCSE examinations over recent years have been below the national average, with boys significantly below. In 2000, 39 per cent of students obtained A* to C compared with the national average of 47 per cent. Girls' results were below average, while boys' results were significantly below. These results represent unsatisfactory progress and achievement through Years 10 and 11. Some students opt to take statistics as an additional GCSE subject with above average results. In 2000, 84 per cent of candidates gained A* to C grades.
86. Inspection evidence indicates that the achievement levels of students presently in Years 10 and 11 are broadly in line with expectations. However, middle attaining students are not being offered sufficient challenge in some lessons and are content to work below the levels they are capable of. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson on the use of the sine rule to calculate angles or sides of a triangle, for example, where some students were keen to progress to more advanced work while others lacked urgency and were not challenged to make more rapid progress. Lower attaining students lack confidence in their numerical and algebraic skills. This was seen in another Year 11 lesson, for example, where students were unsure in their handling of numbers and had difficulty in completing simple multiplications accurately. Although there is little difference between boys and girls, in question and answer sessions in lessons, boys are less likely to complete revision exercises fully.

87. Results in the A level examination have fluctuated over recent years. In 1999, 90 per cent of candidates gained grades A to E grades but only 45 per cent did so in 2000. Although this variation reflects, to an extent, differing standards of attainment of students on entry to the course, it also reflects the lack of confidence of some students in their mathematical skills. This was seen in a Year 12 pure mathematics lesson, for example, where a lack of confidence made students reluctant to answer the teachers' questions. This was in contrast to a Year 13 statistics lesson where students who are re-taking the A level statistics paper in order to improve their grades worked confidently and competently.
88. Provision for students with special educational needs is good and enhanced by the support of learning assistants. Most students with special educational needs make good progress with their learning and achieve GCSE examination grades in the A*-G range. The support that all students with special educational needs receive in class, from both teachers and learning assistants, is a significant factor in the standards that they achieve. The mathematically more gifted students are encouraged to attend extra-curricular revision and enrichment classes offered by several teachers in the department. A good standard of literacy is expected in mathematics lessons. Key words are displayed and emphasised. The standard of English seen in coursework and investigations is generally above expectations.
89. The overall quality of teaching is good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Although much of the teaching in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form has good features, there is insufficient challenge in some lessons and there are inconsistencies in the use of homework and the marking of students' work.
90. Teachers are well qualified and have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. A variety of teaching techniques are employed, including practical work, investigations, group work and computer aided lessons in addition to formal class teaching. They share ideas about best practice with beneficial results. The pace of lessons is usually brisk and many begin with mental arithmetic or algebraic starters. Where used, these provide a stimulating start to lessons. The three or four part lesson structure provides an effective way of using the 60-minute period. In the best lessons, teachers' expectations generally high and students are provided with appropriate challenges. In these lessons teachers command the full attention of students and offer clear explanations, so that students have a good understanding of the lesson objectives. In one Year 9 lesson, for example, the teacher caught the imagination of students with a graphic description of how prisoners of war were able to use trigonometry to aid an escape plan. This led to enthusiastic group work and the competent application of trigonometry to real-life situations. However, where the teaching does not reach this standard, the level of challenge offered to middle attaining students in particular is too low and so these students are not stretched to their full potential. This lack of challenge is most likely to be observed in Years 10 and 11 and in some sixth form lessons. In the majority of lessons the attitude and behaviour of the students is very good, and a reflection of the department's encouraging ethos. There is little or no unacceptable behaviour. Occasional minor transgressions are dealt with firmly by teachers. Homework is usually set according to the college timetable but insufficient attention is given to ensuring that it is completed satisfactorily and on time. There is considerable variation in the marking of students' work. Marking overall is irregular and does not provide students with sufficiently clear information on the standard of their work and what they must do in order to improve it.
91. Students' overall standards of numeracy are consistent with national expectations in Year 9 but below in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Although the department makes provision for the development of basic numerical skills, there is no college numeracy strategy that builds on the work being done in the middle schools, and in Year 9, in a systematic way. Although students have the opportunity to develop their numeracy skills through, for example, the application of formulae in science, measurement in design and technology, estimation in art and the use of tables and graphs in geography and history, many students display a lack of confidence when faced with relatively simple calculations. In science and business studies, for example, the progress of lower attaining students is being inhibited by weak numerical skills. The department has been slow to recognise the need to develop a whole college approach to the development of this basic skill.

92. Although leadership and management in the subject have some good features, overall leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The schemes of work are comprehensive and provide teachers with a very good basis for lesson planning. Teachers in the department are provided with good support when difficulties are encountered and newly appointed teachers are provided with particularly good support. Teachers have also been encouraged to observe each other teach in order to share good practice. However, there has been insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning within the department in order to identify and share good practice in a systematic way, and to ensure that department homework and marking policies are being implemented consistently and effectively. Development planning has been insufficiently focused on strategies for raising standards, such as the development of a school numeracy strategy and the use of assessment for target setting. Insufficient use is made of information and communications technology to support students' learning. This is due to difficulties with the reinstallation of computers and with computer software. The department is tackling these problems.
93. Overall improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Although standards at the end of Year 9 have risen in line with national averages, standards at the end of Year 11 are below those noted in the previous inspection report. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning have met with a degree of success, but there is room for further improvement in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. The weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation identified at the time of the last inspection remain.

SCIENCE

94. In 2000, the results of the National Curriculum tests for students at the end of Year 9 were well above those achieved for all schools nationally and reflected significant progress in science from entry to the college. Since the last inspection in 1996 results at the end of Year 9 have closely followed trends nationally and have been consistently above national figures. It is expected that all students are entered for the double award GCSE science course. In 2000 their performance was just above average, with 49 per cent gaining an A*-C grade and almost 100 per cent passing at the A*-G grade. In the period between the last inspection and 2000, results have fluctuated slightly but have remained above national figures. Students make good progress with a significant group achieving the highest grades at GCSE and those with special educational needs also gaining a graded pass. There is, however, evidence that some students in the mid to lower range are underachieving. In 2000 the performance of girls in school was better than that for the boys reflecting results nationally. However, boys perform ahead of boys nationally and on average do better in science than in all other subjects in college. At Advanced Level in 2000, in biology, chemistry and physics all students achieved an A-E grade, which exceeded the performance of students nationally. In biology, students also performed very well at the highest grades. In chemistry, results for students gaining A and B grades were below national figures and have fluctuated in the last few years. In 2000 the number of students in physics gaining the highest grades matched national results. Overall, since the last inspection, the number of students studying sciences in the sixth form has increased and standards have remained consistent with, or above national expectations.
95. In Year 9, students cover units of work that build on biology, chemistry and physics topics already started in the contributory middle schools. For example, most students are able to recall scientific terms and understanding from earlier work on electricity and they are competent in their practical skills to demonstrate the differences between series and parallel circuits. Liaison with science colleagues in the middle schools is well established and it is contributing to the maintenance of high standards. Many students in Year 9 find theoretical scientific ideas, such as ionic bonding, difficult to understand and some students on GCSE courses also report a lack of confidence with chemistry topics. The use of more varied and relevant learning activities would give all students a chance to work out these complex ideas for themselves. All students in Year 9 carry out experimental and investigative work using a computer simulation to measure speed and they use a good software resource to obtain data and to present and process the results. Students are enthusiastic about computers but they have insufficient opportunity in science to develop data logging, spreadsheet and other presentation techniques using information

technology. In practical investigations they plan and carry out experiments skilfully and safely but they are less secure in their analysis of results and evaluation of their work. This was also true at the time of the last inspection. Teachers now need to use a problem solving approach in all practical lessons and ask students more often to predict outcomes, and to examine critically their results and the methods used. Students are capable of presenting information in tables and charts and their graphical skills are well developed. However, a whole school approach to the development of numeracy would enhance the work of students in science. In GCSE courses they use scientific vocabulary fluently and they retain facts and knowledge well from one unit to another. Frequent practice at examination questions prepares students well for GCSE helping them to make good progress and achieve well in all aspects of the course. Most students in the sixth form adjust smoothly to the greater demands of the new courses. The structure of the modular programmes, the smaller group sizes and the mature relationships that they have with each other and their teachers support them well to make good progress. They quickly start to develop more sophisticated skills, new knowledge and a deeper understanding of scientific concepts.

