

INSPECTION REPORT

THURSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Thurston

LEA area: Suffolk

Unique reference number: 124802

Headteacher: Mr Chris Bowler

Reporting inspector: Mr George Knights
3268

Dates of inspection: 4th to 7th March 2002

Inspection number: 192357

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Thurston Community College

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 13 - 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Thurston
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Suffolk

Postcode: IP31 3PB

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr A Auger

Date of previous inspection: 24th February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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3268	George Knights	Registered inspector		Characteristics Attainment and achievement Teaching and learning How good are curricular and other opportunities? How well is the school led and managed?
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30576	Peter Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
23393	Brian Dower	Team inspector	English	
12934	Christine Ryan	Team inspector	Biology	
11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Business Education Design & Textiles	
12331	Vera Grigg	Team inspector	Art Geography	
2218	Philip Dahl	Team inspector	French German	
31660	Marianne Young	Team inspector	Music	
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	Drama	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Thurston Community College is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 13 to 18 years of age. It is situated some three miles east of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. Students attend the college from a wide geographic area, with around four fifths of students travelling daily by bus and coach. Almost all students come from three partner middle schools in the local pyramid group of schools. Attainment of students on entry to the college is well above average. There are 1289 students on roll, of which 314 are in the sixth form, making the college larger than average. The college is over-subscribed and a further increase in numbers is anticipated. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and unemployment in the area is well below the national average. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. Only very few students are from minority ethnic groups and almost none has English as an additional language. The number on the college's register of special educational needs is below the national average, as is the number with statements of special educational need. Over nine tenths of students continue their education, at the end of Year 11, either remaining at the college or transferring to the local college of further education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Thurston Community College is a good school, which has yet to achieve its full potential. Its established strengths provide a secure basis on which to build further improvements. Standards in national tests and examinations are well above average in the main school and above average in the sixth form. Improvements in standards have come about as a result of good teaching, which enables students to learn well, and because the college provides a rich variety of learning experiences. Leadership of the college has, in the past two years, ensured that the college has continued to provide well for students during a period of significant change in staffing and management arrangements. The recent arrival of a new principal has re-energised leadership and has focused management toward achieving long-term improvement. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- It enables students in the main school to attain standards that are well above the national average.
- It offers its students a rich variety of learning experiences.
- It creates a harmonious community based on mutual trust and respect.
- It provides good moral and social education, which helps students become responsible and mature.

What could be improved

- Establishing and developing a better approach to long-term planning in the college.
- The rigorous evaluation of teachers' work in order to ensure that the best practice is consistently applied.
- Data management to enable better guidance to both students and teachers in improving performance.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college has made good progress overall since the previous inspection, which took place in February 1997. Results in national tests and examinations at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 have improved at a faster rate than nationally over the past few years and sixth form results were better in 2001 than previously. Teaching and learning have been maintained at a good level and the richness of the curriculum has been further improved. There was only one key issue identified in the previous inspection report. This was to ensure that all sixth form students could study a programme in religious education, as is required. The college has made satisfactory progress in dealing with this key issue. All sixth form students take part in two conferences each year, which deal with a wide range of religious, ethical and moral issues. Students value this course, which enriches their overall learning.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13, based on average point scores in national tests and in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
Key Stage 3 tests	A	A	A	B
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	B	C	B	

Key

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

Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above the national average and above average when compared with similar schools. In 2001, results in national tests were well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English. Results in GCSE examinations last year were well above the national average and also well above the average for similar schools. At both key stages, results have been improving at a faster rate than nationally for several years. These results are the outcome of good achievement by students, who build successfully on their prior learning as they move through the college. Students currently in the college are also progressing well and are achieving standards of work, which indicate that recent improvement will be maintained. The college met its targets in 2001 and has set slightly higher targets for the next two years. These targets are not sufficiently ambitious, given the potential in the college when it further improves the overall quality of teaching. Results in the sixth form in 2001 were above average and better than in the previous year. This represents satisfactory progress, given the attainment of those students who follow sixth form courses. Students currently in the sixth form are achieving well and are likely to emulate previous groups of students in forthcoming examinations.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have very good attitudes. They like their college and enjoy their involvement in everything on offer. They are particularly enthusiastic about their lessons when the teaching is very good.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students behave very well in lessons and around the college. They are courteous and polite and careful in their consideration of the needs of others.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development of students is very good throughout the college. Students have very good relationships with each other and with adults in the college.
Attendance	The college successfully reversed the decline in attendance last year and attendance levels are now satisfactory. Students in the sixth form attend very regularly.

The college acknowledges the importance of each student's individual personality and ensures that each makes good gains in their personal development. Boys and girls, and older and younger students, enjoy each other's company. The relationships between sixth form students are excellent. The exceptionally high levels of mutual support in lessons, in particular, help these students learn well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Year 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	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.

Teaching is good overall, with a significant amount of very good or excellent teaching. Only occasionally is teaching unsatisfactory. Teachers know their subjects well and are able to present material to students with confidence. They are able to deal with the challenging questions that students often pose to them. Teachers know their students well and treat them with respect. This helps foster very good working relationships, encouraging students to do well. In too many lessons however, teachers provide insufficiently for students to undertake activities such as research, investigation and problem solving, which would improve their skills in managing their own learning. Some teachers are skilled questioners, using challenging questions to encourage dialogue and debate. Others rarely use this technique, thus restricting students in presenting their ideas or using discussion to help organise their thinking. The teaching of literacy is very good in English and many other subjects ensure that students develop their language skills, though the lack of discussion in some areas is a restriction on this aspect of students' development. Numeracy skills are taught well in mathematics and successfully applied in a range of other subjects. The college ensures that details of students with special educational needs are made known to teachers and thus, these students are helped to learn successfully. The college does not have similar arrangements for identifying the most able students and no systematic approach to meeting the needs of these students is in place. Thus, in some lessons, particularly those dominated by teacher input, the needs of the most able may not be fully met.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	This is very good throughout the college. Students have a good range of courses from which to choose in Key Stage 4, which build successfully on work in Year 9.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is good. The needs of students are well known and communicated to staff. Those students who need direct additional help are well supported, both in lessons and, occasionally, by withdrawal from lessons for short periods.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Only occasionally does the college have significant numbers of students for whom English is an additional language. When this does happen, provision for these students is good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The college makes good provision for students' personal development. The arrangements to promote students' social and moral understanding are particularly effective. The college is not as successful in promoting students' spiritual development, nor in giving them a strong awareness of life in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The college takes very good care of its students, who know and understand the benefits that this provides for them. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory on a day-to-day basis, but is not well co-ordinated at a whole college level. Data management has been inadequate to ensure that assessment information is used well to guide students.

The curriculum is enriched by many educational trips and visits and by a good range of extra-curricular activities. These include concerts and dramatic productions. The curriculum meets all statutory requirements.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership over the past two years has ensured that the work purposes of the college, which focused on ensuring good levels of student achievement, have been maintained during a period of some turmoil. This has involved many changes of staff and of management structures. The leadership of the new principal has already helped re-focus the college and new management structures are beginning to work effectively.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have recently identified the need to adopt a more active role in helping shape the strategic direction of the college and the steps they have taken to bring this about have good potential to achieve this. In the recent past they have taken a close interest in the running of the college, but have not been successfully engaged in fulfilling all their responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is an identified priority for development in the college. Hitherto this has not been a strength, but there is a recognition of the need for rigorous evaluative review.
The strategic use of resources	The college makes satisfactory use of the resources available to it.

Changes to the management structure of the college have provided a good framework to enable more accountability. Steps to improve long-term planning in the college, with greater involvement of staff and governors, have the potential to bring about further improvements in provision and in student standards. Further work on evaluation will help improve the application of the principles of best practice, which are currently satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Before the inspection 67 parents attended a meeting with the registered inspector. Questionnaires were returned from 1016 (79%) parents and 108 of these had comments appended.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students like coming to the college. • Teachers have high expectations of students and as a result students make good progress. • The college helps students become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of information about how well students are progressing. • Homework. • Working with parents.

Inspectors agree with those things that please parents most. Students do like coming to the college, where they behave in a mature and responsible way. Teachers' expectations of students are good and this, coupled with good teaching, helps students make good progress. Inspectors also agree that the college could do more to work with parents, especially in providing them with detailed information on attainment and progress. Inspectors believe that the amount of work required of students for homework is appropriate for the courses they are studying. Inspectors do not agree with the views of a small number of parents that there has been a lack of strong leadership in the college over the past two years.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form at this college has 314 students, making it larger than average. Numbers in the sixth form are increasing. The college provides an extensive range of advanced (AS and A2) courses, together with a small number of AVCE¹ courses. Around two thirds of students who complete Year 11 in the college remain at the college. Most of the others attend a local college of further education, which offers a complementary range of courses. The number of female students in the sixth form is greater than males, though proportions are not significantly different from the national pattern. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low, reflecting the pattern in the college generally. The college encourages students to start advanced level study if they show an aptitude and ability to do so and the overall attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is above average for the courses they study. Around two thirds of students continue their study after leaving Thurston, with around half entering higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Standards overall are above average, indicating that students are achieving as might be expected, given their attainment on entry to the course. Students currently in the sixth form are achieving well, suggesting that the recent improvement in results will be maintained. Overall, teaching is good, though teachers use a limited range of strategies with their students. Sixth form provision meets the needs of students well. Leadership of the sixth form is strong, following the recent appointment of a new management team.

Strengths

- Students in the sixth form are offered a rich variety of learning experiences.
- The sixth form is a harmonious community based on mutual trust and respect.
- There is a very clear vision for the further development of the sixth form.
- Attendance to college and to lessons is very good.

What could be improved

- The long-term improvement plan for the sixth form.
- The rigorous evaluation of teachers' work in order to ensure that the best practice is consistently applied.
- Data management to enable better guidance to both students and teachers in improving performance.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	The quality of provision is good. Results have been consistently well above average over recent years. Coursework is a particular strength. Whilst teaching over the length of the course is good, there is not sufficient variety in teaching style.
Chemistry	The quality of provision is good. Standards are above average, showing improvement from previous examination results. Students in Years 12 and 13 display good levels of understanding. Communication, presentation and investigation skills are above average. Results in AS level examinations show generally better progress than might be expected from previous GCSE scores. Teaching is good.

¹ Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education

Biology	The quality of provision is satisfactory. Results have fallen slightly over the last three years and are now at about the national average. Teaching is satisfactory and as a result most students make satisfactory progress.
Design & Technology	The quality of provision is good. Small numbers take the course and, while three quarters gain passes, few gain the highest grades. Teaching is good, with teachers matching tasks to the strengths and needs of individual students.
Business Studies	The quality of provision is good. This is a new AVCE course and students are working at the expected level. Teaching is good, though the range of teaching styles used is rather narrow.
Health and Social Care	The quality of provision is good. This is a new AVCE course and students are achieving well because teaching is good overall.
Art & Design	The quality of provision is excellent. Standards are consistently very high. This is the result of excellent teaching focused on the individual, detailed assessments that inform students how to improve and a curriculum that widens their experience in art. All students achieve well. Leadership and management are excellent.
Music	The quality of provision is good. Standards in the sixth form are above average with excellent strengths in students' performance skills. Teaching is good, with secure teacher knowledge and very good marking to ensure that students conform well to examination requirements. Students are well motivated and show good commitment to their work and extra-curricular activities.
Drama	The quality of provision is good. Standards in examinations are close to national averages, with the subject becoming increasingly popular. Teaching is good, enabling students to achieve well.
Geography	The quality of provision is very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. Teaching is very good and varied fieldwork adds to students' understanding. Leadership and management are very good.
History	The quality of provision is good. Results in recent examinations have been average, with an increase recently in the number of students gaining the highest grades. Teaching is good, enabling students to learn well.
Sociology	The quality of provision is satisfactory. Results in recent examinations have been broadly average. Teaching is satisfactory, but some tasks are too limited to extend or challenge students.
English	The quality of provision is good. Results in English literature have been above national averages for the past three years, whilst results in English language have fluctuated. Teaching in both language and literature courses is good.
French	The quality of provision is good. Standards are close to the national average, with examination performance having improved significantly over the past two years. The teaching of French is very good.
German	The quality of provision is very good. Results in the past two years have been above the national average and significantly better than in previous years. Teaching in German lessons is very good.

Work in a small number of additional subjects was sampled during the inspection. Students were achieving well in a politics lesson because of very good teaching. This is a new course, but results in AS level examinations in 2001 were impressive. Teaching in religious education is good and standards are close to the national average. Results in physics in 2001 were below average, but small numbers taking the course make comparisons unreliable.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Sixth Form students are very well cared for and the students know it. Procedures for assessing students' needs and providing guidance for future study are good. The regular contact with teachers and tutors helps provide continuity of care and support. Whilst the quality of this support is good, it is not yet sufficiently formal and rigorous to ensure consistent high quality academic guidance.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership of the sixth form is good and a clear vision for its future success is established. The management of the sixth form provides a suitable framework for it to run efficiently, whilst keeping the needs of students as its main focus. Improvement planning is not distinct from that of the whole college. It is at an early stage of development and requires more precisely defined objectives, with specific success criteria, so that gains may be more easily measured.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoy courses that suit their needs. • They feel that they are well taught and are challenged to achieve well. • Supportive and committed staff, who are accessible and who willingly help them. • The friendliness and mutual support of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information they are given about their progress. • The guidance they are given about future options. • The response of teachers to them as responsible young adults. • The range of enrichment activities available to them.

Students are very positive about the college. Inspectors agree with some of their concerns, but not all. Inspectors consider that there is partial justification for the concerns expressed by some students about the lack of guidance about future options. Whilst the college provides very good guidance for students considering Oxbridge applications and good guidance for other university applicants, it is not so successful in guiding those considering alternative pathways when they leave. Members of staff treat students as mature young adults, a view confirmed in discussions with students during the inspection. The concerns of both students and their parents about the information they are given about progress are justified. Interim reports do not give a clear indication of the progress students make. Annual reports give a good overall picture of students' effort and response, but do not always accurately describe exactly what the students can or cannot do.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

It enables students in the main school to attain standards that are well above the national average.