96. Students who are identified as having special educational needs make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Strong and direct teaching provides them with a sound framework for learning. The individual education plans are practicable and are well applied by the learning support assistants who know students well and know how to improve the quality of their work. Further developments are needed to ensure that science teachers plan and prepare paper resources and other activities to support more directly the literacy skills of these students.
97. Students come to lessons with a positive attitude and this affects the standards of work achieved. In class they are expected to be attentive, to settle to tasks quickly and to concentrate on their work. Inappropriate behaviour is checked and generally dealt with firmly and sensitively. They are good listeners responding well to what teachers say and carrying out instructions carefully. Most students are confident to ask and answer questions in class and to talk informally about their work with peers and teachers. However, they would benefit from more opportunity to share and debate ideas in group work and to practise extended and more formal presentations with the whole class. Examples of good practice were seen where students worked enthusiastically and seriously with each other to explain and argue new ideas in biology. A wider use of these types of activities would promote students to develop further their understanding of science and to polish their communication skills. Some students do not keep clear and up to date records of their work. Their notebooks are untidy and unattractive and this has an effect on their commitment to revise work for tests and examinations. The good use of revision guides partly addresses this issue but support for the development of note taking and other study skills would benefit students who have limited writing skills.
98. Overall, the quality of teaching is good throughout the college. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and confident about their subject and they plan their lessons to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses and specifications. They start lessons by checking and reinforcing prior learning and by setting out clear learning outcomes. They keep students working at a brisk pace moving them on from one task to the next and allocating sufficient time to summarise what has been achieved at the end. Teachers are skilled in giving instructions, carrying out demonstrations and in explaining facts and more complicated topics. In the best lessons teachers also use questions to challenge students' ideas and to develop their thinking skills. Practical work is not always efficiently organised particularly at the beginning of lessons when students are asked to collect the necessary equipment from trolleys brought in from the preparation room. This slows down the transition into the activity and can contribute to unsafe laboratory procedures. The department is trialling a new approach to marking students' work. Books are checked regularly and corrections are made but good practice in target setting for students' future work is not yet well established. Apart from end of topic tests and the marking of science investigations, teachers are not sharing assessment criteria with students to assess a wider range of their work in science. This is preventing them from building up a complete profile of the capability of each student. At present, although achievement targets are set for student performance in national tests and GCSE examinations, the guidance provided by teachers on what to do and how to improve is less well developed. The paired teaching arrangement through the school has benefits for staff and students and contributes significantly to the standards achieved. There are examples of very good teaching in the department. The current

development to monitor and evaluate teaching needs to continue so that good practice can be shared and all teachers can have a chance to extend their repertoire of teaching methods.

99. The leadership of the department is very good with well-documented systems in place to ensure that administration runs smoothly, that all teachers are involved in the planning and implementation of initiatives, and that financial management is efficient and effective. Teachers are skilled in the analysis of data related to achievement of students in external tests and examinations at each stage throughout the school. Comparisons are made against national benchmarks and the outcomes are used not only to help students achieve their potential but also to evaluate and develop teaching performance and curriculum organisation. This is a real strength of the department. Laboratory accommodation is old and inconvenient but it is well managed by staff to limit the adverse effect it could have on standards. New provision for science is planned for the near future. The quality and provision of resources are adequate and all students have their own textbook for homework and personal study. Access to sufficient and appropriate computer hardware and software is not adequate and this deficit needs to be a specific focus for development so that all students benefit fully from the use of information technology in science. There have been new science teachers appointed recently. This provides opportunity for the establishment of a cohesive team of experienced and younger staff who can share expertise, keep up to date and work to maintain the high achievement of all students.

ART AND DESIGN

100. At the end of Year 9 students' work is above average. Good drawing is evident in projects based upon art historical studies; for example, the work of Gaudi in architecture. Students show good skills in composition and in the use of light and shade. The range of these drawings is a measure of the extent to which students are confident in the expression of their own ideas. There is interesting work in design, employing paper mosaic in large-scale and colourful work. Although the use of colour is lively, students in many cases are not able to apply colour theory knowledgeably, relying more on intuition. Despite this, work in colour is vivid and expressive. Attainment in projects in which students work collectively is good. In these projects, which include a large-scale totem pole, for example, students from all levels of prior attainment, including students with special educational needs, achieve well. There is some evidence of the use of computers and there are some resource limitations in this area. Printmaking, however, reaches a good standard. Students are able to use a range of materials, string and card, for example, to make effective printing blocks and produce imaginative prints. Literacy is emphasised in relation to subject terms in lesson discussion.
101. At the end of Year 11 in work observed, students attain standards in general at around the national average. In GCSE examinations, however, students gained 48 per cent A*-C against the national average of 64 per cent in the most recent year. This marks a significant drop from the previous year and coincides with prolonged staff absence due to illness. Printmaking is a major strength and is displayed around the school to good effect. Colour is studied systematically in this work and is explored as a means of creating a mood in art. Students also show skills in construction when designing and making a mask using papier-mâché. The printing produced at this stage is of high quality. Colourful monoprints strongly composed are clearly printed with good control of technique. The planning of projects provides for success at a wide range of levels and students are able to produce work at a level appropriate to their prior attainment. Students with special educational needs achieve well for the same reasons. Progress in the use of computers is, again, limited by a comparative lack of resources. Literacy is enhanced by the use of daily word lists and the discussion of terms as they arise.
102. Students in the sixth form show maturity together in creative self-confidence. They attain results around the national average in A level examinations. In the last two years, all students entered passed. In their work students are capable of strongly expressive composition and painting underpinned by good quality drawing. Art historical material is used effectively as a source for personal development; the work of Francis Bacon, for example, gave rise to some strong portrait painting. Students achieve well in developing their creative potential in personal ways. They are able to make progress independently whilst being receptive to help and advice from their teachers.

103. Teaching is good in Years 9 to 11 and satisfactory in the sixth form. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed and much teaching was very good. Students' progress and achievement generally reflects the quality of teaching, but in the last school year was affected by the staff absence due to illness. Strengths in teaching derive from the good planning of projects, to cater for a wide attainment range, and sensitive individual tuition and encouragement. Teacher student relationships are very good and lead to a pleasant working atmosphere in classrooms. The aims of lessons are explained clearly at the outset and pursued with good pace, which is reflected in the pace of learning. Resources are sparse but are used well. Wall displays, for example, provide a stimulating environment and a learning resource showing ways in which ideas are developed. Classroom management is good and there are few instances of unacceptable behaviour in lessons.
104. Assessment procedures are thorough and provide for both the continuous assessment of students' work and for summative assessments in line with college policy. Good use is made of assessment in lessons and involves students in the assessment of their own work. Tentative levels have been devised for the assessment of work in Year 9, but these do not conform directly to National Curriculum attainment targets
105. Students' attitudes are good. The level of interest and enjoyment is high with good concentration, which is sustained throughout the 60-minute lessons. Behaviour is good and very good in the sixth form. Materials are handled with care and respect and the working environment is pleasant and productive.
106. The curriculum in Year 9 is broad and varied with projects covering creative work in two and three dimensions. National Curriculum Programmes of Study are covered adequately and the time allocation for the subject is satisfactory. Art history is linked with creative work. In Years 10 and 11, the GCSE syllabus forms the basis of the curriculum and builds on the broad nature of the curriculum in Year 9. Students are able to place emphasis on a chosen area of study whilst pursuing a general curriculum. As at the earlier stage, art history is interwoven with practical creative work in projects. The A level and A/S level syllabuses provide for continuing development of personal interest in either two or three-dimensional work. As reported at the time of the last inspection, students' critical skills are particularly well developed. The generally good quality of teaching noted at the same time has also been sustained and accommodation has been improved to ease the very cramped conditions in some classes, noted in the previous inspection report. There is, however, a sparse supply of resources for learning. This is very evident in the area of computers, where equipment is old. The department is well managed by a committed head of department. Relationships within the department are good and objectives for development are shared. Displays are effectively organised both within the department and around the school. A strong feature of the management of the department is the organisation of trips to galleries, both in London and abroad. Students have visited America staying in Washington and New York and studying in art galleries, including the Gulbenkian Museum. The organisation of these visits is possible due to the very high commitment of the head of department who arranges all details personally.

BUSINESS STUDIES

107. Results in business studies are above average and have risen since the last inspection. In the 2000 GCSE examination, the percentage of students obtaining A*-C grades was above the national average. The percentage of girls achieving A*-C grades was also above average, while boys were about average. In the sixth form, GNVQ passes compare favourably with national averages. Results at A level have been consistently high. In 2000, 81 per cent of candidates obtained A-C grades. All of the current Year 12 students have taken the first test in the new A/S level course and achieved a 100 per cent pass rate.
108. Inspection evidence shows that students make good progress and achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. In Years 10 and 11, students are developing their understanding and use of business principles. In one lesson, for example, students expressed some good ideas based on business principles in a role playing exercise related to green issues. Another group worked on

final accounts and showed good understanding of the principles involved including gross and net profit. Students show an understanding of break-even concepts and the difference between fixed and variable costs. However, the weak numeracy skills of many students slowed progress in lessons where these needed to be applied. Teachers are aware of the problem and provide assistance to enable the students to arrive at the correct answers. Students are aware of their target GCSE grades and the marking of their work in relation to final GCSE grades helps many students to exceed their targets.

109. GNVQ students are encouraged to engage in independent study whilst in the classroom environment and the good standard of work in students' portfolios is evidence of the learning and progress being made. Students' information and communications technology skills are good and well used in the presentation of their work. Teachers are encouraging and work is well matched to the attainment levels of students. This helps all students to achieve appropriate standards. Whilst the levels of application of GNVQ students to the course varies, their progress is being monitored and the indications are that all will complete the programme successfully this year.
110. Work on A level courses is well structured and provides students with good support. Students are able to apply business principles in a variety of contexts. The lessons allow more elements of individual and group work including presentations and discussions as well as the application of theories to case study work. All of these are done well and reflect the very good progress and achievement that students are making.
111. Both the GCSE and GNVQ groups contain students with special educational needs. They are well known to their teachers who are aware of their needs and the type of support required. These students are well integrated into their teaching groups and well supported by teachers. In one GNVQ lesson, for example, one student with special educational needs was able to obtain some relevant information from the Internet for the group for the benefit of the class as a whole. Where provided, in class support from learning support assistants is effective and visibly increases the confidence of students being supported.
112. Students' behaviour and their attitudes to the subject are very good. They participate with enthusiasm and work well in pairs and small groups. Students settle quickly into classes, are keen to contribute to questioning and to volunteer information. Only one instance of unsatisfactory behaviour was seen during the inspection.
113. Teaching in business studies is never less than satisfactory and mostly good, and sometimes very good. GCSE classes contain students of mixed attainment levels who are provided with the support needed for all students to work to the best of their ability. Lessons are well planned and lesson objectives are made clear at the start of lessons and reviewed at the end. Classroom management is good. Attention is given to improving students' numerical skills, which are weak. For example one lesson had to include the teaching of percentages when some students had difficulty in calculating 53 per cent of a given amount. Students have developed good information and communications technology skills and these skills are used as an integral part of GCSE and GNVQ lessons. A particularly good feature of the use of information and communications technology is the placing of exercises on the network for student access. However, in one lesson the tasks were too involved and slowed the pace of the lesson. The quality of lesson handouts is good and the overhead projector is used to good effect. Lessons are well planned to develop in logical sequence, include a variety of learning activities and proceed at a good pace. Sixth form students respond particularly well to the teaching methods used. They are able to analyse complex problems and apply business theories to their solution. Oral skills are well developed through group work, class presentations and question and answer sessions in lessons.
114. Homework is set regularly and monitored by the head of department. Workbooks and homework are regularly marked according to the department policy and returned quickly to students. They are aware of their progress, particularly in respect of their projected grades at in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Some examples of A level work were poorly presented and contained grammatical and spelling errors, which had not been corrected. However, the grades awarded reflected accurately the standard achieved.
115. The subject is strongly led by the head of department who has clear ideas about its development. There is appropriate delegation of responsibilities and teachers work well together. They willingly

share teaching materials and other resources. Schemes of work are detailed and where a course is shared the division is clearly stated. The budget is well managed by the head of department and records of spending are maintained. Additional funding for new and changed syllabuses has been used to provide new textbooks and other materials.

116. The department has made a positive response to the previous inspection report and teaching and standards have improved. External analyses show considerable value-added both at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. Several recent staffing changes in the department have been accommodated smoothly with no adverse effect on teaching and learning. All teachers either hold business qualifications or have appropriate business experience, which enables them to cope well with the teaching requirements. All new teachers have allocated mentors to assist in their integration to the college. Accommodation is adequate but teaching rooms are not close together, which necessitates much movement by teachers as well as requiring them to carry books and equipment to classes. Resources to support teaching are satisfactory. The ability to access the Internet on the school's network has proved to be very helpful for GNVQ research. The department has many strengths and business studies is a strong subject in the college. It is taken by a large number of students who are well taught. This enables them to make good progress and achieve good standards.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

117. Overall standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are above average, although there is variation across the range of subject activities. In designing and making projects students achieve above average standards and demonstrate competence in a range of processes and skills. The designing and making of a picture frame, for example, incorporates cutting and shaping resistant materials and the use of information and communications technology. The project also requires the exercise of design and graphic skills and these together are evident in the finished products. Good graphics skills are also evident in well-presented aspects of orthographic projections to which colour is applied effectively. Numerical skills are used effectively to ensure accurate measurement. Good work was also evident in the completion of the final design for a watch package. This was highly imaginative and good use was made of computer skills in printing, logo and lettering. Students are able to make effective use of computers in design, incorporating clipart and making use of word art. They are also able to save, load and print efficiently.
118. In food technology, good food preparation skills were evident in the making of a Swiss roll. Some of the finished products were of a high standard and had a truly professional character. In another project students showed skill in making cakes by different methods and researching associated theoretical material. Comparatively less use is made of computers in food technology due to resource limitations. Literacy is addressed by the display of a subject vocabulary list and by the discussion of terms as they arise. Numerical skills are enhanced by measurement, use of space in projections and by calculations in food technology. Students' progress and achievement by the end of Year 9 are good relative to standards of attainment on entry to the college. Projects are structured well to provide all students with opportunities for success at different levels and, because of this, students with special educational needs achieve well.
119. Overall results in the 2000 GCSE examination were about the same as the national average, with both girls and boys gaining similar results. Work in graphics is well presented. Students have good drawing skills and these are evident in well-developed project folios. A comparative weakness in this area is lettering, where students are often too ambitious in attempting to design their own lettering before first acquiring knowledge and skills in spacing and proportion in basic lettering. In health and social care, students display a lively interest in, and awareness of, current practice in the community. In child development, students prepare their projects well in practical terms, selecting their subject for study and making arrangements for observations. There are, however, weaknesses in students' understanding and use of theories of child development, and there is a tendency for students to form views on the basis of relatively thin background reading.
120. Overall results in the A level design examination are good. In 2000, all candidates obtained pass grades. Results on the GNVQ Advanced health and social care course were also good with the majority of students completing their courses satisfactorily. However a significant proportion of

students failed to complete the Intermediate health and social care course. The progress of students presently taking the GNVQ courses is being closely monitored and the indications are that the completion rate will be much higher.

121. Inspection evidence shows that students' skills in practical work and research are of a good standard. Ambitious large-scale work as, for example, in the making of garden furniture, is undertaken confidently in resistant materials, and in food technology quite advanced tasks are tackled with confidence; the preparation of diabetic diets, for example, which required a good knowledge of both the medical condition and its treatment. The response of students to the challenges presented is good at all levels and students show that they are capable of working without close supervision from the teacher. There is a sense of purposeful involvement in most lessons with a good level of interest. In food technology, students work on practical tasks with due care and respect for hygiene. They also show a capacity for independent research in their GNVQ and A level work.
122. Students' attitudes towards design and technology are good. They show respect for their teachers and awareness of the needs of others. Students enjoy the subject, persevere and take much pride in their work. The working atmosphere is often good as students work individually and in small groups. They have a sense of commitment and a good understanding of the need to behave correctly and to handle tools and other equipment with care. In workshops, students show confidence in using lathes and other machinery.
123. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, and comparisons of standards of attainment on entry with standards achieved in external examinations show that students' progress and achievement are good. Expectations are high and the majority of lessons seen were good or better. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. This was due to a lack of teacher direction and intervention in a GNVQ health and social care lesson. Teachers are well qualified in their specialist teaching areas. Good use is made of their subject knowledge in lesson planning and this leads to purposeful learning and good pace in most lessons. Teaching areas are well organised and effective use is made of resources to support students' learning. Sensible account is taken of hygiene and health and safety matters and the need to work safely at all times is instilled in students.
124. Classroom management and relationships between teachers and students are good. The good humour and mutual respect that are evident in lessons leads to confident student behaviour. This provides a very good foundation for students' achievements. Assessment is used effectively to support students' progress in lessons. In both major strands of the subject, technology and food, teachers use their subject expertise sensitively to provide individual guidance during ongoing work. The nature of this individual support and guidance helps to ensure that students of differing levels of attainment make good progress in lessons.
125. A feature of the teaching reported at the time of the last inspection was that too high a proportion of tasks left little opportunity for student choice or initiative. Although this is not a conspicuous feature of teaching now there is an underlying issue that leads to a certain amount of over-direction in teaching, particularly in Years 9 and 10. This is due to the different levels of experience of design and technology that students from different middle schools have on entry to the college. The feeder middle schools do not have an equal provision of specialist design and technology teaching areas and so students enter the college with different skill levels, particular in design and making. This makes it necessary to teach basic design and making skills in Year 9 in order to ensure that all students have a secure skill foundation. The need to teach these skills does have an adverse impact on impact on students' progress and achievement in Year 9 and in the GCSE courses. A further limitation is the level of resources, funding for which is comparatively low.
126. The curriculum in Year 9 meets National Curriculum requirements. There is a range of designing and making activities, including graphics, electronics and resistant materials, together with food technology. Computers are widely used and introduced where appropriate in projects. The GCSE course options reflect the curriculum studied in Year 9 in graphics, resistant materials and food technology. A level and sixth form GNVQ courses allow for continuous progression from Year 9 to Year 13. In technology, designing and making projects cover universal principles which are all