- 1 For the past three years, students aged 14 have attained results in national tests that are well above the national average. Results in 2001 were also above the average for similar schools². When students arrive in the college in Year 9 they are quickly encouraged to pick up on their studies and teachers encourage students to adopt good patterns of work. In return, students are very positive about their studies and work hard to build on their learning from middle schools. Teachers of English, mathematics and science prepare students well for national tests. In 2001, results were well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English. These English results represented a slight decline from previous years, but the work of students currently in Year 9 suggests that results this year will be back to the very good levels of two years ago. There is little variation in results between boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3.
- 2 In other subjects, students make steady progress in Year 9 and teacher assessments at the end of the first year in the college indicate that attainment is above average in almost all subjects. It is well above average in physical education, music and information and communication technology and is average in design and technology. Differences in attainment levels in these subjects are mainly a result of variations in previous experiences. Teachers work hard and successfully prepare all students for their studies in Key Stage 4.
- 3 At the end of Key Stage 4, results in GCSE examinations have been well above the national average for the past three years. In 2001, results were well above average for similar schools. These results are the outcome of careful preparation of students by teachers, coupled with very enthusiastic student attitudes to work. There is some variation in standards from subject to subject. In 2001, students performed relatively better in science and slightly worse in English and mathematics. Overall, in 2001, results in GCSE examinations were above the national average in all subjects for which students were entered. Results were particularly impressive in art and design and in drama. Both boys and girls perform better than boys and girls nationally, but girls' performance overall is relatively better than that of boys. The college is aware of this and a priority in the college plans for improvement is to seek ways of improving the attainment of boys.
- 4 Recognition of the need to improve the attainment of boys is just one example of the care with which the college is beginning to take account of the needs of individual students. Another example is in the care with which college staff take account of those students with special educational needs. Each of these students is carefully monitored and teachers are aware of individual needs. As a result, these students make good progress. It is significant that the number of students gaining at least five GCSE grades of G or better is also well above the national average. This indicates that almost all students leave the college with significant accreditation of their education at Thurston.
- 5 The proportion of students gaining the A* and A grades in GCSE examinations in recent years has been above the national average, suggesting that these students

² Similar school comparisons are made with schools having a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals.

are challenged reasonably well. This is, however, not consistently the case. Some lessons are dominated by teacher input and this limits the scope to stretch the most able students. Currently, the college does not have a system for identifying gifted and talented students and so it is not able to ensure that all the needs of these students will be met.

- 6 The college has only a few students from minority ethnic groups or for whom English is an additional language. As a result it does not have formal systems for identifying and monitoring these students. These students are, however, identified on an individual basis and their progress is monitored. As a result, they are well integrated into college life and are thus, able to make good progress alongside other students.
- 7 A major factor in helping students achieve well is the dedication and commitment of teachers. Teachers know their material well and seek to make lessons interesting. They generally engage students well and encourage them to enjoy their work. In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of what the majority of students will achieve. In a significant number, too much teacher input tends to be the norm. There are two consequences of this. The first is that work is focused on the majority of students in the class and does not take sufficient account of the most and least able. The second is that students have too little opportunity to take responsibility for their own study, for instance, by engaging in investigation, research or extended problem solving. This mode of teaching may be effective in enabling students to achieve well in GCSE examinations, but is not a good preparation for sixth form study.

It offers its students a rich variety of learning experiences.

- 8 All students at the college are provided with a rich variety of experiences, both in lessons and in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. When students arrive in Year 9 they are quickly able to pick up their studies in all subjects of the National Curriculum. The college maintains a course in religious education and a comprehensive and interesting course in personal, social and health education (PSHE) enables students to receive education in drugs awareness and sex education. Currently, the college is extending the PSHE course to include elements of citizenship. The vast majority of students will have studied French in their middle schools and courses in this language are continued. Those students with an aptitude for languages are able to take up study of German as a second language when they arrive at the college.
- 9 Although students are able to pick up their studies in all National Curriculum subjects, links at the level of subject teachers with colleagues in partner middle schools are not strong. A programme of headteacher meetings has been established and there are good links with middle schools to ensure that general details are passed on about students' work and progress. There is scope for more contact at subject teacher level to ensure that teachers are fully aware of students' previous experiences. This is particularly pertinent as the national Key Stage 3 strategy is fully introduced.
- 10 The good range of courses in Year 9 provides an effective basis for choices of courses in Years 10 and 11. The only exception to this is the short time that students study German before having to make a choice about whether to continue study of this course. Students and their parents are very well informed about the courses available and teachers work closely with each student to help them select sensibly. The vast majority of students follow courses that will lead to 10 GCSE subjects, including double science and both English language and literature. The arrangements are such that all students follow a course in design and technology,

which is a requirement. Similarly, all students follow a course in religious education and those who wish to do so can take a short GCSE course in this subject. Course choices are so constructed that students are not precluded from studying two humanities or two languages. These provisions, together, mean that all students follow a varied and well-balanced programme of subjects.

- 11 The college recognises that, for a minority, this breadth of courses may not be fully appropriate. Arrangements are thus made for some students to follow an ASDAN³ course. Others are able to follow a course in work-related learning and occasionally individual arrangements are made for students to follow a course in extended work placement. All of these represent a very good commitment to ensuring that all students are able to study courses that are well matched to their talents and needs.
- 12 Classroom work is enriched, in many subjects, by trips and visits, many abroad. In addition, very good use is made of visitors to lessons to support students' learning. All students in Years 9 to 11 are able to take part in a wide range of clubs and societies that complement what they do in lessons. Many of these take place at lunchtime because of the need for students to catch buses at the end of the college day. The college does, however, make arrangements for late transport for those students who do wish to remain for after-college activities.
- 13 Students have very good facilities for independent study. Access to computers is such that students are able to apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills to support their learning in other subjects. ICT facilities will be significantly enhanced in the very near future when the college takes possession of a large number of new computers. The library is well stocked and provides a very good learning resource, the use of which is well planned by teachers in many subjects. Not all subjects include library use in their schemes of work however, and this means that students' library experiences vary from subject to subject.
- 14 Lessons are 50 minutes long, with timetabling providing double lessons in many subjects. Teachers do not always make best use of these long lessons and this reduces their overall effectiveness. The college is aware of this and is about to undertake a comprehensive curriculum review that will include a consideration of the most effective lesson length.
- 15 As students approach the end of their studies in Year 11 they, and their parents, are given very good guidance on future course options. The college offers a wide range of advanced level⁴ subjects, together with a small range of AVCE⁵ courses. Deliberate decisions have been made not to offer courses for students who are not able to follow them to advanced level. This is a realistic decision, recognising that to spread resources too thinly would damage the quality of what the college does provide. In order to ensure that no student suffers from this decision, the college has very good links with the local college of further education. All students are made fully aware of what the further education college has to offer and visits are arranged in order for students to make informed choices. Students feel well supported by teachers as they make their decisions about sixth form study. The vast majority of students, who opt to remain in the sixth form, remain for the duration of the courses they have chosen because they feel that the college staff provide well for their needs.
- 16 Sixth form students are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities outside of lessons. Many offer support to younger students with their learning and the

³ Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, based at Bristol University.

⁴ AS level and A2 level courses are now offered.

⁵ Advanced vocational certificate of education

contribution that sixth form students make to the local community is very good. As part of their studies, sixth form students have extensive opportunities to make trips and visits. Arrangements have been made for a recreational afternoon and students respond very well to this. They recognise the value of this and believe that it helps them focus on planned private study at other times of the week when they are not in lessons. Students in the sixth form are encouraged to take responsibility for many aspects of their life outside the classroom. Organising a Christmas ball and staging a pantomime are just two of many excellent means by which students can take responsibility and prepare themselves for adult life. Sixth form students can also participate in a wide range of clubs and societies. Just one measure of the success of these is the debating society, which has been very successful in national competitions.

It creates a harmonious community based on mutual trust and respect.

- 17 One of the most striking features of Thurston Community College is the fact that students really enjoy attending. The college serves a rural area, with many students living in isolated communities. Thus, the college provides a meeting place for social interaction as well as for study. This has been recognised by staff, who provide good facilities for students to be together. Social areas are attractive, as is the college dining room, and students happily congregate in these areas when not in lessons. Students' behaviour is very good and the level of staff presence necessary to maintain a calm and relaxed environment is at a minimum.
- 18 One of the main reasons for the harmonious community in the college is that the very good relationships among students are mirrored by those between staff and students. It is clear that staff like the students they work with and enjoy their company. This is one of the reasons why staff give freely of their time to support activities outside lessons. Very good relationships are also a feature of work in classrooms. Only very rarely are students less than courteous and their behaviour in lessons is very good. This is a major factor in enabling students to work well. Teachers trust students to take their work seriously and to complete assignments. When students are sent to the library they do so sensibly and responsibly, concentrating on their studies without direct teacher supervision.
- 19 Relationships between younger and older students are very good. Older students provide very good role models and many provide direct help to younger students, especially supporting those with learning difficulties. The sixth form students are well integrated into college life, mainly because the sixth form base is central to the college buildings. Staff are aware of the need to continue to encourage sixth form students to play a full role in the life of the college when students move into their new sixth form block in the next few weeks. In all lessons, boys and girls work well together, respecting each other's views and opinions.
- 20 Tutors get to know their students very well and they maintain a good overview of the personal development of the students in their care. Students are secure in their understanding that tutors and heads of house are concerned for their welfare and thus, are confident to turn to them if they have problems. This confidence is shared by parents. Tutors are helped by good channels of communication, which are efficiently maintained by staff in the office.
- 21 Students behave in a responsible and mature manner. They feel that they share in the ownership of the college community. Through house and college councils, they are able to present their views and ideas, which are taken seriously. The level of respect for property and the general college environment is good and this is a further

example of the level of trust. The responsible attitude of students is perhaps best illustrated by the way they board buses at the end of the day. This potentially hazardous operation, involving more than 20 buses, is managed efficiently by staff, but is successful because students are mature and sensible in their approach.

The college provides good moral and social education, which helps students become responsible and mature.

- 22 The college's aims statement refers to developing 'positive personal qualities, sensitivity to the needs of others and the ability to achieve sound personal relationships'. This aim is lived out very well in practice. The attention to this aim, both formally and informally, is testimony to the care, commitment and concern for others of each and every member of the college community. It is lived out in lessons, in social interaction and in the spirit of service that pervades much of the life and work of the college.
- 23 The college aims are reflected in many of its policies, which include a commitment to student self esteem and to equality of opportunity and access. Students are very proud of their college and of what it does for them and for others.
- 24 Within the curriculum, and in a range of other activities, staff provide well for students' moral and social development. Most importantly, staff respect students as young adults and treat them accordingly. Trust, openness and honesty characterise interchanges between teachers and students. The assembly programme, which is well established in the college, effectively deals with a large range of social, moral and ethical issues in sensitive ways. In the curriculum, many subjects make a strong contribution to students' personal development. In religious education, for instance, a Year 9 class considered the benefits of a code of conduct. In a history lesson dealing with the assassination of President Kennedy, students focused on issues of right and wrong, on guilt and on their own responses to the event.
- 25 Whilst college assemblies make a strong contribution to students' personal development, they do not take place for all students each day and hence, the college does not fulfil a statutory requirement. Aware of this, the college has recently introduced a *Thought For The Day*. Themes for this reflect the college commitment to addressing difficult moral and social issues and thus, the initiative has the potential to be a powerful further aspect of overall college provision for students. As yet its application is inconsistent and there is a need for further staff training in how this aspect of college work can be most effective.
- 26 The ideas, views and beliefs of students are respected. As a result, students grow in maturity as they are encouraged to take more responsibility for their personal development. Moral, social and ethical issues are raised and dealt with in personal, social and health education (PSHE), where students are provided with good frameworks for their development as citizens. When, in lessons, students are required to work in groups, they are encouraged to respect the thoughts and ideas of others. This was very well illustrated in a Year 11 PSHE lesson, where students listened carefully to presentations by others in the group on topics such as euthanasia. Hard issues are also faced up to directly. Students following the ASDAN course, for instance, have been able to visit prisoners at a local prison as part of their education in drugs awareness.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Establishing and developing a better approach to long-term planning in the college.

- 27 During the recent past, the college has gone through a period of significant change in management. The departure of the previous principal, and a consequent period in which the college was led by an acting principal, coincided with a significant change in management structures and responsibilities in the college. Throughout this period of time governors and senior staff made sure that changes taking place did not in any way jeopardise the education of students. In fact, results have improved during the past two years. Nevertheless, it was a time in which the long-term vision for improvement in the college became less important than the priority of maintaining stability in the short term.
- 28 The college is currently working through a programme of development drawn up to take account of the current year only. On his arrival in January of this year, the new principal recognised the need for a longer-term approach and for greater involvement of all staff and governors in the process of planning for improvement. Consequently, he led staff into a review of where the college was at in its development and in the identification of priorities for the coming three years. This process has been successful in getting staff involved, but has also highlighted the limited experience they have had, hitherto, in planning over a long time-scale.
- 29 Plans currently being drawn up have identified pertinent priorities, such as taking steps to improve the attainment of boys. Other identified priorities deal with improving teaching and learning through a programme of monitoring, undertaking a curriculum review, improving provision for information and communication technology and seeking specialist status. What is currently not sufficiently strong in the plan is the establishment of clear links between all identified priorities and student outcomes. This would be achieved if more attention was paid to sharpening the criteria against which the success of each identified action is judged. Nor is there sufficient focus on detailed costing and on identification of necessary training of staff to bring about the intended improvements successfully.
- 30 Curriculum area⁶ plans are being drawn up to complement a whole-college plan. Many of these show a refreshing and impressive commitment to bring about improvement, but some are unrealistic in terms of what can be achieved or funded in a reasonable amount of time. This highlights the need for middle managers, several of whom are new to their posts, to have further training in how to draw up and implement long-term plans.
- 31 Careful budget management over several years has meant that the college has maintained a secure financial basis for further development. Budget setting has not, in the past, been sufficiently closely aligned with plans for whole-college improvement, but significant steps have been taken to bring the two processes more closely into line. This improvement is exemplified by the recent decision to lease a large suite of computers because the college recognises that it cannot afford the outlay on all the equipment it has identified as being necessary in one year.
- 32 Governors have, hitherto, been involved in improvement planning and budget setting at a late stage in each process. Their role has been to review and approve plans and budgets prepared by college staff. Both the chair of governors and the new principal have recognised that this is too late to enable governors to fully meet their

⁶ This is the college term for describing subject departments

responsibilities for helping shape the strategic direction of the college. Some steps are being taken this year to engage governors in these processes at a slightly earlier stage, but further steps need to be taken to help governors play their full part in college leadership.

The rigorous evaluation of teachers' work in order to ensure that the best practice is consistently applied.

- 33 The college has identified the monitoring of teaching and learning as a priority for improvement in the coming year. Draft plans rightly highlight the need for the training of team leaders⁷ in self-evaluation techniques. They also provide for the development of a policy on the monitoring of teaching and learning, involving all staff in the process. What the plan misses, as it currently stands, is the link between this monitoring and improvements in teaching that will bring about more successful student learning.
- 34 The inspection has identified that, whilst teaching is good overall, there is significant variation in quality. Also, many teachers adopt a limited range of styles for presenting work to students. Too many lessons provide limited experiences for students in taking responsibility for research, for investigation and for extended problem solving. Whilst the best teachers employ very effective techniques for posing challenging questions to students, many make very little use of this potentially highly effective means of ensuring that all students are working at their optimal level.
- 35 What does not exist currently is a programme of activity, which ensures that all teachers are fully aware of the characteristics of the most effective teaching and learning techniques. Nor has there been a sufficiently comprehensive programme of training of middle managers in a wide range of evaluative techniques for reviewing other aspects of teachers' work, such as planning and the marking of students' work. These were both areas in which inspectors identified considerable variation in practice. College plans do not highlight the need for a rigorous programme of review by middle managers, focused on evaluation of quality, which extends to evaluation of the work of teachers in other contexts. There is also scope for an improvement in the work of tutors. Currently this does not cover the monitoring of students' academic progress, which is a priority for future development, nor other aspects of their work, such as presenting the recently introduced *Thought For The Day*.
- 36 Following the recent changes in middle management structures and the appointment of new vice-principals, good lines of accountability have begun to be drawn up. The co-ordination responsibilities of both vice-principals, as identified in their job descriptions, are rightly spread across both team leader and pastoral leader⁸ roles. This linkage of middle and senior management provides a good means by which the evaluative role of middle managers can itself be guided, managed and evaluated. It has the potential to build on practice that hitherto has not been sufficiently sharply focused on ensuring consistency at the level of the best quality work in the college.

Data management to enable better guidance to both students and teachers in improving performance.

- 37 Over the recent past, the college has been successful in building up a very good database on the attainment and potential of each student. This has made extensive

⁷ These are teachers who are responsible for subjects or groups of subjects, and are often referred to elsewhere as faculty directors.

⁸ Heads of house for Years 9 to 11 and head of sixth form and heads of year for Years 12 and 13.

use of national test and examination data, together with measures that give predicted outcomes for students. The only significant area where data is still not sufficient relates to students' prior attainment when they arrive in the college at the beginning of Year 9. This means that not all students are sufficiently challenged in all subjects during Year 9 to ensure that they achieve the best levels of attainment of which they are capable.

- 38 Information in the database has begun to be shared with staff and, in turn, with students. However, staff currently make only limited use of the wealth of data available. This is partly because the data provided has not been sufficiently synthesised and analysed and partly because members of staff have not been sufficiently trained in interpretation of data and its application in planning and target setting. As a result, most subject departments do not, for instance, deal with differences in the attainment of boys and girls because they are not sufficiently aware of the extent of these differences in their subjects. Similarly, insufficient detailed analysis is undertaken of relative performance by different groups of students as a starting point for a consideration of the factors that bring about variation in attainment.
- 39 Currently, subject teachers monitor the academic progress of students. They, in turn, provide information to tutors and heads of house if there are particular concerns about individuals in their subject. They are also responsible for setting targets. What is missing is a co-ordinated overview of the academic progress of each individual by a single person, such as a tutor. This is because the comprehensive data available is not provided for them. Nor, currently, is time allocated for tutors and students to meet together to review progress. This is recognised by the college and plans to introduce academic tutoring are being drawn up for the coming year.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to maintain and enhance standards in the college, staff and governors should:

- Establish and develop a better approach to long-term planning in the college, by:
 - Engaging staff and governors in identifying priorities for more than the current year;
 - Providing staff with training in the development and implementation of actions identified in the plan and in the evaluation of their success;
 - Ensuring that governors are actively involved at all stages in the production of the college improvement plan;
 - Making closer links between budget and strategic planning processes, so that each is well informed by the other;
 - Tightening criteria by which the success of actions will be evaluated and ensuring that these criteria relate to student outcomes.(Paragraphs 27 - 32)

- Develop a programme of rigorous evaluation of teachers' work so that best practice is consistently applied, by:
 - Providing training in evaluation techniques for all middle and senior managers in the college;
 - Strengthening the accountability links between middle managers and senior management so that the steps being taken to bring about improvement can be effectively kept under review;
 - Providing an organisational structure that enables middle managers to undertake evaluative activity.(Paragraphs 33 - 36)

- Make better use of data to guide both teachers and students as they seek to improve performance, by:
 - Providing tighter management of the college database, to include more processes for synthesising and analysing the data available;
 - Ensuring a better flow of data to staff;
 - Training all staff in the interpretation of data and its use to guide planning and target setting;
 - Establishing a system whereby one person has an overview of each student's work and progress.
 (Paragraphs 37-39)

Sixth form

- Establish a long-term improvement plan for the sixth form, by:
 - Ensuring that a section of the college improvement plan includes an explicit set of priorities for the sixth form;
 - Linking sixth form planning to overall budget priorities in the college.
 (Paragraph 73)

- Develop a programme of rigorous evaluation of teachers' work so that best practice is consistently applied, by:
 - Providing training in evaluation techniques for all middle and senior managers in the college;
 - Strengthening the accountability links between middle managers and senior management so that the steps being taken to bring about improvement can be effectively kept under review;
 - Providing a tight organisational structure to enable middle managers to undertake evaluative activity.
 (Paragraphs 36-39, 74, 123, 149 and 161)

- Make better use of data to guide both teachers and students as they seek to improve performance, by:
 - Providing tighter management of the college database to include more processes for synthesising and analysing the data available;
 - Ensuring a better flow of data to staff;
 - Training all staff in the interpretation of data and its use to guide planning and target setting;
 - Establishing a system whereby one person has an overview of each student's work and progress.
 (Paragraphs 37-39, 43, 62, 66, 97, 123 and 147)

In addition, the college should include the following issues in their action plan:

- Improve the quality of information to parents about the attainment and progress of their children. (Summary, paragraphs 63 and 70)
- Raise the profile of spiritual and multi-cultural development in the curriculum. (Summary, paragraph 60)
- Ensure that standards in information and communication technology at Key Stage 4 are separately reported to parents. (Summary)
- Ensure that all students can participate in a daily act of collective worship. (Paragraphs 25, 58 and 60)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 - 11	30
	Sixth form	75
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		65

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 9 - 11							
Number	5	5	8	10	2	0	0
Percentage	17	17	27	33	6	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	18	35	19	1	0	0
Percentage	1	25	47	26	1	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 9 – 11 as each lesson represents more than three percentage points and for the sixth form where each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y9 - 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	975	314
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	43	0

Special educational needs	Y9 - 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	13	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	146	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	44

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.2
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
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 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	170	169	339

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	108	141	145
	Girls	136	137	138
	Total	244	278	283
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (85)	82 (81)	84 (80)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	37 (39)	62 (58)	59 (46)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	122	111	137
	Girls	128	109	132
	Total	250	220	269
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (74)	71 (79)	88 (88)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (47)	45 (50)	57 (62)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	168	164	332

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	103	164	168
	Girls	122	161	163
	Total	225	325	331
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	68 (66)	98 (94)	100 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.7
	National	39.0

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

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
	2001	151	184	335

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	75	74	149
	Average point score per candidate	16 (14.2)	17.5 (16.8)	16.8 (15.5)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	18 (18.0)	17.5 (17.6)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	62	65	127	13	9	22
	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5	11.5	14	12.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1272
Any other minority ethnic group	12

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	80.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	372

Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70.9
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Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.2
Key Stage 4	22.8
Sixth form	16.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000 - 2001
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	£
Total income	3 550 183
Total expenditure	3 508 557
Expenditure per pupil	2 747
Balance brought forward from previous year	80 739
Balance carried forward to next year	122 365

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	28
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	27.4

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1289
Number of questionnaires returned	1016

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	25	58	11	4	2
My child is making good progress in school.	30	61	6	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	61	9	2	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	57	20	4	4
The teaching is good.	14	63	11	2	10
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	14	47	29	8	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	35	53	8	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	41	53	4	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	10	46	31	7	6
The school is well led and managed.	11	50	13	5	20
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	20	62	10	2	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	16	44	15	4	21

Other issues raised by parents

Some parents expressed concern about the number of changes of teaching staff over the past year. Others were concerned that there had been a lack of leadership during the past two years.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 40 The college encourages students to commence study of advanced level sixth form courses if their previous work suggests that they will be able to meet the intellectual challenge to do so. This means that, for some courses, there is a wide range of students' prior attainment levels. Thus, the overall pattern of attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is above average rather than well above average, as might be expected from the college's results in GCSE examinations. Students achieve well in their sixth form studies and gain results that are above average. The results in 2001 were significantly better than those in 2000. Details of individual subject results for 2001 are given in the table at the beginning of Part E of this report.
- 41 In many subjects, the number of entries is high enough to make reliable comparisons with national results. In these subjects, standards in 2001 examinations were above average in art and design, business studies, English language and literature, German, geography and mathematics. Results were below average in biology and were broadly average in other subjects. The numbers of students gaining A or B grades was also above average in many subjects, indicating good achievement by the most able students in the college. There was no significant difference in the results of male and female students in most subjects, though females performed better than male students in biology, history and geography and male students performed better than females in art.
- 42 This inspection focused on work in 15 subjects and courses. Work being produced by students currently in the sixth form is well above average in English language, English literature, geography and mathematics and is of a very high standard in art. Standards of work are above average in chemistry, history, drama, music, French and German. Elsewhere, standards are broadly average. Students are achieving well in most lessons because the teaching is generally good. In art, achievements are very good because teachers focus their teaching very successfully on the needs of each individual student. In chemistry, achievements are such that students are likely to do better than their predecessors. This is because teachers have extended the range of activities to support students' learning. Levels of achievement, though generally good, are sometimes restricted because teachers adopt too narrow a range of teaching styles. In many subjects too little emphasis is placed on students taking responsibility for their own studies.
- 43 The college has an extensive range of information about the standards being achieved by sixth form students, but does not yet analyse this in sufficient detail to provide good guidance to teachers on what they might expect of students. The data is not yet used to review the progress of different groups of students, such as males and females. Further analysis would help teachers focus their teaching more on the needs of the individual rather than on the whole class, as is often the case at the moment. This would, in turn, help raise standards further.
- 44 All sixth form students have good language skills. Most are able to express themselves orally and the quality of written work in most subjects is good. Students have the necessary mathematical skills to enable them to fulfil their work in other subjects. Skills in the application of information and communication technology are good and many students are very competent in using the Internet as a source of information.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- 45 Students are very positive about their work in the sixth form. They find it enjoyable and are motivated to succeed. They appreciate what subject staff do to support and encourage them as individuals and to guide them academically. Students enjoy very good relationships with each other and, as a result, collaborate well in lessons, in small groups and as a whole class. Confidence and self-esteem are fostered because of the strong relationships students have with their teachers. Students' attendance records are very good and therefore, they benefit greatly from the continuity of their learning experiences.
- 46 The conduct of all students is very good. They are courteous and friendly towards each other and towards all staff working in the college. They respond readily to those younger students whose needs they support as mentors. Sixth form students have a clear understanding of the impact of their actions on others and respect their feelings, values and beliefs. They are enthusiastic about the day conferences, which provide a forum for sharing ideas and opinions about matters of moral, social and cultural concern. The work they undertake on charitable committees is testimony to their sensitivity to the plight of those less fortunate than themselves. The fact that there are no social divisions between Years 12 and 13 reflects well on students' growing maturity.
- 47 The college provides well for students to take responsibility and to contribute to the life of the institution as a whole. Students respond positively to these opportunities. In addition to the mentoring, they coach younger students in a variety of sports and also support them academically in lessons. In English, for example, they support students who need help with their literacy skills. Sixth form students serve on a range of committees and help organize and run many clubs. They determine the agenda and play a leading part in the organization of the one-day conferences. These activities provide an effective way of enhancing students' learning in various contexts and make a significant contribution to their personal development.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 48 Teaching in the sixth form is good. During the inspection, three quarters of teaching observed was good or better and a quarter was very good or excellent. Only rarely is teaching in the sixth form unsatisfactory. This represents a maintenance of the good teaching observed in the previous inspection. As a result of this good teaching, students are learning well and this contributes to the good standards being achieved.
- 49 In the 15 subjects and courses focused on in this inspection, teaching is excellent in art and is very good in geography, French and German. It is good in all other subjects except biology, where it is satisfactory. In other subjects where teaching was sampled, the quality is generally good, with very good teaching observed in a politics lesson.
- 50 Teachers generally have a good understanding of the subjects and courses they teach and many are enthusiastic about their subject. This enthusiasm is infectious and most students show enjoyment and good levels of motivation in their sixth form study. Relationships between staff and students are very good and this leads to a relaxed, but industrious, atmosphere in lessons. Teachers manage students very well and this is a major factor in the overall success of the sixth form work.
- 51 Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly. In many lessons, however, teachers tend to dominate, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Lecture-style

lessons are valuable as a means of sharing knowledge, but too rarely are students given experiences of discussion, debate, investigation and extended problem solving to improve their skills in these aspects of their work. This is a particular issue in the teaching of biology and music. Teachers make good use of text materials and encourage students to gain information from the Internet.

- 52 Expectations of what students will achieve in lessons and assignments are good, but a lack of sufficient data on prior attainment tends to limit the scope and detail of targets that are agreed between students and their teachers. Where teaching is most successful, work is modified to meet the needs of each individual. This is best seen in art teaching, which enables students to achieve very high standards of work. In subjects such as chemistry and geography, probing questioning of students stretches them and enables them to achieve well as a result. In chemistry, for example, this is enabling students to achieve considerably better than previous groups of students in this subject.
- 53 The assessment of students' work is good and teachers' comments provide useful guidance to students on how to improve the quality of their work. Teachers are aware of the most able students and some are skilful in asking questions that provide more challenge to them than to other students. As a result, many students are able to achieve the highest grades in examinations at the end of the course. Teachers are aware of the few sixth form students with special educational needs and of those for whom English is an additional language. Careful steps are taken to enable these students to play a full part in lessons and, as a result, they make good progress.
- 54 Many lessons are scheduled to last for 100 minutes. While some teachers use this time well, others do not consider the impact of lack of variety of activity on levels of concentration. Occasionally, teachers give students a long break in the middle of the lesson, the consequence of which is to significantly reduce learning time by the equivalent of half a term's work in a two year course. Such practice, therefore, lowers the potential achievement level of students in those classes.