inclusive, whilst in food technology students are offered experience of the traditions of a range of other cultures. There is still, however, a lack of textiles as noted in the last report.

127. The design and technology areas are well managed by energetic heads of design technology and home economics. Work in design and technology is well supported by a very capable full time technician. Relationships within the department are very good between experienced well-qualified teachers with shared aims.

DRAMA

128. Standards of attainment are above average at the end of Year 9, and well above average at the ends of Year 11 and Year 13.
129. By the end of Year 9, students achieve above expectations and make good progress. Students improvise short scenes effectively, creating a strong atmosphere. They have good observational skills. Their use of gesture and exaggerated facial expressions indicate they have a good understanding of the term 'physical theatre'. They are accustomed to evaluating their work and are able to do this sensibly and naturally. Teamwork is very good. Students with special educational needs participate fully and make the same good progress as the class.
130. The percentage of students achieving the highest GCSE A* - A grades in drama was well above average in 1999 and 2000. In 2000, approximately half the girls and about a quarter of the boys obtained A* - A grades. Eighty six per cent of candidates achieved grades A* - C in 2000. All students obtained a grade in the A* - G range in 2000. Students achieve better results in drama than in their other subjects. Girls do better than boys, reflecting the national picture. The percentage of students achieving A* - C grades in dance was below average. Students did not obtain grades as high as those in their other subjects. However, all students attained a grade in the A* - G range. In 2000, the proportion of A* - C grades theatre studies improved to be above average. All students obtained a grade in the A* - G range.
131. Inspection evidence shows that by the end of Year 11 standards in drama are well above expectations and that students are making very good progress. Building on skills learnt earlier, students use a range of techniques. They understand the effectiveness of 'freeze', multi-role play, and the importance of timing. They perform well in practical work, but they are also able to explain what they are doing and the impact they hope it will have on the audience. Almost all are able to evaluate the effectiveness of the performance, both their own and other members of the class. Specialist vocabulary is understood and used accurately. Teamwork is a strong feature. Students with special educational needs make very good progress.
132. Students studying dance reach above average expectations and make very good progress. They have good control in movement and work well to rhythm. They understand and use dance terminology well.
133. In 2000, the proportion of A - B grades in A level Theatre Studies improved and is now above average. All students obtained a grade in the A - E range. Students studying dance are in the first year of the A-level course. By the end of Year 13, drama students appreciate theatre in a much wider context and are able to place playwrights such as Oscar Wilde, Sam Shepherd and Berthold Brecht in context. They understand the significance of innovators such as Brecht. Students are confident and effective when performing. They express themselves readily and fluently in speech and in writing.
134. Year 12 dance students reach above average expectations in their ability to identify motif and demonstrate its development. Their progress is very good. In both drama and dance, students with special educational needs make very good progress.
135. The overall quality of teaching in both drama and dance is good and most is very good or excellent. Learning follows a similar pattern. All teachers have very good subject knowledge that, above all, inspires students. They want to share these interests and skills. Through questioning and demonstrations, students learn to exploit the full meaning of the dialogue. When practising a

scene from 'The Long, the Short and the Tall', students explain how confrontation is conveyed through gestures and movement as well as the language used. Teachers share the objectives of a lesson so that at the end of a Year 9 lesson, students understood that one of the purposes of physical theatre is to use the imagination to the fullest extent. There is constant evaluation and this ensures students are aware of their own and the group's progress. Teachers use pair and group work most effectively, so students in all years collaborate fully. This often supports students with special educational needs to reach higher standards of attainment. On occasion, planned opportunities enabled gifted and talented students to direct or demonstrate activities. Understanding of specialist vocabulary is incorporated into all lessons. In dance lessons terminology was most effectively taught and students' understanding reinforced by constant reference. Teachers know their students well and give extra support, quite unobtrusively, to students with special educational needs. Students understand that rehearsals and coursework are 'homework' and they respond to teachers who give generously of their time. Written work is carefully marked and ways to improve explained.

136. Students enjoy drama and dance lessons. They behave very well, and even in Year 9 when most students are being introduced to the subject, there is little talk unrelated to the lesson. In discussion, they listen to one another's ideas and consider them carefully. Good independent learning skills develop well because they evaluate their work, function within a team, and are able to take the initiative, for example, by choosing how they will present an idea.
137. The head of the performing arts faculty has a very clear educational vision and is well supported by a specialist and committed staff. Classes in Years 9 and 11 are sometimes unevenly distributed in the two-week timetable, which affects continuity of learning. The faculty maintains a very strong programme of extra-curricular activities which includes major school productions, performances by different years and in middle schools and in towns in England and abroad
138. At the time of the last inspection, standards in examinations, in lessons, and in teaching and learning were high. They have been maintained and in 2000, standards in A level drama improved. To raise standards further in drama, Year 10 is benefiting from classes specifically devoted to theory and higher attaining students have the opportunity to attend regular master classes.

GEOGRAPHY

139. When students join the college at the beginning of Year 9, their attainment in geography is below the national expectation. During Year 9 they make satisfactory progress. At the end of the year, standards remain below the national average. There is no difference in standards between boys and girls.
140. In Years 10 and 11, geography is offered as a GCSE option. Over the past two years about 30 per cent of the students have continued to study the subject, a proportion below the national trend. The majority of students make good progress and by the end of Year 11, standards are close to the national average. In 2000 the proportion of girls achieving higher grades at GCSE was above that for all girls nationally. The achievement of boys at higher grades was below the national average for boys. Girls at the college performed much better than the boys. Both boys and girls performed less well in geography than in some of their other subjects.
141. At A level, students have achieved good pass rates during the past two years. In 1999 all candidates gained a pass, of which most were at the higher B-C grades. In 2000 all entries achieved a pass, but with a smaller proportion at the higher grades.
142. Achievement increases as students progress through the college. Initially in Year 9 a significant proportion of both boys and girls have not yet acquired the range of geographical skills, knowledge and understanding that would be expected. For example, in a Year 9 class studying population migration using a case study based on the United States, the students responded well to the excellent teaching and demonstrated a very good grasp of the issues. In another group looking at the same topic learning was satisfactory but not as good, because the teaching has not taken into account the gaps in students' prior learning and the strategies used did not ensure that all students were appropriately challenged throughout the sixty minutes of the lesson.