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

- 55 Overall, curricular provision is very good. Access to the sixth form is open to students who show that they can benefit from particular courses. Whilst this means that a minimum standard is required for students to be accepted for advanced level work, this does help towards the good and improving numbers of students completing courses.
- 56 Courses are well matched to the needs of students and build well on their prior attainment. The college provides a wide range of advanced courses leading to A level GCE qualifications. Advanced vocational courses are also offered in art, health and social care, business education and leisure and recreation. The college intends to extend the range of courses available by offering psychology and information technology courses from September 2002. As numbers in the college are large, the viability of courses is rarely a problem. Courses not run by the college are available at the nearest further education establishment and the college is flexible in allowing students to attend both if this will benefit individual students. Students who do not meet the requirements for advanced courses may study a certificated core course, equivalent to six higher grade GCSE's. This allows students to improve GCSE grades in mathematics, English and science, as well as concentrating on the wider key skills.

- 57 The curriculum is of high quality in almost all curriculum areas and particularly in art, where it is outstanding. Most lessons are scheduled for double periods, but teachers do not always make the best use of the lessons, which last 100 minutes. There is a tendency for lessons in a minority of subjects, particularly sociology, to lack a sharpness of objectives on an individual lesson basis that means time is not always used effectively.
- 58 No regular provision is made for all students to follow courses in religious education, personal, social and health education or key skills. However, the college organises two conference days each year, as well as inviting speakers to weekly assemblies, to present these areas meaningfully to students. Students work effectively in teams, discussing issues and making presentations using information and communications technology to communicate their findings to other students. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is still not being met. All sixth form students are expected to act as mentors for students in the main college. This enrichment provision is beneficial both to the sixth form students and the younger students being mentored.
- 59 The provision of enrichment activities for sixth form students is very good. There is good support in all subjects to help students improve the standard of their work. This is in the form of regular clinics or informal meetings with teachers. Students make effective use of the very good library facilities. The college regularly organises trips and visits, both in this country and abroad, in many areas of the curriculum. There is extremely good provision for participation in performances, particularly of music and drama. As well as a good range of team sports, the college also offers provision, where the timetable permits, for most students to attend a local leisure club on Wednesday afternoons. Work experience is available for those who request it. This is particularly important in enhancing the experiences of students in health and social care.
- 60 The college makes good provision for students' personal development through the quality and range of the sixth form curriculum. It also provides for students to take responsibility and show initiative, both within and outside the college. Students discuss moral and social issues as they arise from work in lessons and during the one-day conferences that are held on a regular basis. The wide range of visits, in this country and abroad, extends students' understanding of their own cultural traditions and the diversity and richness of other cultures. Students successfully address religious matters during the conferences and there are occasions in lessons when they can reflect on spiritual issues. However, this aspect of their development is not provided for in a systematic way.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

- 61 Assessment, overall, is good. Students are initially assessed on their suitability for entry to courses by reviewing their performance in GCSE examinations. It is expected that students will, generally, have secured a grade B or better in the main advanced level subjects they choose to study. Substantial and effective evaluation of students' performance over the first six weeks of their sixth form courses takes place in the case of students with less than the minimum grade requirements or those new to the college. This helps ensure that sensible choices have been made.

- 62 The analysis of data available on students' performance is not well used to provide individual departments with targets for each year's cohort. Expectations of student progress, thus, vary from one department to another. Some, such as biology and sociology, are content for individual students to reach their targets as predicted from overall GCSE grades. Others, such as art, mathematics, and geography, build on the achievements of the individual within the subject area and set more realistically high targets for their students. Currently, there is insufficient accountability by departments to senior management for targets and results and there is only limited overall evaluation of results by gender or other categorisation. New management systems will help remedy this situation.
- 63 Although whole college systems lack rigour, assessment by individual departments is almost always good or better. It is satisfactory in biology and sociology and very good in mathematics and geography. It is excellent in art. Homework is used effectively in all subjects and students are well aware of their progress because this work is assessed well. Assessment is used well to inform curricular planning. Systems are in place to refer students causing concern to their tutors for support and guidance at any stage during a course. The reporting system allows for both an intermediate and full report in Year 12 and a full report in Year 13. Whilst these reports provide for forecast grades, there is still too little clear direction in most subject areas on what students should do to improve.

Advice, support and guidance

- 64 The college takes good care of its sixth form students and they appreciate it. Very good relationships exist throughout the sixth form community and these ensure that interactions between staff and students are characterised by mutual trust and respect. Students offer each other exceptionally good help and support. Tutors support their students well, noting any particular need or concern. Information about students' individual needs is quickly and sensitively shared. The office staff are exceptionally efficient and organised, as instanced by the remarkably rigorous recording of sickness and injuries. This efficiency helps secure good communication within the college, with parents and with any supporting agencies. Arrangements to secure the safety of students and staff are very good and governors regularly monitor these procedures. The college takes very seriously its responsibility for ensuring that child protection procedures are secure. Staff are, therefore, all aware of these procedures and the college carefully records and follows up any concerns.
- 65 Most students feel they are given good information about sixth form choices. All have individual interviews with staff at the end of Year 11. Students speak positively about the guidance they are given at individual subject level. They feel that their teachers know them well. Staff notice when demeanour or performance alters and follow this up with suitable support. Staff make themselves readily available to listen to students' concerns. Students are particularly positive about the guidance in those subjects, such as science and philosophy, where regular assessment leads to clear grading and target setting. Students also welcome the use of self-evaluation in some of their subjects, such as art. Students mentioned the encouragement they are given to use study periods effectively as a particular feature of the general support they are given.
- 66 Students are not as positive about the academic guidance they are given at tutor level. They recognise that the new system for personal interviews is not yet securely embedded. Those students, who have already had their annual interview, feel that they benefited from these. They appreciated the extended personal discussion and the agreed notes that they could share with their parents. The college does not yet

regularly and systematically share all data about each student's past performance and predicted grades, either within or across subjects. Hence, the concerns expressed in a significant minority of student questionnaires about the information they are given about their progress are partly justified.

- 67 Students rightly feel they are given good guidance about their personal development. Attendance is very good and reflects both the students' very good attitudes to the sixth form and the careful promotion and monitoring of attendance. The college also encourages sixth formers to take responsibility for aspects of college life and notes students' involvement and response.
- 68 A large minority of questionnaires criticised the advice about future options. Current Year 12 students have not yet had significant input and information to date has concentrated only on universities courses. The inspection judgement is that, despite these limitations, across the two sixth form years, the college provides good advice to students about their future careers. Staff support students sensitively in making choices, guiding them towards relevant courses and helping them complete their applications.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

- 69 Parents and students are supportive of the college and recognise its strengths. Students, supported by their parents, commit themselves very enthusiastically to their life at the college. They all, for instance, take part in at least one activity to support the main college, such as refereeing for sports' matches. Many help out in lessons and also mentor younger students by helping with their reading.
- 70 Significant minorities of both students and parents expressed concern about the information that they receive about individual students' progress. These concerns are justified because some of the descriptions in the annual reports are too general. Reports do not always give a clear picture of exactly what the student can and cannot do within the areas taught during the year. Interim reports give a good picture of each student's attitude and effort, but do not report on the students' attainment. The college has a new system for annual personal interviews for each sixth form student with their tutor. The college expects students to share the notes of these interviews with parents. Those students, who have already had their interviews, report their parents' positive response.
- 71 The college provides good information for parents of sixth form students before the students select their courses. The booklet describing the curriculum and life of the sixth form is attractive and informative. The college invites all parents of Year 11 students to a well-organised open evening to share plans for the year ahead. This effective guidance helps parents support their son or daughter's entry into the sixth form.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

- 72 The leadership of the sixth form is strong, clear and effective in pursuing its educational objectives. The head of sixth form and the respective heads of Years 12 and 13 are all recently appointed. In a relatively short time they have established a close-knit team whose efforts have focused strongly on maintaining positive relationships between students and teachers and providing care and support for all

students. As a result, an environment in which students want to and are enabled to learn is firmly in place. The team is enthusiastic and committed to the development of the sixth form.

- 73 Governors' involvement with the sixth form is largely confined to matters of staffing, finance and premises, rather than in helping to define the vision for the future. Improvement planning and allocation of financial resources is dealt with by the senior management team of the college and incorporated into the over-arching college improvement plan. Whilst this ensures that developments are fully integrated with whole-college priorities, it also makes it more difficult to establish a strategic plan for improvement that is specific to the needs of the sixth form. At present, the sixth form management team do not have an improvement plan that relates specifically to their stated aims and objectives with clear and measurable targets and against which they can evaluate sixth form performance as a whole. As the sixth form becomes established in new buildings it will be even more important that the cost effectiveness of decisions, in relation to raising standards of achievement, can be readily monitored and appraised.
- 74 Overall, management within departments is good and in art it is of an exceptional standard. Policies are in place for each sector of the sixth form's activities and are well-developed in pastoral and organisational matters. They are less clear in relation to evaluating performance in subjects and in assuring the quality of teaching. As a result, not all work in the classroom is at the standard of the best and in some subjects, such as music, the impact of staffing changes and team leader appointments have not been fully evaluated. In most departments, with the notable exceptions of art and geography, monitoring procedures and systems for evaluating the work of the department are not well-developed. This has resulted in a lack of clarity about how to measure and report performance, which in turn limits the quality of feedback that students receive. Students' responses to the inspection questionnaire highlighted inconsistencies in the quality of guidance on attainment and progress. Their concerns were substantiated by the inspection, which found very effective procedures in some subjects, such as art and geography, but less informative systems elsewhere.

Resources

- 75 There has been a number of changes to the teaching staff during the past two years. These changes have enabled an improvement in the match of teachers to the subjects they teach and the college is staffed by well-qualified teachers, who know their subjects well and who seek to present work to students in interesting ways. Accommodation for the sixth form is about to change substantially as it moves from the present site to a purpose-built facility close by. The previous report highlighted a number of subjects where difficulties with accommodation, staffing and resources adversely affected provision. Since then, significant improvements have been made and all subjects are now adequately served. Nevertheless, there are still shortcomings, which will be considerably alleviated by the new premises. Whilst not all subjects will transfer to the new buildings, those that remain will benefit from the release of pressure on space and resources. Plans are already in place, for example, to considerably increase the numbers of computers in the college and a planned programme of refurbishment and redecoration is under way.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	7	100	62	71	15	3.86	1.51
Music	2	50	84	50	29	2.50	2.41
Physics	1	100	52	-	4	1.00	0.90
Sociology	1	-	63	-	7	-	1.17

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	32	100	96	63	46	7.56	6.57
Biology	42	71	88	29	34	4.29	5.25
Business Studies	22	100	92	68	32	7.09	5.50
Chemistry	27	93	90	48	43	5.93	5.90
Communication Studies	27	74	93	33	31	4.89	5.53
Drama	11	100	99	36	38	6.55	6.59
English language	33	100	91	36	30	6.18	5.27
English literature	20	100	95	40	30	6.30	5.91
French	10	90	89	50	38	6.20	5.59
Full design and technology	8	75	91	-	30	2.25	5.38
Geography	10	90	92	60	38	6.60	5.74
German	4	100	91	75	40	7.50	5.81
History	31	90	88	32	35	5.35	5.45
Mathematics	40	98	87	60	43	7.30	5.80
Music	1	100	93	-	35	6.00	5.74
Other social studies	1	-	87	-	34	-	5.30
Physics	10	90	88	30	40	4.60	5.67
Religious studies	8	88	92	25	38	5.50	5.84
Sociology	12	83	86	42	35	5.83	5.32

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.00	12.24
Business	8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	-	10.45
Health and social care	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18.00	10.79
Science	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.00	9.80

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Results at A level over many years;
- Standards in lessons in Year 13 and quality of coursework;
- Teachers' subject knowledge, enthusiasm and end of course expectations;
- Assessment of students' work;
- Educational direction from the team leader.

Areas for development

- Extending the variety of teaching styles used in the department;
- Discussion skills of the students;
- Use of estimation by the students.

76 Results have consistently been well above the national average for many years. All students attain at least grade E and the proportion attaining the top grade is always high compared with national averages. Overall, this represents good progress given the prior attainment of students. There is no significant difference in the performance of male and female students. After years of male dominance there are now approximately equal numbers of male and female students studying mathematics at A level. Every year, a proportion of students in Year 12, who do not meet the requirements for advanced study, are able to follow courses that help them to improve their GCSE grades.

77 Standards seen in lessons in Year 13 are well above national expectations and reflect the A level results of previous years. Standards of work in statistics are outstanding. Taking into account the students' prior attainment, this represents good achievement over the two years of the course. In some lessons, students demonstrate a high level of understanding of the mathematics being studied because of the teacher's structured use of questioning, which increases in complexity and reflects high levels of expectation of what students can achieve. Students show less confidence, however, when they have insufficient experience in exploring and investigating their mathematics. This is the case in the majority of lessons. Teachers' skilful use of diagrams on overhead projectors and their well-structured questioning helps many students to an understanding of the topic. This was well illustrated in a Year 13 calculus lesson where students were exploring volumes of integration. In many lessons, students know how to apply formulae and rules that they are learning, but they have not been well trained in checking results or estimating answers in advance of calculation. This leads to some errors, which would otherwise not occur.

78 Students enter the sixth form mathematics courses with attainment that is above the national average and with good standards of numeracy. Standards seen in lessons in Year 12 are only just above those expected nationally. This is because of the department's philosophy of building secure foundations for more difficult work in Year 13. This is very effective in engaging all students and helping them to maintain steady progress through the course. Whilst the progress of all students in Year 12 is secure, the most able, in particular, are not being sufficiently challenged to think for

themselves and discuss with their fellow students the mathematics they are studying. However, evidence from previous years suggests that all students are enabled to perform as well as originally expected in their sixth form courses.

- 79 Whilst students are reluctant to show open enthusiasm for mathematics, they exhibit many impressive qualities. They persevere well and are extremely attentive. They are very conscientious with homework and are determined to succeed. Students attend the regular weekly after-school clinic if they have problems with their work and all ask for help in and out of lessons as required. Relationships amongst students and between students and teachers are very good.
- 80 Teaching is good. Its strengths are the very good subject knowledge of the teachers and their high expectations of students for the A level GCE examinations. The teachers understand the philosophy of the course, despite the new specifications, and usually teach a group for the entire two years. They know their students very well and set challenging targets above the predictions based on average GCSE scores. The department consistently betters these. Students are made very well aware of their performance levels. Teaching in lessons, however, usually consists of teacher input with some oral questioning, followed by students working on problems to consolidate. There are indications that teachers are just beginning to adopt more activity-based and investigative lessons, but currently, the absence of these restricts students' understanding of the mathematics they are studying.
- 81 Despite a lack of variety in teaching styles, the students learn well overall throughout the course. They trust their teachers, who work hard for them. The students concentrate on solving written problems and producing coursework with good guidance. They complete homework thoroughly and accurately and whilst feedback from this is prompt and helpful, it rarely involves independent new learning. Students show little open enthusiasm for mathematics. They would benefit from more experience in discussion, extended problem solving and investigating, but nevertheless, they are successful in what they do. They use graphic calculators extremely well and teachers make good use of overhead projectors and, occasionally, computer software to enhance learning.
- 82 The department is strongly led. The team leader has great enthusiasm for mathematics and a clear vision of how the course should be run and accepts that once the new course specifications have been worked through, then a greater diversity of teaching styles needs to be worked on for all teachers. Morale is good, teachers meet regularly to discuss students' progress and all are enthusiastic about the subject, both in and out of the classroom. Students rate the department highly. Resources are used effectively, but there is scope to widen the range of these given a less didactic style of teaching. Bearing in mind the high standards and good teaching in the previous report, the department has made satisfactory progress in maintaining standards, recruiting more female students and making some moves towards variation in teaching styles.

SCIENCES

- 83 The focus was on chemistry and biology, but physics was also sampled. In physics, examination results were below average in 2001, but the small number of students taking the examination makes comparisons with other subjects unreliable. The AS level results were encouraging and most students did as well or better than expected from their GCSE scores. Two lessons were observed and in both of these teaching was good, leading students to a good understanding of new requirements for practical examinations.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in lessons;
- Teaching, with increasing expectations for students' accomplishments;
- Subject leadership, which has established a committed team to secure further improvement;
- Structured time for support with calculations, which helps students to make better progress.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results for some students;
- Individual student guidance to help students overcome difficulties;
- Resources for information and communication technology.

84 In 2001, GCSE A level results in chemistry were average, including the proportion of students gaining A or B grades. This represents an improvement on the situation at the time of the previous inspection. There was no significant difference between the performance of male and female students. Students made satisfactory progress overall from their GCSE scores. Although half the number made expected or better progress, the remainder underachieved because they found certain aspects of the course too difficult. Results in AS level examinations at the end of Year 12 are encouraging for a greater proportion of students. A number of students studying chemistry in Year 13 continue to find elements of the course difficult, but the subject leader has put in place changes to support students, such as lunch-time calculation clinics.

85 Standards of work of students currently in the sixth form are above average. This represents improvement over the reported examination results in 2001. Students reach good standards in lessons because teachers have strengthened the styles of teaching and learning. In practical investigation, they reach good standards. Year 13 students refine practical skills and are encouraged to be analytical and evaluative, thus, raising their standards further. One class gained good insights into concepts such as dynamic equilibrium through the use of simple models, such as carbon dioxide in fizzy spring water. In presenting good quality research, they spoke comprehensively about practical applications of buffers. One group in particular took the subject beyond the immediate requirements of the examination course whilst other students maintained interest by making very good presentations using computer software. Others summarised information well, using overhead transparencies to explain.

86 Good teaching and learning helps students make good progress in lessons. Teachers communicate the subject skilfully, asking pertinent questions and expecting students to offer scientific explanations. They ensure individuals have understood and extend discussions in the interests of those who need further understanding. Year 12 students improve their grasp of bonding in molecular structures because the teacher gives them time to build models and talks through problems and misunderstandings in small groups. In learning about the structure of isomers, they improve their use of technical language because the teacher requires them to be more explicit in describing them.

- 87 Students develop mature relationships with each other and with teachers and this improves their confidence in talking about the subject. Male and female students contribute equally effectively, with no distinct differences in performance. They work productively together, supporting each other's learning. Structured time for support with calculations is helping students make better progress, but they would benefit from further individual guidance in order to reinforce learning. They have a good capacity for working independently, taking study seriously and they use the library well. Learning resources are improving as good quality advanced level books are added to stock. They use computers for private study, but more planned use within lessons is needed.
- 88 Subject leadership is good, with effective co-ordination of the team of teachers, some of whom are part-time. Resources are well managed and have a positive impact on the quality of teaching, but access to resources for information and communication technology is inadequate. Technicians work effectively and support students directly on occasions. Assessment information has not been used effectively to monitor student progress, but improvements are in hand.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge;
- Emphasis on technical vocabulary;
- Individual feedback given to students during lessons;
- Quality of relationships between students and teachers;
- Preparation and guidance for examinations and tests.

Areas for improvement

- A level examination results;
- Analysis and use of prior attainment data;
- The development of students' practical and investigative skills;
- Schemes of work and teachers planning;
- Quality of teaching.

- 89 All students entered for the AS level examination in 2001 gained a pass grade and half of these were at the higher grades A and B. No national comparative data is available at present, but the results indicate good achievement in relation to students' earlier performance at GCSE. In contrast, examination results for A level fell to below the national average for the first time in 2001. In relation to their GCSE results, a substantial minority of students has not achieved as well as predicted, although a few of the highest attaining students did very well. Results over the last three years have been falling, although until 2001 they had been above the national average. Results in 2001 were lower than results in biology at the time of the previous inspection. Examination results also show some divergence in the performance of males and females. Female students are doing significantly better in A level biology than their male counterparts and to a greater degree than is found nationally. No obvious differences in performance are evident in lessons and so the reasons for this disparity require further investigation.
- 90 The attainment of current Year 13 students reflects a similar picture to recent results and most are achieving reasonably well. Students have a sound grasp of the main facts and concepts. They can, for example, relate the structures of mammalian

organs to the complex biochemical functions they perform. When studying the structure and action of muscles, they can identify the main characteristics of striated muscle from photomicrographs.

- 91 Similarly, students in Year 12 are achieving at an acceptable level for this stage of the course. They are successfully building on their knowledge and understanding from GCSE courses and can, for example, relate the differences between anabolic and catabolic reactions to their current work on cellular respiration. They probe statistics on food and diet to understand the links between health and lifestyle choices.
- 92 Students in both year groups are less confident when asked to apply their knowledge to unfamiliar situations, for instance, when asked to make inferences from experimental data that draws on their understanding of a number of different topics. Students' practical and investigative skills are not, in general, as well developed as other aspects of their work. In both Years 12 and 13, students, who started the course with more modest GCSE results, receive strong support from their teachers and as a result they make good progress. Higher attaining students are not achieving as much as they could in relation to their capabilities, largely as a result of teaching that demands too little of them.
- 93 Most students work conscientiously in lessons and co-operate well with one another. Good relationships between students and their teachers generate a learning environment where students feel able to test out their ideas in discussion and where they receive very good individual feedback from teachers. Written work is generally of a good standard and is well presented and organised. Most students have copious notes on each topic covered, but little of their own writing is evident. Unusually, very few practical lessons were seen during the inspection and little investigative work was evident in students' files.
- 94 Teaching is satisfactory overall and most students make acceptable progress as a result. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to select relevant models and analogies to explain difficult concepts, such as the biochemistry of muscle contraction. They prepare students thoroughly for examinations, conveying important points of technique and show by specific examples where marks are gained or lost. End of unit tests are thoroughly reviewed in class so that students can learn from their mistakes. Occasionally, students make more rapid gains in their learning in response to well planned teaching. For example, a carefully chosen range of tasks, matched to students' differing capabilities, enabled a Year 12 class to quickly identify patterns in the transmission of major infectious diseases.
- 95 In most lessons where progress is satisfactory overall, but not better than this, a significant minority of students are not sufficiently challenged by the work. In these lessons, in both Years 12 and 13, teacher exposition prevails and tasks are closely directed. In their desire to support the slowest learners, teachers' over-supportive methods constrain what others in the class can achieve and leave little scope for students to use their initiative or develop their own ideas. In the majority of lessons, students spend time copying notes or completing worksheets, which could more efficiently be accomplished in their own time.
- 96 Students are keen to succeed; they are attentive in class and usually complete the tasks set. When working together in groups they readily listen to each other's ideas. Group presentations are a common feature in some classes, which helps to develop students' confidence and tests their understanding. Students have access to the Internet and a well-stocked library for research. Despite this, students' independent

learning and enquiry skills are not well developed. Most do not go beyond what is asked of them in class or seek more extensive information for themselves from teachers or other sources.

- 97 The head of subject has only recently been appointed and has made a good start in reviewing the department's procedures and formulating an improvement plan. Work has begun on rewriting the schemes of work for both AS and A level courses. This process is at a relatively early stage, although improvements are already evident in some of the units of work for AS level. At present though, planning at all levels, from department to individual teachers, does not take sufficient account of students' prior attainment and does not focus sharply enough on learning outcomes. The department is just beginning to analyse the wealth of examination and test data available to get a clearer picture of students' attainment on entry to the course and of their progress over time. Target setting, based on careful analysis of students' performance and focussed on specific learning goals, is not yet established.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The subject sampled in this curriculum area was design and technology.

Design and technology

Overall the quality of provision in product design is **good**.

Strengths

- Support for individual students;
- Teachers' subject knowledge;
- Assessment of students' work.

Areas for development

- Monitoring and evaluation of work in the subject;
- Access to information and communication technology;
- Accommodation for the sixth form course;
- Provision for computer aided manufacture;
- Links with industry to give students an understanding of industrial processes.

- 98 The number of students taking the subject is low and therefore, making comparison with national figures is unreliable. Attainment in the subject has fluctuated over the last three years with a good percentage of students gaining pass grades. In 2001, three-quarters of students gained pass grades, but no student gained the highest grade. No female students took the subject in the last two years.
- 99 Students currently taking the course represent a full range of performance. Standards are in line with national expectation and achievements are satisfactory. There is no significant difference between the performance of the small number of females on the course and that of the boys. All students make satisfactory advances in knowledge, skills and understanding during the early part of the course. This is helped by the pre-course assignment work and the planned 'catch-up' sessions that recognise the different skills of students entering the course. Students' prior learning tends to be linked to either graphic products or resistant materials, which results in skills gaps in either design or construction. However, students in both years demonstrate sound research skills when developing design ideas, exploring a range of work from other designers. Their folders show sound, and often good, development of design proposals, although some students rely on a limited range of

ideas, which restricts the options for a final solution. The more committed students in Year 12 produced garden implements to a good standard having made modifications during the production stage. Those students with well-developed design skills find the practical aspect enjoyable, but challenging. They recognise in their evaluations the shortcomings of their final product. Year 13 students working on final projects have developed products with a degree of originality. Examples include light bulb changers, universal shelving systems and cycle trailers. Students have, through their designing, set themselves high targets using materials such as steel, polystyrene, acrylic and wood in order to realise their products. They have a good understanding of how well they are performing, understanding the system of grade predictions. Through good, accurate teacher assessments, students understand how to improve on those grades.

- 100 Progress varies according to the level of commitment, although most students have a positive attitude towards the subject. They receive good guidance from knowledgeable teachers, who monitor their progress closely in order that the students meet the required deadlines. The overall quality of teaching is good with teachers planning activities effectively to match the strengths of individual students. Teachers manage the students well and expect a good degree of commitment to the course, which they normally achieve. Occasionally, the lack of demand placed on students during the lesson allows a more pedestrian pace. However, the general level of individual support is good.
- 101 Provision for the course is sound with planning in place to meet all aspects of the course. There is room to develop links with industry to ensure that students have exposure to a range of industrial processes and understand thoroughly the demands of working in a commercial environment.
- 102 Management of the subject is satisfactory and effective on a day-to-day basis. Developments are in abeyance awaiting the arrival of the new subject co-ordinator next term. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching is not a feature of the subject, although there is much informal contact between the teachers responsible. The subject has only limited resources with which to service the course, requiring students to supply the majority of material for major projects. Whilst the staff ensure that students are not disadvantaged it is nevertheless a constraint. Accommodation and equipment levels lower standards as information and communication technology facilities are limited and facilities for computer aided manufacture are inadequate for this level of course. The lack of a technician to support sixth form teaching places added pressure on teaching staff.
- 103 Since the previous inspection, teaching has remained good, with articulate students and lessons generally well planned. The subject has embraced the new course specification effectively and, although further development has been on hold pending the arrival of the subject co-ordinator, progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

BUSINESS

The focus course in this curriculum area was the AVCE course in business.

Business

Overall provision for AVCE in Business is **good**.

Strengths

- Students' attitudes to the course;
- Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding;
- Assessment of students' work.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the range of teaching strategies used;
- Evaluation of teaching;
- Accommodation and access to information and communication technology.

- 104 As the AVCE course is new, there is no direct comparison with business courses from previous years. However, the college did have a small number of students taking the advanced level GNVQ in business for which completion rates were above those seen nationally. The number of students achieving merit and distinction awards was also above the national average. The standard of work seen during the inspection was at the level expected nationally for Year 12 and 13 students at this stage in their course. Some students entering the course have studied the subject at GCSE whilst others have not. Progress for all groups is satisfactory. There is no significant difference between the standard of work of male and female students.
- 105 Students have a good foundation of business knowledge and demonstrate an ability to apply that knowledge to actual and hypothetical business situations. Year 12 students working on the finance unit were able to interpret financial data and assess the strength of a business by using standard financial ratios. They were able to explain how useful the various ratios would be to potential investors. Year 13 students have a good understanding of public relations, not only in the context of the small local business with whom they are working, but also national and multi-national companies. Most students showed good recall of knowledge from across the completed units. There is sound development of research skills, using various sources, including information and communication technology (ICT), supporting teacher-driven notes. Assignments are accurately assessed. In both years, students' positive attitudes show through, especially when stimulated by good teaching. In one Year 13 lesson, students studying aspects of contract, consumer and employment law contributed well to discussions. The good relationships that exist between students and teachers serves to support the good learning that results from the good teaching. Students are positive about the course and appreciate the assistance their receive from the teaching staff.
- 106 Overall, the quality of teaching is good. All teachers have a good level of specialist business knowledge. In the best lessons, students are clear on what is to be achieved because teachers outline the objectives well. Teachers use questioning techniques effectively in order to test and develop business understanding. However, in some lessons, the range of strategies used is too limited. Time is wasted whilst students are asked to copy information. Teachers do not vary their methods, expecting students to concentrate for lengthy periods of time.