143. In Years 10 and 11, students become increasingly capable of using a wider range of information. As part of the GCSE course students examine differences in levels of economic development in contrasting regions of the world. They apply their understanding to a case study of Brazil and effectively use statistics, maps, visual material and research from books and the internet to produce reasoned answers. This growing confidence and independence is extended further through the course work and fieldwork required for the GCSE examination. Students in the sixth form study the impact of pollution on coastal environments and demonstrate high levels of co-operation and very good decision making skills.
144. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and where additional support is provided in lessons, it is effectively used and progress is good. A regular feature in many of the lessons is the way in which the college strategy for improving literacy is supported through the emphasis on key words. Opportunities are taken for students to develop communication skills through reading, writing and oral work.
145. Standards of behaviour in lessons are generally good. Students arrive on time for lessons, they are prepared for work and co-operate well with their teachers. Relationships are very good and often students work with interest and growing maturity. There are well-established routines that support good classroom management and students show respect for others and for property. On a small number of occasions when the lesson activities are insufficiently varied or less well matched to the wide range of students' individual learning needs, levels of concentration and productivity decline. While this does not necessarily lead to unwanted behaviour it reduces the pace and quality of the learning.
146. Teaching is generally good, often very good and on one occasion excellent. As a consequence of the good teaching most students make good progress and achieve good standards relative to standards of attainment on entry to the college. However, overall standards are affected by the disproportionate number of boys who opt for the subject and whose overall performance is below that of girls. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Schemes of work and sequences of lessons are carefully planned and appropriately resourced. Expectations are high and work is marked regularly and feedback is given so that students understand how to improve the standard of their work. In the strongest lessons where the teaching is of the highest quality a range of resources and activities is used and because of the very good match to the students' learning needs there is pace, challenge and frequent opportunities for students to participate. Where the teaching is sometimes less effective, but still satisfactory, it is because the good subject knowledge and understanding of the students' needs does not consistently and effectively incorporate the full range of classroom strategies.
147. The head of department provides clear direction for the subject and there has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. There is very good support for whole school policies and improvement priorities. This is reflected in the department's planning and documentation and is evident in the teaching and learning observed in lessons. Members of the department work well together. They share ideas and expertise and there is commitment to raising standards. The department has already identified the need to review arrangements for assessment at the end of Year 9 and has an appropriate plan of action to extend the use of information and communications technology into the work in geography. Resources for learning and the accommodation are efficiently and effectively used and there are plans to broaden the opportunities for practical work and fieldwork. This is a department with many strengths and the capacity to improve further.

HISTORY

148. Teachers' assessments show the standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 in 2000, to be above the national average. Inspection evidence also shows standards by the end of Year 9 to be above national expectations.
149. Students have generally secure recall of the history they study and use their knowledge and understanding to explain and exemplify their opinions. They develop a good range of historical skills. For example, students understand that events have both causes and effects and these can be both short and long term. When studying the complex reasons underlying the terms of the

Treaty of Versailles, most students were able to understand and compare a range of reasons. Students studying a number of significant periods and events in the twentieth century have good understanding of the order in which they occurred and have constructed very effective "time lines" to illustrate this. Most students show developing perception of the significance and reliability of historical source material. The work of nearly all students is accurately written and well presented and all students use a very effective range of methods of recording their knowledge and understanding, including both more formal extended writing and clear diagrams.

150. The percentage of students attaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examination taken at the end of Year 11 in 2000 was above the national average. The percentage of students attaining A*-A grades was also slightly above the national average. All students entered for the history examination attained at least a grade G. In general, students attain better results in history than they do in their other subjects. There has been a steady improvement over the past four years in the percentage of students attaining the higher grades. The attainment of girls at GCSE is higher than that of boys and this difference is greater than that found nationally. Standards based on evidence seen during the course of the inspection are also above what is seen nationally.
151. Students have good understanding of a wide range of historical facts, situations and personalities and are able to use their knowledge and understanding to form opinions and evaluations of the periods and topics they study. Their recall of this is appropriately accurate and all students understand the importance of revising their work carefully in preparation for their examinations. They show clear understanding of the significance of the historical sources they use and appreciate that sources should be judged on the basis of their provenance and accuracy. Most students show mature understanding of the intended effect and significance of demanding cartoons. Students use a wide range of methods of recording their knowledge and understanding; for example when evaluating the importance of Louis Pasteur they used spider diagrams, charts and 'mind-maps' in order to make the topic clear and easily assimilated. Most students make good use of detailed note making and planning skills when preparing written assignments, although lower attaining students find it very difficult to include sufficient detail in their work.
152. The percentage of students attaining A - B grades at A level in 2000 was below the national average, although the number of students taking the subject that year was too small to make accurate statistical comparisons. All students attained a pass grade, which is better than is seen nationally. In 1999, when the number of students entered for history was much higher, the percentage of students attaining the two top grades was above average. Attainment based on evidence seen during the course of the inspection is in line with what is seen nationally.
153. Most students have a clear understanding and developing recall of the facts and situations which they study, although some students are not able to remember sufficient detail to enable them to produce convincing, full answers without reference to a range of source material. In such cases, the understanding of students outstrips their ability to illustrate and justify their ideas by the use of a range of facts. Most students have developed comprehensive notes, annotated information sheets, outline plans and diagrammatic information to enable them to produce appropriately detailed written assignments, although the few students whose preparatory work has been less comprehensive find it difficult to include sufficient detail in their answers. A strength of history in the sixth form is that students regularly refer to the ideas and opinions of a number of well-known historians and their written work shows evidence of considerable reading around the subject, although lower attaining students find it more difficult to compare and contrast differing viewpoints. Students make good use of opportunities to discuss their opinions in both informal and more formal debate and also use their own knowledge and understanding to offer positive criticisms of the work of fellow students.
154. There has been an improvement in standards over those reported after the previous inspection, when some students at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 were reported to exceed the national standards and A level students were judged to generally meet national expectations.
155. The attitude to history of students of all ages is good. They listen carefully to their teachers and to each other, offering support to those experiencing difficulty. They work hard, showing good levels of concentration and settle to work quickly in order to ensure that they complete their tasks in the time allowed. Students make good use of the opportunity to work in groups and pairs in

order to evaluate and extend their knowledge and understanding and co-operate well with each other. Nearly all students take care to present their work neatly. There are a small number of students in Year 9, mainly boys, whose boisterous and inconsiderate behaviour serves as a distraction to others in the class.

156. All teaching seen during the course of the inspection was at least satisfactory and the teaching of the full-time, permanent members of the department was consistently good. The planning of lessons is sound, with clear objectives for learning in each lesson. Teachers plan a wide range of activities and opportunities for students to work in a number of groupings such as pairs, small group and whole class as well as individually. Students respond well to these opportunities by working hard and maintaining good levels of concentration. Teachers have high expectations of their students, expecting them to think hard without being spoon-fed with ideas and students respond positively to these expectations, forming and justifying their own ideas. All teachers make good use of discussion and questioning to both check what students have understood and to prompt them to think hard in order to extend knowledge and understanding. There is a thorough programme of revision at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13, which is followed assiduously by all teachers and does much to promote recall and address uncertainties. Sixth form students revising the role played by Alexander II responded to a skilfully led discussion by making good progress in recalling and reinforcing their prior learning on the topic. In order to get through a heavy volume of planned work, teachers set a brisk pace and students respond by settling to work quickly and maintaining their level of concentration. Teachers have put thought into the styles of learning that will promote the progress of boys and consciously plan to present information in a variety of formats most suited to the topic; for example, spider diagrams, mind-maps and charts. Teachers make effective use of resources and some of these have been adapted to make them accessible to students across the attainment range. This represents improvement on the high teaching standards mentioned in the previous inspection report, in that a higher proportion of the teaching has been judged to be good.
157. The department is well led and managed, with an emphasis on the continued raising of standards of students at all attainment levels. There is a very thorough scheme of work, which ensures that topics are covered in appropriate detail and at a good pace. There are a number of departmental initiatives designed to raise the standards of students who are seen to be underachieving; for example, a history 'catch-up' club and a policy of detentions for students who need additional support in order to make the progress of which they are capable. There are good procedures in place for the assessment of work, including student self-assessment negotiated with their teachers. Thorough records are kept of the attainment levels of individual students as they progress through the school and these are used to measure and predict their progress. Less use is made of comparison with national assessment information. Good use is made of the setting of targets by the students themselves and this is developing well, although some of the targets currently set are unrealistic or imprecise. During the inspection week there were a number of temporary teachers working in the department and these were provided with high quality systems and support to enable them to make a valuable contribution. Through good management and thoughtful planning the adverse effects of unavoidable staff absence was kept to an absolute minimum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

158. Students' attainment in information and communication technology is average at the end of Year 9, when they are aged fourteen, and again at the end of Year 11 when they are sixteen. In the sixth form Advanced Level classes, however, attainment is below average, as reflected in results achieved in the year 2000 examinations.
159. Standards in Year 9 classes, where information and communication technology is taught well as a distinct subject, are in line with national expectations overall. This represents good progress in a relatively short time since attainment on entry to the college is very variable and often below national averages. Whilst most strands of the programme of study are well covered within the distinct lessons, other aspects are adequately catered for in subjects such as science and design technology. Most Year 9 students are confident and competent users of an appropriate range of software applications. They work well with the 'Windows' operating system, cutting and pasting

between various applications, using formulae, graphs and sorting information in spreadsheets, and they successfully redraft their commentaries and reports effectively using word-processing. During lessons students maturely consider the effects of information and communication technology on society, and on occasions they exhibit considerable depth of understanding in this field. In a very good lesson, where students were designing and creating a control system, they considered the advantages and disadvantages of manual and automatic schemes. From their in-depth comments and debates it was apparent that they had a good understanding of what they were doing, and they recorded their findings well, using information and communication technology to good effect. In most lessons students' literacy skills are enhanced through regular and correct use of spell checkers, along with good guidance from teachers about grammar, punctuation and correct methods of presentation.

160. Because teachers plan very well to cater for the needs of all students, making extension material available for the above average, arranging suitably challenging tasks for those below average and assessing achievement in every lesson, progress throughout Year 9 is good. Pupils with special educational needs, through well organised individual education plans and subject specific detailed expectations for every lesson, along with good learning assistant support, often make very good progress.
161. In Years 10 and 11, although there is no GCSE course in information and communication technology available to students, they have several opportunities to use a good range of hardware and software through the effective GNVQ part 1 course and in a satisfactory range of other subjects. This represents good progress since the time of the previous inspection, when cross-curricular use was unsatisfactory overall. The college is not complacent about this progress and it plans to extend the use of information and communication technology further through the curriculum by funding new equipment and staff training. Most noteworthy amongst the subjects using information and communication technology facilities are English and geography. Both subjects have planned well for including such aspects of learning within their schemes of work so that students not only enhance their learning within the subjects but also make progress in the use of modern technology.
162. In Year 10 students within the newly introduced GNVQ part 1 course make good progress. They work very well within lessons willingly and enthusiastically undertaking tasks designed to challenge them fully. A good example occurred during the inspection when students were planning and designing ways of storing, presenting and interrogating particular information about cars. They carefully considered which data was necessary and how best to present it, and this was done without relying upon their teacher for guidance at every step. When questioned students expressed their appreciation of the course, valuing the opportunities it gave them to work independently, and they were well aware of what was required of them and how to achieve success.
163. In the sixth form, standards achieved within the Year 12 Key Skills course are good. Students independently make full use of a good range of information sources to prepare personal action plans for their future careers. Using their teachers as mentors they apply previously acquired information and communication technology skills effectively, taking advantage of what is available on the Internet, on CD-ROMs and in written form to prepare well organised and well presented documents.
164. In the sixth form computing courses, mainly because students have not previously pursued a computing related rigorous GCSE course, standards are below average. Many students' prior attainment precludes them from making sufficient progress to achieve good grades in external examinations. Whilst they try hard to cope with programming aspects and testing strategies, many students' levels of understanding are barely satisfactory and hence progress is made at a slow pace.
165. Indicative of the fact that generally students feel confident about using information and communication technology in their work is the number of them who take advantage of the college's facilities within the network rooms and the library. Every day the network rooms are open to students before school, at lunchtimes and after school for independent study, and they

are well used. At all times students treat the facilities with respect; they value them and there are very few instances of inappropriate behaviour.

166. Teaching within information and communication technology lessons is good. Subject knowledge, high expectations, good planning, and an awareness of individual students' strengths and weaknesses provide a sure foundation for good lessons. Activities in most lessons are designed to use the sixty minutes available to best effect, providing opportunities for students to make good progress. Revision questions at the beginning of lessons engage students well and ensure that they participate. Following on, teachers ask searching questions that make the students think and thus improve their understanding before setting them tasks to improve their skills and to consolidate their knowledge. Throughout lessons teachers' own enthusiasm for the subject does much to help students enjoy their work.
167. In almost every information and communication technology lesson students' attitudes and behaviour are good. They generally organise themselves and their work well, quickly accessing software and relevant files. Not only do they respond well to teachers' questions, many of them ask searching questions themselves to confirm understanding. This is good learning. Also in lessons many students willingly help classmates or engage in meaningful dialogue about their work, and such mutual support and encouragement helps provide good learning environments.
168. Many issues of concern were highlighted in the previous report. Most of them have been adequately dealt with and progress in meeting targets is good. Significant improvements have been made in the provision of hardware, assessment arrangements, the independent use of computers by students, the overall level of teachers' skills and the co-ordination and use of computers in Years 10 and 11. Other aspects such as attainment in the sixth form, linked to the lack of a GCSE courses, are identified as issues to be tackled within the school development plan.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

169. Standards in modern languages at the end of Year 9 are consistent with national expectations. Students arrive in Year 9 from three contributory middle schools with a range of experience of learning French, only a minority having been taught by specialist teachers. However, attainment on entry is broadly in line with national expectations. At the end of Year 9, teacher assessments in 2000 showed a well-above average picture of performance, but these assessments were too generous, to judge by the work of the present Year 10 students.
170. GCSE examination results in French at grades A*-C in 2000 were in line with national averages. The results for a smaller group of lower attaining students, who took German, were below national averages. A small group of higher attaining students, who took Spanish, gained grades well above national averages. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls in French was wider than is the case nationally, but in German and Spanish it was narrower, reflecting the attainment of more cohesive groups. In 2000, nearly all students in Year 11 took a GCSE examination in a language, and all these students gained a grade. This was a good achievement. Students performed significantly better in French and Spanish than in their other subjects. Over the last three years, results have improved steadily. Students are well motivated by the modular GCSE examination, which they begin at the end of Year 9 by making an audiotape about themselves.
171. Sixth form students achieved well at A level in 2000 and all achieved grades in line with their targets. Of the five students who took both French and German at A level, all achieved grades in the A-E range. The number of entries was too low to make valid comparisons with national averages. Over the last three years the number of students taking languages at A level has fluctuated; students' results have also varied, but they have always achieved in line with their predicted grades.
172. The standards reached by students in Year 9 both in lessons and other work are just above national expectations. This represents good progress from the beginning of the year. Most

students can take part in short conversations about themselves, and the higher attaining students are confident and generally accurate in talking about their own daily routine and reporting that of others. All students, including the lower attaining students, respond well to vigorous teaching and most understand a limited range of familiar vocabulary. The higher-attaining students are much quicker at remembering the meaning of words. In written work, there is a wide range of achievement, from unsatisfactory to very good. The lower attaining students receive much teacher support; they can copy-write fairly accurately, but mostly write only short sentences. The demands on the higher attaining students are greater and they begin to write in the past tense about, for example, activities they have been involved in and enjoyed. However, they are rarely required to write at length and with the detail that many are capable of. Students make a good beginning in German, which all students take as their second foreign language.

173. Inspection evidence shows the standards reached by students in Year 11 to be consistent with national expectations. Students are given a free choice as to whether they continue with French or German to GCSE. Those who continue with German have had less time to reach the level required for starting GCSE than those studying French. Standards for lower and middle attaining students are not as high as for middle attaining students in French, but higher attaining students in German achieve as well as those in French. Most students make satisfactory progress, including those with special educational needs. The higher attaining students make good progress. Students in Years 10 and 11, develop their writing skills well because of good teacher support and guidance. From Year 10 on, students increase the amount and complexity of their writing and, by Year 11, the higher attaining students can write good, and often interesting, accounts and descriptions in coursework assignments. For example, they write about their experiences on holiday and express their reactions to holidays very well. All students use dictionaries sensibly to help in their understanding of the reading passages they encounter. The vast majority of students listen carefully to tapes and to their teacher, but middle and lower attaining students need much repetition and practice in this skill to understand words, other than in a familiar context. The highest-attaining students make good progress in speaking and listening to the language, which they do with increasing confidence. They learn to use a variety of tenses appropriately.
174. In the sixth form, students perform in line with expectations for both the new A/S level courses and the Year 13 A level courses in French, German and Spanish. The most gifted students express their ideas and opinions well both in written and spoken form. Other students have less confidence and fluency in speaking and their written work often lacks accuracy, especially when they move from structured grammar practice to written essays.
175. The great majority of students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in Year 9. The higher attaining students make particularly good progress and are keen to develop all their language skills. In Years 10 and 11, when nearly all students choose to study one language, achievement is satisfactory. In the sixth form, achievement is also satisfactory.
176. Improvement in modern languages has been good since the last inspection, particularly in the last few years. GCSE results have risen because students have responded positively to the new modular syllabus, where their efforts are assessed continuously and they understand where and when they are making progress. Teachers are assiduous in target setting, keeping students to deadlines for assignments and providing revision classes. The quality of teaching and students' learning has improved, because teachers discuss, and the majority share, the best practice in teaching and behaviour management. The recent, valuable in-service training shared with middle school teachers has provided some good stimulus towards forging common teaching approaches from Years 7 - 9.
177. The quality of teaching is good overall. One third of the lessons seen were good and one third were very good. The remainder were satisfactory, except for one unsatisfactory lesson when students were presented with work that was much too difficult for them. All teachers have a good knowledge of the languages they teach and their good accents serve as appropriate models for their students. Most teachers understand well how students learn languages and they use the foreign language constantly for instructions and communication to develop students' listening skills. A few teachers use too much English, and sometimes they do not give students enough practice in pronunciation for students to become confident in speaking. All teachers plan their