- 107 Changes made to the curriculum in the sixth form have enabled more students to study business. The subject is available in six and 12 unit forms that offer a flexibility that did not exist at the time of the last inspection. All aspects of the specification are covered, with the subject leader being aware of the need to further develop links with the wider business community. Some students, as a result of timetabling difficulties, received four of their lessons in one block. This highlights the need to use a variety of teaching methods to help students retain focus during such long lessons.
- 108 Since the last inspection, the subject has made satisfactory progress. The subject is being managed satisfactorily, on a day-to-day basis, whilst the subject co-ordinator is on maternity leave. Qualified specialist staff teach the majority of lessons. Resourcing is satisfactory, but Year 13 students have no specific text and find access to ICT limited. This should be resolved with the opening of the new sixth form area. The new centre should also alleviate the unsatisfactory nature of the accommodation used. Poorly equipped and maintained teaching rooms currently used for the course do not provide a good learning environment.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No subject was inspected in this curriculum area.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

- 109 The focus was on the AVCE course in health and social care, but the GNVQ Part 1 health and social care was also sampled. Two lessons in this course were observed. Both were at least satisfactory with students attaining the standards they should have in the light of their previous modest GCSE results at the end of Year 11. Work was also sampled in physical education and in leisure and recreation. In both, students make good progress in all lessons. Teaching is very well planned and standards amongst the first cohort of students in Year 13 are above average. No work was sampled in leisure and tourism during the inspection.

Health and social care

Overall the quality of provision in health and social care AVCE⁹ is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching;
- Standards of attainment, which are above average;
- Work placements, which enable students to apply their learning;
- Very motivated and responsible Year 13 students.

Areas for improvement

- Guidance for students in the management of different assignments;
- Access to resources, including information and communication technology;
- The pace of lessons when students work independently on portfolios.

- 110 Overall, the standards are above average. The number of students taking the AVCE is small, but has increased over the last two years, with four students in Year 13 and 11 in Year 12. No male students have been recruited onto the course. In previous years, students achieved a high percentage of distinctions and merits in the

⁹ Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education

advanced GNVQ course. The results of the current Year 13 at the end of the first year of study of the AVCE were very good and a comparison with their GCSE grades shows they are achieving well.

- 111 The coursework produced is thorough and well presented, often using good information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Students' written work in portfolios is usually well organised, though less capable students tend to concentrate on presenting factual material, without analysing or interpreting the content sufficiently. The higher attaining students show critical abilities and can evaluate their work, making suggestions of ways to improve the assignments they have undertaken. The Year 13 students are managing their learning independently, but the Year 12 students need more guidance to help them organise the coursework being set by the three different teachers concurrently. Most students are developing a good understanding of the fundamental concepts of health and social care.
- 112 Teaching is good overall mainly because of the teachers' good subject knowledge and awareness of the syllabus for this new course. They skilfully plan the units of work to relate the theory of social care to work placements and visits that the students undertake. In one lesson, a student had found out a great deal of information about exercise related fitness by visiting a local gym and interviewing a fitness instructor. She discussed with the teacher aspects of the role of exercise in maintaining health by using the good range of information she had gained both from the visit and from book research. Teachers make good use of informative handouts to support their teaching and tasks are well planned to guide students through the topic effectively. Students are learning technical terms as a result of teacher usage and clear explanations. In Year 13, the course is organised to enable students to make some choices about which units to follow and this has allowed them to link the course to their preferred progression routes after they leave the college.
- 113 Students learn well in response to good teaching and enjoy very good relationships with teachers. They are attentive in lessons and have very positive attitudes to work. The Year 13 students are responsive to class discussions, but the Year 12 students are more reticent and less confident in expressing their views. In one lesson, only a few girls were prepared to give answers to questions about a recent visit to a nursery or to suggest reasons for the expansion of nursery education. They are conscientious and receive good opportunities for independent learning. Lessons are long and some students find it difficult to manage work on their portfolios and do not use the whole of the lesson to good effect.
- 114 The course leader and teaching team have worked well to develop the new AVCE course to meet the revised examination requirements. The department does not have a base and some poor accommodation creates constraints on learning. Lack of a designated teaching area limits students' ready access to supporting texts, materials and ICT facilities. Resources are expanding and placements are being increased to help develop the vocational aspect of the course.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design, music and drama were focus subjects in this curriculum area.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Standards, which are consistently very high;
- Leadership and management, which ensure a clear direction for the subject;
- The quality of teaching, which focuses on the individual student;
- Visits, which considerably enhance students' learning and widen their experiences;
- Assessment, which ensures that students know how to improve.

Areas for improvement

- The facilities and use of information and communication technology;
- Funding to allow all students to experience the full range of art techniques and skills;
- Replacement of the very old and makeshift furniture.

- 115 Large numbers of students follow AS and A level courses in art and design. Standards in art and design are very high and have been consistently at that level since the time of the last inspection. This is due to the very good teaching. Results in 2001 examinations were well above the national average. A very high number of students in art and design gained A or B grades. Results in textiles are outstanding, with all students gaining A grades at AS level. Results in the GNVQ course are also very good. Overall, male students attain higher results than females.
- 116 Standards of work seen are very high. Students' exploration of initial ideas includes research into diverse areas, such as contemporary Japanese art and ornamentation of 18th Century dresses. They have extensive knowledge of modern and traditional artists. This was seen when a student explained how she had looked at the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Durer, as well as 20th Century posters, when exploring how artists drew hands. The standard of drawing is very high, both with pencil and pen. This was seen, for example, in a head and shoulders drawing using the dry point process. The life drawings show a freer approach and all show a confidence in using various media. The use of colour is imaginative and is used effectively to develop ideas. Students experiment extensively with ideas and this was seen when unusual materials were used to develop a garment. These included plastic, woven and layered materials, which effectively extended the texture. Ceramics are also used to explore the three dimensional aspects of students' ideas and observations. For example, small expressive figures were made in one session of the life classes, which showed individual interpretations of the human form. The panels made of sixth form life by the GNVQ students, showed the influence of Roy Lichtenstein, yet remained within the constraints of the brief given to the students. They showed how changing shades of colour could be effective. Some students follow the course without GCSE experience in the subject. All achieve very well, with many students achieving beyond their expected levels.
- 117 The quality of teaching overall is excellent, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Lessons seen were based on excellent subject knowledge. Teachers focus on the individual student, which ensures their learning. This was seen during a tutorial session, when the content of the students' work was discussed and a student saw how to combine her caricatures of jockeys with her lively paintings. The

excellent relationships between teachers and students results in an effective dialogue. Probing questioning makes students think and explore alternative ways of developing ideas, for example, 'have you considered?' Comments made help students develop rigour in their sketch book annotations, such as noting the influence of artists on their work. The excellent teaching ensures that students become highly motivated learners as their individuality and creativity is emphasised. This was seen when a student was encouraged to be adventurous in her designs because, as the teacher pointed out, not all items worn at fashion shows are actually wearable. The intellectual content of the discussions often leads to a growth in students' maturity, for example, when the influence of artists such as Frank Auerbach on texture was explored.

- 118 Students are highly motivated to succeed. For example, one student joined an art workshop during the half term in order to gain a wider experience of drawing horses. Students work very hard and this is seen in their sketch books, which are bursting with artwork. They are very ready to talk about art and to evaluate it. For example, one student explained why she liked the work of Lucien Freud. She explained that he arrived at the essence of the person through intense scrutiny, but without caricature, and cited the recent painting of the Queen as an example. Those studying for GNVQ research thoroughly and work very well as a team. They agreed quickly on the content of an assignment and presented their suggestions on the proposed art-work for the new sixth form block clearly to the client. Students use the college library extensively as a focus for their research.
- 119 Leadership and management of art and design are excellent and are based on teamwork using the individual strengths of teachers. The curriculum is excellent. Students are able to develop their individual aptitudes. This development is, however, hindered by the under-funding of the department, which, for example, allows only limited experience of silk screen printing and etching. This could affect the ability of students to reach their potential. Visits provide a remarkable breadth of experience for students. These have included trips to Pompeii and New York. The influence of these experiences can be seen in students' work, such as in a painting that was developed from a remembered view from The Empire State Building. Also, visiting artists and the work of other artists have provided additional stimulus, such as the textiles of Elizabeth Blackadder. Assessment is excellent, based on a tutorial system, with all teachers responsible for a group of students. Although each teacher critically evaluates the work of all students in their classes, the tutor conducts a focused evaluation of students' work, based on examination criteria, with marks and written comments. This ensures that students know how to improve.
- 120 The college library provides an outstanding resource for students' research. It has a wealth of art reference books, in addition to those that can be borrowed. Artwork has an important focus throughout the college with students' work, or that donated by visiting artists, being attractively displayed. The gallery, with its vivid paintings, is given prominence and demonstrates the importance of art in the college. As there are insufficient computers or associated equipment, the use of information and communication technology is limited. This area of provision has not improved since the time of the last inspection. Much of the furniture and equipment in the department is depressingly old and makeshift and is in urgent need of replacement. For example, some tables consist of tops balanced on very old desks and some sewing machines are 20 years old. The lack of sufficient funding has hindered planning for future developments.

Music

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

Strengths:

- Standards achieved by students at AS level in 2001;
- Excellent performing skills of some students;
- The enrichment programme of extra curricular-ensembles;
- Attitudes shown by students to their studies.

Areas for Improvement:

- Setting targets to enable students to know how to improve their work;
- Revising work in lessons to challenge all students;
- Vary teaching styles to help students learn independently;
- Increase the use of information and communication technology in lessons;

- 121 Despite small numbers entered for the subject, there is a good record of examination results. In 2001, there were only female students in the cohort for AS level and they all achieved A or B grades. Work seen during the inspection confirms that they are expected to maintain this standard at A2 level, showing very good progress since GCSE examinations. Over the last three years, female students have continued to achieve higher grades than males. No analysis has been undertaken of this trend in order to adapt and re-consider the work set for these students. The college has maintained its level of success, as reported at the time of the previous inspection, helping students to develop their excellent performing standards. Students perform regularly in the college as part of the many ensembles and also in the locality and with the county music groups. Students have a thorough knowledge of their studies and also their instrumental work. However, they are unable to discuss music beyond their immediate study and compare and contrast pieces by the same composer. For example, students had done a very thorough and detailed analysis of a recitative from *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell. However, they were unsure when comparing it to other pieces by the same composer.
- 122 Most evidence indicates that teaching in the sixth form is good overall. However, in the lessons seen during the inspection, the teaching was only satisfactory. This was mainly due to the pedestrian pace and teacher-directed style employed. The head of subject has a thorough knowledge of examination requirements. This, together with very detailed and informative marking, means that students know where they have lost marks as well as how to achieve them. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher led a review of students' harmonisation of Bach chorales. Students were expected to comment on others' work and so learn from their mistakes. The teacher reinforced their learning and understanding by playing each phrase so that they could hear the musical effect created. However, linking practical and written work is not always done in lessons. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, the students were not able to play and listen to augmented intervals when writing them on paper. There are occasions when musical examples are very well chosen. This was clearly demonstrated in a lesson when students were introduced to two versions of *Fields of Gold*. The teacher's personal knowledge and enthusiasm for the music ensured that no detail was overlooked.
- 123 The head of subject manages efficiently the various aspects of the department. However, because of changes to the links with other departments, there is a lack of long-term planning and development for the subject. There is also a lack of rigorous evaluation of the teaching within the department. At present, there is no formal

assessment of students' work in order to set clear and precise targets that will help them to improve their work. Much is done informally and so lacks rigour. At present, there is limited use of information and communication technology. Work is needed to plan lessons so that all students have access to sufficient equipment that will allow them to create and revise their compositions. At present, the music rooms are insufficiently sound-proofed and this makes aural, recording and listening work difficult at times.

- 124 All the students are well motivated and enthusiastic about their studies and especially about participating in concerts. Many students are also involved in county music ensembles and are accomplished performers on more than one instrument.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Students' previous high attainment in GCSE drama;
- The interest and motivation students show in their A level work;
- Teachers' enthusiasm and subject knowledge;
- Good resources and facilities.

Areas for improvement

- A Level standards, which do not reflect levels of attainment at GCSE;
- Staff deployment in Years 12 and 13.

- 125 The A level drama and theatre studies course is well established, with the majority of AS students going on to complete the full course and take the A level examination at the end of their second year. Following a recent reorganisation, drama is now part of the arts department, with art and music. It is an increasingly popular option choice for students, the majority of whom have achieved excellent results in drama at GCSE.

- 126 Standards attained in 2001 were close to the national average, as they were in 1999, though there was a drop in performance in 2000. At the time of the last inspection, one fifth of the students attained A or B grades. This success rate has not improved, but the numbers taking the drama course have increased. There has also been a steady increase in the number of male students taking A level drama, with one third of Year 12 students following the drama course being male.

- 127 With examination results close to, but seldom above, the national average, drama at A level has not yet been able to replicate the outstanding attainment seen in GCSE examinations. Virtually all students now doing AS and A level drama have attained A grades in their GCSE drama examination. They have embarked on the course with considerable enthusiasm and a very good basic understanding of the conventions and disciplines of drama and have adjusted well to the requirements of the A level course. Evidence from this inspection indicates that students in both Years 12 and 13 are working well and the majority are attaining above average standards, both in practical and written work. A survey of assessed essays and exploratory notes shows that students in Year 12 have a good understanding of dramatic structure and form. They can write thorough, well argued analyses with good use of appropriate terminology and references to other writers and plays.

- 128 Male students are working and achieving as well as females in both year groups. Two students with special educational needs are doing less well in their written work than in other parts of the course, but with good teaching and their own application, they are making satisfactory progress.
- 129 The overall quality of teaching is good. Students are being taught by two teachers who were new at the beginning of the academic year, one of whom is the team leader for arts. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of the course and examination requirements. However, as a consequence of time-tabling problems this year, the majority of sixth form drama teaching is being done by the junior member of the team and the head of drama has only one of the three double lessons in each year. This is not entirely satisfactory, but the teachers are collaborating closely and the head of department has full responsibility in her overview and monitoring role.
- 130 The best work during the inspection was seen in Year 12, where the enjoyment shared by teacher and students was a key element in the success of the lessons. Working on *Our Country's Good* for their text in performance, students showed an intelligent and sensitive response to the play's themes and skill in understanding character and realising it in performance. The teacher's interventions, always well judged and constructive, improved points of understanding and approach. When discussing and analysing the effects of using Brechtian techniques, students were challenged to think and to venture judgements and they responded thoughtfully. In this lesson, good teaching and high expectations produced a correspondingly high quality of learning.
- 131 The quality of teaching and learning in the one Year 13 lesson observed was satisfactory, but students' responses to the work and to their teacher were more muted. In this lesson, students worked individually or in short tutorial sessions with the teacher. Some students were anxious about the precise requirements of the course and the teacher was careful to work with the individual students concerned and to reassure and clarify.
- 132 Generally, students are very positive about A level drama, its value to them both academically and personally, and their enjoyment of the work they are doing. Students in Year 13 had found it stressful to lose both their drama teachers at the end of the first year of their course and were still adjusting to the change, though confident about their progress as the examination approached. Several intend to study drama at college or university. Students in Year 12 were very enthusiastic about their first year, appreciating the change from GCSE drama and the opportunity to work with two teachers. Both groups spoke of a good range of theatre visits and visitors. A visit to the Young Vic to see *Dr. Faustus* was being arranged during the week of the inspection. In the autumn term, the head of drama had organised an interesting workshop on theatre in prison, led by an ex-convict and very relevant to students working on the convicts' acting experiences in *Our Country's Good*.
- 133 As the last inspection report noted, drama makes a significant contribution to the college's extra-curricular programme. There have been regular whole-college and group productions and A level drama also benefits from the work in drama done by the English department. A production of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, directed by an English teacher, was in rehearsal during the inspection, with performers from Year 11 and a stage crew consisting of Year 13 drama students.
- 134 For these productions and other drama work, the college has a large stage and modern auditorium with high-quality sound and lighting resources. The drama

spaces, already good, will be improved when the new sixth form building, which includes a drama studio, opens later this year.

- 135 The leadership and management of drama are currently good and potentially very good. The subject leader has been in post only since the start of the college year and as team leader for arts she has a wider management responsibility. Since her arrival, she has produced an audit of arts provision in the college, including a review of curriculum provision in the sixth form. She has also written an excellent students' guide to the A level drama and theatre studies course. A departmental handbook and schemes of work are being completed and effective student self-assessment procedures are now in use. The new head of drama is well placed to build on the established strengths of the subject in the college and to improve A level attainment so that it matches the outstanding successes achieved in GCSE.

HUMANITIES

- 136 The focus of the inspection in humanities was history, geography and sociology. Work was also sampled in politics and religious education. In the politics lesson observed, the quality of teaching was very good. Students were confidently discussing the role of the Prime Minister and debating whether the role was becoming more presidential. This course is new to the sixth form so there is no A2 comparative data, but the 2001 Year 12 AS results were very good. Attainment in the lesson was also very good. The quality of teaching in the sampled religious education lessons was also good. Standards are broadly in line with the national average.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **very good**.

Strengths

- Leadership and management, which ensures a clear direction for the subject;
- Consistently very good teaching;
- Fieldwork, which enhances students' learning through practical experience.

Areas for improvement

- Facilities and use of information and communication technology;
- Closer analysis of examination and test results in order to raise standards further;
- Greater emphasis on students' understanding how to improve in order to raise standards further.

- 137 Standards are very good and were better in 2001 than in the previous year. Students generally do better in geography than their other subjects. AS results are good, with almost half the students gaining A or B grades. Female students achieve better examination results than do males. Standards have improved since the time of the last inspection.

- 138 Standards of work are very good. Students achieve well, with many achieving beyond what might be expected, given their prior attainment. Students have a very good understanding of the factors that affect the growth of cities. For example, they explained accurately the different factors that have affected the growth of Mexico City, such as the deforestation of the land and the subsequent growth of squatter zones. They also explained why there has been a decrease of population in London and they showed a thorough understanding of counter-urbanisation. Students use

models accurately, for example the Butler's model of the evaluation of tourism in a region. Allied to this, students show a thorough understanding of the issues associated with international tourism, such as political instability and the importance of an infrastructure. The students' study of Bradfield woods is comprehensive and reinforces knowledge gained in the classroom, as well as developing awareness of the local environment. Their knowledge of tectonic activity is very good. For example, they clearly explained the oceanic subduction zone, with an explanation of why most lavas are composed of andesite. Students' studies of slope development and marine and sub aerial processes are also of a very high standard and there is good use of case studies, such as the area around Swanage. Information and communication technology is seldom used.

- 139 Teaching is consistently very good, based on a breadth of subject knowledge. All teachers have good relationships with students, which ensure that a learning dialogue takes place. This was evident when the concept of social deprivation was explored and the students referred to a television programme seen on Cheltenham. Questioning is probing, which ensures that students arrive at correct conclusions and therefore, consolidate their learning. For example, they were closely questioned about the effect of latent heat at the poles until all understood the effect. Resources are used very effectively. For example, the use of balloons to show inequalities in air pressure without doubt consolidated students' understanding as the balloons careered around the room. Time is never wasted in lessons, which ensures that much is covered and a variety of activities fully engages students. This was seen when students worked in pairs when watching a video and resulted in all the information being rapidly noted. Tasks have a good level of challenge so that students progress in their learning. This was seen when students made choropleth maps using data supplied. Through experimentation, they arrived at an understanding of the importance of the visual effect of these maps. Individual learning was emphasised and students were involved in later presentations. Work is well marked, with a thorough evaluation of students' written material.
- 140 Students have a very positive attitude to geography and they are highly enthusiastic about the subject. A student, who finds learning difficult, has joined the course because she loves the subject. Students talk animatedly about the field-work, which brings the subject alive. Students are responsive in discussions and are ready to talk about their own experiences. One student described Harlem in New York and the possible reasons why it became a ghetto. This showed an understanding of the problems faced by immigrants to a city due to differences in language, culture, faith and colour. Students work hard in lessons and tackle the tasks with enthusiasm. They research thoroughly and this is evident in the library, which is very well used.
- 141 Leadership and management are good. The strengths of individual teachers are used well, which contributes to the very good standards. The subject leader is very responsive to new ideas. This has led to developments in the philosophy of teaching geography and to teaching styles that have resulted in a greater involvement of students. Field visits underpin much of the learning that takes place in the classroom and this has contributed to the very high standards. The choice of Arran as an area for first-hand study ensures that students have the experience of a totally different geographical area. The additional experience of walking through decaying areas of Glasgow brought home to students the reality of inner city deprivation. Recent analysis of examination and test results has led to some changes in the curriculum, such as the content of revision, but a closer analysis and targeted reinforcement should lead to higher standards. The improvement of students rests on their understanding of how they can improve and a clearer focus on this area is needed and will also lead to higher standards. The department has a suite of very old

computers, which do not facilitate the effective use of information and communication technology. The college library has a wealth of very good resources for geography, which well cover the different aspects.

History

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

Strengths

- Students' ability to undertake individual research;
- Good subject management that nurtures a strong sense of corporate identity;
- Good teaching, which is lively, stimulating and well planned and reflects strength of subject knowledge and understanding;
- High numbers opting for the subject.

Areas for Improvement

- The attainment of average and below average male students;
- Evaluation of the quality of students' performance when compared with performance nationally;
- Wider use of information and communication technology;
- The evaluation of the quality of teaching;
- The structure and working of the new management system.

- 142 The A level examination results in 2001 are close to the national average. Over the past two years there has been a steadily rising trend in the number of students gaining A and B grades. Male students' attainment is not as good as females' and this is significant in the middle and lower grade ranges. History results are slightly below those of some other subjects in the college, but this is largely explained by the wider student ability range the department accepts on its courses. The AS results this summer were below the national average. All students commencing the courses completed them satisfactorily.
- 143 The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows standards are rising and are above average overall. In half of the lessons observed, attainment is above what might be expected, bearing in mind students' GCSE and AS results. There are several reasons for this. In Year 13, students are benefiting from the guidance and encouragement of their teachers in the development of their skills in undertaking their own individual historical research. The high quality of their personal studies projects, based on local history themes researched in the regional records office, provides good evidence of this rise in standards. In Year 12, students benefit from teacher changes to course planning, which enables them to meet the challenges presented by the different work patterns required in the sixth form.
- 144 Students in Year 13 are achieving well. Their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter is good, their listening skills are well developed and they have real strengths in the critical analysis and evaluation of historical sources. For example, in a lesson on the Nazi economy, students drew on their expertise in source evaluation to produce well-balanced and compelling arguments on the comparative merits of a range of economic strategies and decisions facing Adolf Hitler in 1937. Most students are able to write well-structured essays and discuss historical issues with increasing confidence. The Year 13 course involves students in some website research work, but the wider use of information and communication technology is more limited.

- 145 Students in Year 12 are achieving well. This is partly because the ability level of the student intake is higher than in previous years. Students are also receiving more help and advice from their history teachers on how to adapt their working practices to the different requirements of the new AS course. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of historical concepts, are able to interpret and evaluate a range of sources and are developing their capacity for critical thinking. For example, in a lesson on the threats to the stability of the Weimar Republic, they were able to evaluate contemporary sources and make critical judgements about the relative merits of alternative policy options facing the government.
- 146 Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. There are no differences in the standards of teaching in Years 12 and 13. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, plan meticulously, use time in lessons well and set clear shared learning objectives. This enables students to increase the range and depth of their knowledge and understanding. Teachers choose a wide variety of stimulating resources, which are carefully linked to regular changes in teaching strategies. This good teaching leads to a positive response from students. They are stimulated by the lively teaching approaches and are willing to engage in discussion and writing activities that enlarge the range and depth of their key historical skills. History is a popular subject because all the teachers encourage students to undertake their own research enquiries into a wide variety of historical problems. For instance, a lesson on the rise of the Labour Party in the 20th century benefited from earlier group investigational work. This enabled the students to present cogent arguments, supported by carefully selected evidence during the feedback session in the next lesson. Teachers make very good use of video clips and artefacts, thus, enriching students' appreciation of the period, places and personalities they are studying. In the few lessons where the teaching is only satisfactory, there is a lack of pace and a reduction in the opportunities made available for more active student involvement.
- 147 Students have a very clear idea of how they are progressing and what they have to do in order to achieve their targets. Standards are rising as a result of the close help and attention teachers give to individual students. This has helped them to produce higher quality essays and better structured coursework assignments. A well planned departmental assessment and monitoring policy is a potential strength of the department. Work is regularly marked and assessed, grades are linked to the requirements of the syllabus and teachers write comments that help students to progress. However, evaluation of the quality of performance needs to be strengthened by the wider teacher use of comparative national data.
- 148 Students have very positive attitudes towards their work and this improves the quality of their learning. Relationships with teachers are good and contribute to overall student achievement. Teachers encourage students to help and support each other.
- 149 The department is well led by the subject leader. A scheme of work of high quality reflects the team approach to planning. The subject leader has a clear view of the priorities for history and is committed to the maintenance and further improvement of the high standards established in recent years. The students have access to a comprehensive range of resources and there are good financial controls in place. The lack of a formal system for the evaluation of the quality of classroom teaching is a weakness in the department and is slowing steps to bring about further improvement in quality. There is some uncertainty within the department regarding precise roles of the newly created post-holders. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection.

Sociology

The overall quality of provision in sociology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Attainment of higher ability students;
- Well-qualified and experienced teachers;
- Very good relationships with students.

Areas for improvement

- Students' clarity about how to improve their work;
- Beginnings to lessons;
- Teaching tasks, which have limited learning potential.

- 150 Overall, the standards are satisfactory. GCE A-level results over the last four years have been at the national level or slightly above. The proportion of students achieving grades A and B has often been above the national average. In 2001, results for students in Year 13 were slightly above the national average. In the same year, the standards in the end of Year 12 examinations were disappointing. The number of males taking the course is low so it is not possible to compare the standards attained by female and male students.
- 151 The standards of attainment observed during the inspection were average. Year 12 students have made a good start to the course. They are beginning to develop an understanding of different theoretical perspectives and are beginning to apply theory and concepts to the study of social structures, such as the education system. The work of the Year 13 students is at the level expected. They are developing the ability to analyse different sociological material and have a good understanding of sociological methods. Some higher ability students are able to discuss complex theories and more sophisticated concepts using a range of evidence to support different positions and perspectives.
- 152 The teaching of sociology is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge, use sociological terminology accurately and have a breadth of understanding of the subject. They are particularly skilled at integrating the elements of the course and are able to draw out links between the different topics studied. In one lesson, the Year 12 students were able to hold a lively discussion about the introduction of the citizenship curriculum by linking this to changes in the contemporary family and issues of social control. Sometimes, the beginnings to lessons are not focused, with no checking of students' understanding of previous work. This occurred in one particular lesson about theories of religion, which included an exposition of Weber's theory of the *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. The lesson did not include checks on the students' understanding and consequently, some students did not understand the new theory and made slow progress during the lesson.
- 153 Teachers make very good use of contemporary events in their teaching and encourage students to extend their learning by personal study, using a range of source material including books, articles and the Internet. Some teaching activities constrain students' learning by asking them to fill in missing words from a provided list that leads to guesswork and elimination rather than knowledge. Overall, teachers have good knowledge of the syllabus and use this to good effect with students, encouraging them to incorporate features into their work that reflect the requirements of the course. Marking of written work briefly outlines areas for improvement, but students are not always sure of how to improve their work to achieve higher grades.

- 154 The attitudes of students are very good. Students are attentive and co-operative in lessons. There are positive and constructive relationships between staff and students in both year groups. They are ready to listen to others and to consider new ideas and concepts. In one Year 13 lesson, students took part in a well-organised debate about the relationship between deviance and social control. With guidance from the teacher they had made good preparations for the debate so that all the students made a good contribution. They took part confidently and valued each other's presentations. Some were able to evaluate and analyse the information provided by others and offer counter-arguments to each other's points of view. As a result, they made good progress in developing the application of theory to their study of contemporary social structures, such as the family and education.
- 155 The department is well led by an experienced teacher and the teaching team is committed to the students' progress. Resources and up-to-date materials are used to good effect. The department has purchased new textbooks to support the introduction of the new syllabus.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of work in this curriculum area was on English, French and German.

English

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

Strengths

- Recent results in the A level English literature course that have been consistently above the national average;
- The 2001 AS level English language results, which represented good achievement for the students;
- Consistently good teaching and their ability to work well together enable students to learn well in lessons;
- The very good range of extra-curricular provision, which enables students to extend their understanding and enjoyment of English.

Areas for improvement

- The teaching that fails to engage students fully in the exchange of ideas and opinions;
- Students' access to computers to enable them to improve the content and presentation of their work;
- The setting of agreed targets as a means of raising standards further.