lessons well and aim to cover a range of activities and learning targets in each lesson. They make the aims of each lesson clear at the beginning and usually start with a good review of previously learnt work and an extensive oral practice-session of new material. The literacy skills of good presentation and accuracy could be underlined more firmly at this stage. Most teachers use well-produced overhead transparencies to stimulate students' interest and engage them in learning by seeing and speaking. 'Fun' language-learning games are an important part of all lessons; students, particularly boys, enjoy the competitive element in these activities, which stimulate increased effort and concentration. For example, in one Year 9 class for low attaining students all joined in, guessing successfully at the meaning of phrases they had just learnt, although the phrases being shown were presented on the overhead projector back to front and without any vowels. Teachers regularly provide follow-up consolidation tasks to repeat the key words and phrases, an activity that all groups of students need for real learning. Teachers manage their students well and work very hard to hold students' interest and maintain their learning throughout the lesson. They provide very good challenges for the higher attaining students, pushing them to guess at meaning, to see patterns in grammar and to express their own experiences and feelings in their examination assignments. For example, Year 11 students wrote in German very interestingly about their activities during their summer holidays, using a wide range of expressions and vocabulary. Marking of exercise books is not consistent in regularity across the department and effort grades are not always given. On occasion, teachers do not give students enough time to write down homework properly. However, the general pattern of the assessment of students' work is good and teachers monitor the course of their students' learning very well. Textbooks in French require renewal and there are shortages in overhead projectors and television sets.

178. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has enabled a very committed team to achieve real improvement since the last inspection in developing the quality of teaching and learning and in raising the standards of attainment, particularly those of the 'average' students. Good target setting is established and students are well motivated to succeed in the new modular GCSE course. The department is aware of the need to develop information and communications technology and a monitored private study programme for sixth formers.

MUSIC

179. The 2000 teacher assessments show students' standards of attainment the end of Year 9 to be above average. Inspection evidence shows that present students are achieving in line with the national average. Students enter the college with a range of musical experiences and whilst the majority of students are able to undertake the tasks set, the need for consolidation prevents them from developing the skills necessary for more rapid progress. Lack of standardised tests at this stage in students' musical education also hinders accurate assessment. Students in Year 9 can define and play triads rhythmically in a set progression. They are able to identify the relationship between chords and melody and discuss this relationship in extracts played on a CD.
180. The 2000 GCSE results were above the school average and show a continuation of the improvement of results achieved since the last inspection. There has also been an increase in the number of students taking the examination. However, the number of candidates is still too few to make comparison with national figures meaningful. Inspection evidence shows standards by the end of Year 11 to be in line with expectations. It was not possible to hear any solo performances and only a few compositions were available for scrutiny. Students in Year 10 are able to write down short melodies played on the piano and fill in the missing notes from a melody played three times. They also start to independently use information communication technology for realising compositions. However, a lack of basic grounding is preventing lower attaining students from achieving in line with their peers. This is also noticeable in Year 11 where some students find the GCSE type listening questions too demanding and the ensuing discussion of decreasing interest.
181. There were no candidates for A level in 2000, but there are now candidates in both Year 12 and Year 13. Results in 1999 were above the school average. Inspection evidence shows that students in Year 12 are achieving in line with expectations. They are developing their dictation skills to meet the demands of the A level examination and are arranging new accompaniments

and instrumentation for well-known melodies. Standards in Year 13 are above expectations. They have the wider experience gained from a high standard of instrumental performance on several instruments, which has enabled them to participate in ensembles both in and out of college. They are able to sing accurately at sight, with good tone, and participate knowledgeably in analytical discussion.

182. Students' progress and learning in Year 9 are satisfactory. Students in Year 9 learn to play the different chord patterns used to accompany the song 'Hello!' and compose alternative melodies to fit them. They also learn to play the progressions on the guitars. Lack of singing, the need for wider access to information communication technology, and the unsuitability of the accommodation to encourage students working in groups of more than two contribute to the lack of experience found in Years 10 and 11.
183. Learning in Years 10 and 11 is good. Students in Year 10 listen to a piece by Satie called 'Gnossienne 1', and use one of three scales as a basis for their compositions based on the composer's style. Students in Year 11 are working hard to complete their compositions in time for the approaching deadline, rehearsing their practical work. Unfortunately there is a sense of complacency amongst a few of the students, which affects their attitude to work in class and their outlook on the requirement to meet the deadlines.
184. Students' progress and learning in Year 12 is satisfactory, and very good in Year 13. Students in Year 12 make good use of the computer's facilities to choose suitable harmonies and accompaniments for their melodies with some interesting musical results. However lack of broader experience gained from instrumental ability is hindering progress in listening. Students in Year 13 sing accurately at sight, analyse, and complete extracts from renaissance counterpoint confidently. They are also preparing for the performance section of the examination by personal practice and participation in ensembles, some of which they arrange and direct.
185. Students with special educational needs are well integrated with the other members of their class and higher attaining students assist them where necessary. This contributes to their progress, which is in line with the remainder of the class. Students with special educational needs are also welcomed into the GCSE and A level classes. However there is a need for more foundation work to enable to students make progress in line with the remainder of the classes. A range of extra-curricular activities that are of a high standard and instrumental tuition provided by the Bedfordshire Music Service caters for higher attaining students. Contributions to literacy skills are small, but students are often asked to read aloud to the remainder of the class and some attention is given to the use of key words and musical vocabulary.
186. Students attitudes and behaviour in music are satisfactory in Year 9, good in Years 10 to 12 and excellent in Year 13. In Year 9 some classes respond better than others, depending largely on the attitude of individual students. Where disaffection is already established, this can disturb the concentration of others. In most classes students enjoy the practical nature of the tasks and use the resources well to achieve results. They listen carefully to the teachers, respond to questioning in an orderly manner, stop practising when the teachers wish to speak, and treat the instruments with respect. Relationships in class are generally good between students and also between students and teachers. These develop as the students gain in age, until Year 13 where real maturity prevails in lessons.
187. Teaching in Year 9 is good with one lesson being very good and another satisfactory. In the satisfactory lesson, a lower attaining student was underinvolved and consequently did not behave well. Teaching in Year 10 and 11 is good and in Years 12 and 13 it is very good. The teachers have a good knowledge of the subject, and challenge the higher attaining students with appropriate questions. Lessons are effectively planned, move at a good pace, with a good variety of activities and changes in seating to give students changes of focus. Teachers' expectations are appropriate for the ability of the individual students. They make good use of questioning to assist the recall of information from the previous lessons to enable the students to begin this lesson with the material in the front of their minds. More use could be made of student demonstration to assist this revision. No homework was set in Year 9 according to departmental policy. This denies the students the opportunity of developing their research abilities, increasing their use of

musical vocabulary, and furthering their experience of expressing themselves about music or their participation in musical activities.