- 156 The standards attained in the 2001 A level English literature examinations were good, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Although the numbers studying the subject have fallen over recent years, standards have been above the national average for three years for both males and females. Students' levels of achievement were as expected, therefore, given their above average qualifications on entry to the course. This was also the case for the 2001 AS results, where attainment was above average and achievement was in line with expectations. A level results in English language for males and females have fluctuated over the three years the course has been running. In 2001, the results were well above the national average, unlike 2000 when they were well below. The results in 1999 were close to national averages. Students' qualifications when embarking on the course

are above average and therefore, achievement also varied in line with the standards obtained.

- 157 During the course of the inspection, the work seen of Year 13 English literature students was well above the national average in terms of their analytical and critical skills and their ability to express their own independent opinions fluently. This was seen in their understanding of William Blake's style and the nature of the themes he explores in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. For example, they understood and could explain succinctly how the poet achieved balance in the structure of his verse. The English literature work seen in Year 12 was of average standard because the students have yet to develop an independent, personal approach in their evaluation of literary texts. Many are beginning to show discrimination in their judgements, but there is a minority, who are not improving their critical faculties sufficiently because they are not engaged fully in class discussion. A small number of students sat passively through a lesson on the poetry of Philip Larkin and failed to respond to the challenge of the work. There was, therefore, a significant variation in what students were achieving in that lesson.
- 158 In English language, the work seen of Year 13 students was well above average in their command of the conventions of language and their ability to interpret and explain the form and structure of words, sentences and complete texts. They have very good general analytical skills and a command of a range of linguistic terminology. Year 12 English language students are gaining confidence in their ability to explain and interpret the structures and functions of language. They are developing critical and investigative research skills and are working well independently and in small groups. In one lesson seen, the students gave presentations on the conventions of formal and informal conversations, which they had researched in small groups. The standard of work of the majority was above average and even those of lesser competence were achieving well. This was because they had been well prepared by the teacher and had learnt how to present their findings logically and with supporting evidence.
- 159 Students' attitudes are good in both subjects and reflect the quality of the teaching they receive. Students work well collaboratively and most share ideas and engage readily in discussion. By Year 13 they are developing an independent approach to their studies and are taking greater responsibility for their own learning. This is one of the reasons why the standards of work seen in both subjects in that year are well above the national average.
- 160 The teaching of A level English language and English literature is good. Teachers know their subject very well and have high expectations of the students. The planning for both subjects in the lessons seen was good and the work was always well prepared. Students responded well to the high expectations and the demands made on them and they made significant learning gains in all lessons. Year 13 English literature students, for example, developed their knowledge and understanding of the historical and social context of life in the trenches and so heightened their appreciation of the literature of the First World War. The teacher had prepared extensively for the lesson and the students learnt well because of the range of textual material she had assembled for them. Teachers are skilled in the use of questioning techniques to improve understanding of the texts being studied and they communicate their own sense of enjoyment of the subject to the students. This was seen in a Year 13 English language lesson on the use of formal and informal language where the rapport between teacher and students generated enthusiasm for the subject.

- 161 Teaching was seen which failed to engage all students in discussion. In one lesson, the work was challenging and the teacher established a good rapport with those who were naturally confident and responsive. There was not the flexibility in the teaching approach, however, to draw in and motivate the more reticent to contribute. The ability to involve all students actively in the learning process is a teaching skill that all staff need to develop if every student is to achieve well. Not all the teaching seen was sufficiently challenging to extend students fully. There are teachers in the department whose rigorous teaching motivates and stimulates, but such an approach is not a consistent feature of all lessons. The implementation of a systematic approach to evaluating teaching would enable this to happen more widely and should be seen as a priority in the department's improvement planning. Teachers are limited in the extent to which they can use computers for teaching and learning because of restricted access to the technology and therefore, students are not developing their skills beyond word processing. The opening of the new sixth form centre in the coming weeks should make such facilities more readily available.
- 162 The leadership and management of the subject are good. The newly appointed team leader provides clear direction for the work of her colleagues with the emphasis on raising standards through improving teaching and learning styles. She has established, as another priority for development, the greater involvement of students in their own learning through research and independent study. She is also aware that improvements need to be made in setting targets that will raise student aspirations. Newly-appointed teachers are being well supported and are already having a positive impact on the quality of students' learning. The very good range of extra-curricular provision enables students to extend their understanding and enjoyment of English. The department is now well placed to secure further improvements in the standards students attain in English literature and English language at A level.

French

The quality of provision in French is **good**.

Strengths

- Improved results over the last two years;
- Students' response to teachers' high expectations and sustained course demands on them;
- Achievement in listening and reading;
- Very good teaching, which includes expert questioning that challenges students to achieve high standards in oral communication;
- The range and quality of students' writing.

Areas for improvement

- The progression from earlier language learning to enable more students to continue their studies post 16;
- Broader assessment in earlier phases of students' learning to help students prepare for progress to the higher levels of attainment in the sixth form.

- 163 The quality of provision in French is good. Standards of attainment at A level are close to the national average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection, and there has been a significant improvement over the last two years. Teachers and students work together in a highly effective partnership to achieve these results. Whilst teachers expect a great deal of their students in terms of language, skills and imagination, students respond very positively and rise to the challenging demands

- they are set. Both male and female students achieve above average course requirements. Students respond to the genuine demands of understanding world affairs through another language, which helps to develop real language competence.
- 164 Students are helped by their teachers to achieve well in speaking. They make sustained and extended efforts to express complex ideas and respond promptly and with clear understanding in more interactive work. Their own ideas come across strongly in well-expressed and varied language. They engage well in exchanging perspectives on controversial issues, presenting the views of others, as well as arguing from their own standpoint with conviction and a growing ease of expression.
- 165 Achievement in listening and reading is a growing strength, mainly due to the methodical and highly supportive foundations laid by teachers' preparation. Students have been helped to develop significant concentration skills to be able to make very good sense of both audio and video sources of listening at a complex level. They are taught to keep a clear focus and to develop effective strategies in comprehension, building on good vocabulary and very secure grammatical foundations to understand a wide range of textual sources. Course materials vary from news items, either on radio or television, to Internet extracts and to factual information on social, cultural and political issues. All of these are carefully vetted and prepared by teachers, who design clear tasks for students to undertake.
- 166 The range and quality of students' writing is a strong feature of their achievement in French. Writing at length on the wide range of issues covered in the course presents a real challenge, which students are ready and willing to meet. Careful checking and marking by teachers and students' own subsequent re-drafting are helping students to use a wide range of language and apply key grammatical rules and patterns successfully.
- 167 The modern languages provision is also concerned with educating rounded human beings able to participate in society as citizens. As in German, French courses are designed and taught against a strong and shared departmental commitment to both academic and personal development. As students mature through their languages learning, they gain confidence to understand complex social and world issues as well as the demands of each language. They also show their commitment and enthusiasm in the way they persevere and sustain their efforts, organisation and personal discipline over the course and in different ways. Examples were clear in essay preparation, drafting and re-drafting of ideas and in organising their notes, references and materials. Students derive clear value from the rich variety of language, concepts, issues and sources that they meet in French from discussions about topics such as the introduction of the Euro and issues of environmental pollution arising from nuclear powered submarines. By taking positive advantage of these opportunities, students gain a broader worldview. This development is further enhanced by the links and contacts they have both with foreign students in college and abroad, as well as through the programme of trips and visits.
- 168 Teaching in French is very good. The well-managed approach to teaching this course contributes to standards in both examinations and in students' personal development. Strengths in teaching include the immensely thorough and intelligent preparation of activities, materials, sources and stimuli, particularly of up-to-date information from television news and the Internet. Skilful questioning and management of oral interaction help all students develop speaking and communication skills. Teachers make good use of audio, video and computers to promote both the topic and language objectives of the course. They rely on excellent working relationships, especially in maintaining pace, managing oral interaction and

eliciting quality work from students of all abilities. Examination requirements are thoroughly addressed in teachers' guidance in both lessons and marked work. There are real strengths in how teachers mark students' work, with some excellent guidance for improvement, particularly for students who meet barriers to their learning.

- 169 Learning is very good. Students make good progress in broadening and deepening their knowledge and skills in the language from GCSE into AS and A2 courses because the new content is presented clearly and accessibly. Students are intellectually ready to explore issues. They are open to new language, complex ideas, concepts and different materials and such attitudes combine to ensure very good progress. Learning is marked by regular habits of organisation of material, referencing and disciplined memorisation of vocabulary and grammar. Students also learn by taking their mistakes seriously and they take good benefit from correcting and re-drafting their work to improve it.
- 170 Teaching and learning in the sixth form French are very good because of the quality of planning and effective management. Teachers share aspects of each course strategically and use all available resources well. Their approach ensures that key skills are also well developed. This provision is managed effectively in practical terms to achieve very good learning and achievement and improving standards in examinations. Evaluation of progression and standards right through from student entry into sixth form and to A2 is, however, currently hampered because data is not made available to track students' progress. Visits and exchanges are well supported by parents and students with scope for further links with the main course through work experience.
- 171 To improve further on this highly effective provision, two areas of development emerge that will put in place more secure steps into sixth form languages for more students. There are broader aspects of how students progress in language learning from middle college transfer into Key Stage 4 and GCSE courses and these should be more deliberately addressed and shared. To see how much students know, understand and can do at those earlier stages, assessment also needs to be broader and more strategic to allow students more scope to show their real competence and potential. This will help more of them to achieve higher levels at earlier stages and so build confidence for continued study in the sixth form.

German

The quality of provision in German is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results at A Level;
- The design and preparation of the courses offered, which helps students to make a successful transition from GCSE to A Level;
- Very good teaching of German;
- Students' achievement in understanding heard and read texts;
- The variety and richness of materials and sources used by teachers to promote very positive and sustained attitudes to learning.

Areas for improvement:

- The progression from earlier language learning so that more students feel confident enough to continue their studies in the sixth form;
- An earlier experience of broader assessments to convince students that they have the basis for progress to the higher levels of attainment in the sixth form.

- 172 The quality of provision in German is very good. In A Level examinations, students achieve standards above the national average, as at the time of the previous inspection. This is very commendable in view of the fact that students start to study German relatively late on transfer from middle schools. Teachers' high expectations, a thoroughly planned and well-managed course and positive student attitudes all combine to create a very successful learning partnership. Both male and female students achieve similar results in examinations and work to similarly positive effect in what they achieve throughout the course.
- 173 Teaching combines much new content and grammar effectively, so that students achieve well in speaking. Students make good progress in the first year to be able to express complex ideas with growing confidence in the second. When speaking with students in German, it is clear that they express their own ideas in well-structured and varied language, which owes much to the atmosphere established in lessons. Students are enabled to sustain an argument on controversial issues, whether working from materials to present the views of others or when putting across their own opinions. Students with varying levels of confidence in oral work show equal strengths in other aspects of the course, such as their writing.
- 174 Students' achievement in listening and reading is a growing strength. Through careful and thorough preparation of topic content, teachers help students to apply themselves with great concentration to both audio and video sources of listening. They work with clear focus and well-established strategies, good vocabulary and robust grammar to understand a wide range of textual sources. These vary from course materials, to news items, to Internet extracts, to factual information on social, cultural and political issues.
- 175 From the students' work seen, it is clear that they write with growing strength on a range of complex world issues. This is a strong feature of their achievement. They rise to the challenge and demands of writing at length on these issues. They use a varied language, often well matched to purpose, for example in argument, exemplification or quotation. They also exhibit a good grasp of key grammatical rules and essential patterns of German.

- 176 Educating students to be able to participate in society as citizens is a shared commitment in this modern languages department. Students mature through learning German, as they do in French, and this is due to the highly positive attitudes to their language courses that their teachers encourage. They are willing to tackle complex social and world issues as well as the particular demands of German grammar. They are determined and concentrate hard to make progress in these more challenging skills and aspects of the course. They also show their commitment and enthusiasm in the way they persevere and sustain their efforts, organisation and personal discipline over the course. Examples were clear in essay preparation, drafting and re-drafting their ideas and in organising their notes, references and materials. They derive clear value from the rich variety of language, concepts, issues and sources that they meet from the debate about capital punishment to a debate on animal experimentation. By taking such positive advantage of these opportunities, students gain a broader worldview. This development is further enhanced by the links and contacts they have both with foreign students in college and abroad, as well as through the programme of trips and visits.
- 177 Teaching is very good and can be seen as a key factor in both positive personal development as well as good academic success. The preparation of varied and intriguing materials is an example of the commitment staff make and of how students respond to that professionalism. In one lesson seen with Year 12, the topic of crime and punishment was introduced with a film clip, which led first into a discussion of reasons for forms of punishment and then into a study of a German website on capital punishment. This provided scope for discussing controversial moral issues in the foreign language. Teachers guide and prepare their students very thoroughly for examination requirements, particularly in how they share aspects of the course between them. They rely on excellent working relationships, especially in maintaining pace, managing oral interaction and eliciting quality work from students of all abilities. There are real strengths in how teachers mark students' work, with some exemplary guidance, which in one instance gave a student helpful yet demanding pointers for improvement.
- 178 Learning is very good. Students make good progress in broadening and deepening their knowledge and skills in the language from GCSE into AS and A2 courses because the new content is presented clearly and accessibly. Students are intellectually ready to explore issues. They are open to new language, complex ideas, concepts and different materials, and such attitudes combine to ensure very good progress. Learning is marked by regular habits of organisation of material, referencing and disciplined memorisation of vocabulary and grammar. Students also learn by taking their mistakes seriously and they take good benefit from correcting and re-drafting their work to improve it.
- 179 The quality of planning and management of sixth form German provision is a key factor in its success. Teachers share aspects of each course strategically and use all available resources well. Their approach ensures that key skills are also well developed. This provision is managed effectively in practical terms to achieve very good learning and achievement and improving standards of attainment in examinations. Evaluation of progression and standards right through from student entry into sixth form courses is, however, currently hampered without a full set of data to track progress for all. Visits and exchanges are well supported by parents and students with scope for further links with the main course through work experience.
- 180 To improve further on this highly effective provision, two areas of development emerge that will put in place surer steps into sixth form languages for more students.

Starting the new language after transferring to Thurston, students make rapid and secure progress in acquiring the content. They continue this to good effect up to and including GCSE level. To see how much students know, understand and can do at those earlier stages, assessment needs to be broader and more strategic within the time available to allow students more scope to show their real competence and potential as a basis for informed choices about continued language study after 16 years of age.