188. Since the last inspection the majority of the issues raised have been addressed. The head of department is working closely with the head of performing arts and there is a clear sense of educational direction. Assessment has been improved and is based on Curriculum 2000. Students from the college visit middle schools and hold workshops but curriculum links still require further developing. The limited accommodation issue has not been tackled, and is still affecting students' musical education. The curriculum is satisfactory, although the multi-cultural side is limited, and the use of information communication technology needs to be developed to become an integral part of the Year 9 curriculum. This will benefit those students studying GCSE, and also enable sixth form students take advantage of courses available that include musical technology. Some Year 9 students are disadvantaged by the current timetable that offers them both their music lessons in one week within a two-week timetable. This has an adverse effect both on progression and recruitment for GCSE. Extra-curricular activities include a wide range of ensembles, concerts and musicals, and participation in the annual performing arts festival, a celebration of art, dance, drama, and music in the college. However there are no multi-cultural activities within the music department, and few visits to concerts owing to staffing shortages.
189. A full-time teacher, assisted by a head of year, manages the department. The head of year's administrative responsibilities and other teaching commitments only permit a small contribution to the music teaching, leaving the remainder to the head of music, who also has a heavy administrative commitment. This has made it difficult for the head of department to attend in-service training designed to inform teachers about new examination syllabuses and examination marking. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. There are two teaching rooms, one of good size, which serves as a rehearsal room. The second is on the small size with no carpet on the floor, and is used as a music information and communications technology room. However, space is wasted by the lack of proper shelving to house computers with keyboards underneath. There are two practice rooms that are used for instrumental tuition, but there are no areas for group practice, which limits students' experience to working mostly in pairs. One lesson is taught in a non-specialist room and all resources have to be taken to the room and brought back. This reduces the amount of teaching and learning time available. Resources are unsatisfactory. There are insufficient computers and no multi-cultural instruments, which prevent the department from fully meeting the requirements of Curriculum 2000.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

190. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are broadly in line with national expectations. In the course of the year, students develop competence in basic trampolining techniques and in map reading when engaged in orienteering. Because time is allocated to the consolidation of learning, students who are performing above national expectations have a good understanding of problem solving and pace of running in orienteering. They are also able to perform movements on the trampoline demonstrating good body shape and tension. Students' development of knowledge and understanding is enhanced by their ability to work co-operatively in pairs and small groups when developing basic techniques.
191. The percentage of students following the GCSE course achieving A*-C grades in 1999 was well below national averages. The percentage of students achieving A*-C grades in 2000, while showing some improvement, was still well below national averages. Comparison of students' standards of attainment on entry to the course and the standards achieved in the GCSE examination show that most students make satisfactory and some good progress through Years 10 and 11. Standards of attainment of students' in core physical education lessons are in line with national expectations. This difference in attainment levels in Years 10 and 11 is due to a lack of consistency in the development of the GCSE students' ability to observe and assess performance and to use the appropriate terminology when describing performance. Attainment in Year 12 is above average. A significant number of students achieve good standards in extra-curricular activities at local and area levels and this makes a good contribution to the overall standards in physical education.
192. Students make satisfactory progress through Years 9 to 11 and also in the sixth form. Effective teaching ensures that students acquire the basic techniques of a range of activities and that

students work productively with one another; for example, a significant factor in the good progress made in the acquisition of trampolining skills is the confidence students have in the support of their peers. Students also make good progress in the development of skills in soccer and are able to transfer basic passing techniques into a full game situation. The ability to create and utilise space, improves as students move through Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs make good progress, because teachers know them well and make good use of learning support assistants. The progress of higher attaining students is restricted by insufficient attention to the development of their observation and assessment skills.

193. Students' attitudes to learning are good. Students enjoy physical education and have a responsible attitude and approach to their learning. Participation levels are good. Students concentrate well and remain on task. They are able to work effectively as individuals but also co-operate well when working in pairs and small groups. Behaviour is good. Students develop good relationships both with other students and with the teacher. Students take responsibility within extra-curricular activities.
194. The overall quality of teaching is good. In some lessons teaching is very good and improved since the last inspection. There is now no unsatisfactory teaching. The strengths of the teacher include good planning based on a secure knowledge of the subject, organisational skills and a commitment to a moral and social ethos. This means that students are able to learn basic techniques through appropriate activities and in an environment, which encourages learning. Although procedures for monitoring students' progress are now in place, greater use needs to be made of assessment in order to ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of the progress students are making. There is also a need to make more use of this information in both curriculum and lesson planning.
195. The physical education curriculum meets statutory requirements. However, the structure of the two-week timetable leads to some groups having two physical education lessons on the same day in one week and no lessons in the other week. This is an unsatisfactory arrangement. The department recognises the importance of extra-curricular activities, which enhance learning. There is very good range of provision, which offers students opportunities to take part in all major games as well as recreational clubs and trips both within the British Isles and abroad. The school runs very good inter-house competitions, in which a large number of students participate, and competes against other schools in major games. A few students are selected for representative teams at local, regional and on a few occasions national level.
196. Leadership and management in physical education are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the future. The department has a strong philosophy of care for its students. The commitment of the physical education staff and other teachers within the school means supports the very good extra-curricular programme. The department is well organised and the department handbook provides clear guidance on schemes of work, lesson planning and health and safety matters. However, there is insufficient monitoring to ensure consistency in teaching and learning, particularly on the GCSE course. Both indoor and outdoor facilities are good but on many occasions the curriculum is restricted because the indoor facilities are used for examinations, assemblies and other activities.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

197. Inspection evidence confirms that standards at the end of Year 9 are above the expectations of the Bedfordshire agreed syllabus for religious education. Students use religious terminology consistently and with growing confidence. They demonstrate a critical awareness of how religious beliefs can be expressed in a variety of forms and of the ideas, which may underlie those expressions. This was evident, for example, in a Year 9 lesson where students considered Christian attitudes towards forgiveness, using the examples of Myra Hindley and the IRA as case studies. Almost all students are beginning to show an understanding of religious perspectives on a range of ethical issues, for example the existence of suffering in the world. They try very hard to offer reasoned views on such issues and are able to support their arguments at length. Lower attaining students are becoming more confident in expressing and supporting their own viewpoints. Students make good progress throughout Year 9. Students with special educational

needs make similar rates of progress as those of their peers. Higher attaining students are able to reach their potential. This represents an improvement since the last inspection.

198. Last year, GCSE results in religious education were above average for the short course and in line with national averages for the full course. Inspection evidence suggests that standards in the subject are above expectations overall. Topics are covered in sufficient depth to enable students to build fully on the knowledge, understanding and skills gained in Year 9. Students are beginning to identify questions of meaning, such as the nature of God, and are able to suggest answers to such questions with reference to specific religious teaching. They make good progress throughout the key stage. Children with special educational needs make similar rates of progress as those of their peers. Students are led to realise that religious education has a practical application to everyday life and are enabled to consider their own values and beliefs about a wide range of moral and ethical issues.
199. Evidence gathered during the inspection suggests that standards in the sixth form, for those students opting for A/S or A level, are above course expectations. The standards of those taking compulsory religious education as part of general studies course are in line with national expectations. Progress in the sixth form is good. Students confidently identify and discuss questions of meaning, such as the relationship between the creator and the created, and are able to suggest answers to their own questions about meaning with reference to specific Christian teaching. They have a good understanding of philosophy and its relationship to religion.
200. Students' attitudes to religious education are generally very good. They enjoy the lessons and show enthusiasm for the topics taught. Teachers have established an ethos in the classroom which students respect. This means that the atmosphere in lessons is positive and successful learning can take place. Almost all students showed a high degree of perseverance and determination to complete tasks well. Behaviour is generally very good with high levels of motivation and engagement. Attitudes in the sixth form are often excellent. Occasionally, in the very small number of lessons where students were given tasks to complete that were not sufficiently rigorous, classroom attitudes were only satisfactory rather than good or better.
201. The quality of teaching is very good in Year 9 and in the sixth form. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good with many very good features. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers are very knowledgeable in all aspects of the subject. This means that teachers' introductions and explanations are clear with very good quality questioning which builds effectively on students' responses, taking their learning forward at a very good pace. This was evident, for example, in a Year 10 lesson where students compared the Catholic and Quaker views on animal rights. Teachers have generally high expectations of what their students can achieve. Students are being taught to think for themselves and to consider a wide range of moral and ethical issues. These high expectations are having a positive impact on standards in the department, students of all levels of attainment make clear and steady gains in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers provide good role models for the subject and are clearly committed to raising standards and the profile of religious education in the school. Students appreciate the enthusiasm with which their lessons are taught. Classroom relationships are very positive and students feel sufficiently confident to discuss their personal viewpoints in a secure and purposeful atmosphere. Very occasionally, teachers underestimate the amount of challenge their students can cope with and allow too much time to complete a fairly routine task. There are also inconsistencies in the marking of GCSE students' work, with insufficient guidance given on what they must do in order to raise the standard of the work. Teaching in the sixth form is of a very high standard. Teachers demonstrate very effective questioning skills, which have a significantly positive impact on students' abilities to argue, discuss and learn. This was evident, for example, in two different lessons when students considered the problem of evil and the nature and significance of dreams.
202. This is a well-led department with a clear sense of purpose and direction. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection. However, the two-week timetable leads to a long gap between lessons for some classes and this affects continuity in learning. Statutory requirements to teach religious education to all registered students are met. Religious education makes a very significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers work well as a team and are clearly very committed to the subject.

