

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Wallasey Village

LEA area: Wirrall

Unique reference number: 105110

Headteacher: Mr Paul Heitzman

Reporting inspector: Ross Maden
2793

Dates of inspection: 4 - 7 March 2002

Inspection number: 192672

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Wallasey Village
Wirral

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Canon B Hoban

Date of previous inspection: 17 February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2793	Ross Maden	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How high are standards?</p> <p>a) The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
11041	Marvyn Moore	Lay inspector		<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
10984	Pamela Bishop	Team inspector	Science	
4697	Robert Black	Team inspector	Music	
19530	Jennifer Bray	Team inspector	Geography	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English	
7661	Susan Chamberlain	Team inspector	Equal opportunities	
15940	Norman Godfrey	Team inspector	Art and design Health and social care	
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Design and technology	
30996	Anne Higginbotham	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19056	Graham Leech	Team inspector	Drama	
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Business studies Information and communication technology (6 th form)	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
12121	Jack Mallinson	Team inspector	History	
2141	John Oxley	Team inspector	Physical education	
31879	David Rhodes	Team inspector	ICT	

17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	English as an additional language Modern foreign languages	
21957	Richard Vaughton	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
20352	John Wiggins	Team inspector	Physics	
20497	Vernon Williams	Team inspector	Sociology	Sixth form co-ordinator

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's Catholic College is a voluntary aided comprehensive school educating boys and girls in the age range of 11-18. There are 1350 pupils in the college, which is above the national average for secondary schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is 34 per cent, which is above the national average. The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is well below the national average. The percentage of pupils on the college's special educational need register is above the national average and the percentage of these pupils with statements of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. The attainment on entry to the college is below the national averages but is improving. The socio-economic data for the wards the college serves indicate that the percentage of adults with higher education is lower than the national average as is the percentage of children living in high social class households. The percentage of minority ethnic children and the percentage of children living in overcrowded households are below the national average. The college is increasing in size and is over-subscribed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The overall effectiveness of the college and the sixth form is very good and improving. The college has improving standards in many subjects. Pupils are keen to learn with very few problems of behaviour in lessons. Attendance is in line with national figures and is improving. There is a very high proportion of very good teaching across the college. There is a very high quality of leadership and management within the college with outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher. The college has made very good progress since its last inspection. The college provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Improving standards in National Curriculum tests and external examinations.
- Pupils' attitudes are very good and relationships within the college are excellent.
- Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' welfare are excellent.
- There is good quality teaching across the college and it is very good in the sixth form.
- Leadership and management within the college are very good. The leadership provided by the headteacher is outstanding.
- The assessment of pupils' progress is very good.
- The dedicated staff support a college which is both caring and challenging for pupils and provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

What could be improved

- Some areas of accommodation restrict the progress pupils can make.
- More opportunities for independent learning across all subjects. The library is too small for a school of this size as is the range of books it contains.
- Expand facilities to meet rising demand for use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning across all subjects.
- Improve the use of assessment data by ensuring that pupils know what they need to do to meet their academic targets.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in February 1997. The college has made very good progress since the time of the last inspection. The results in National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 9 show significant improvement on those results achieved at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE grades A*-C and five GCSE grades A*-G has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now close to the national averages. In tackling the key issues identified in the last inspection report the college has made very good progress. Systems for assessing pupils' attainment, judged to be a weakness at the time of the last inspection, are now a strength. Development planning is no longer a

weakness. There are very effective strategies now in place for ICT and curricular links with partner primary schools are now very good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	C	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	E	E	C	

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

Pupils' results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in the Year 2001 were above the national average in English, mathematics and science. When compared to schools with pupils of a similar background in 2001, the college achieved results at Level 5 and above for English and mathematics which are in the top 5 per cent nationally and which are well above the average for science. In all three subjects the performance of pupils reaching the higher levels of 6 and above is well above the average. Performance by boys exceeded the national averages for boys in English, was in line for science and below for mathematics. Girls' performance was in line for English but below for mathematics and science.

In the 2001 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C was close to the national average. The proportion gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-G and 1 A*-G was above the national average. When compared to similar schools, results in 2001 show that the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C and five or more GCSE grades A*-G was well above average. Boys' results were above the national average over the last three years and girls' results were close to the national average. Girls do better than boys, as they do nationally, but the gap is not pronounced. This is as a result of the effective strategies to tackle boys' underachievement.

Based on the work seen during the inspection, pupils by the end of Year 9 have reached very high standards in English and ICT. Standards in mathematics are high and in all other subjects standards are in line with national averages. By the end of Year 11 pupils have reached very high standards in ICT, high standards in English, design and technology and drama and in all other subjects standards of attainment are close to the national average. Most pupils are achieving well in Years 7 to 9 in relation to their standards when they entered the college. Pupils are making good progress in most of their subjects. In Years 10 and 11 pupils achieve well in English, design and technology, drama, ICT, geography, art and design and appropriately in all other subjects.

The college exceeded the agreed targets set in 2001 for the proportion of pupils gaining 5 A*-C GCSE grades; 1 A*-G grade and average point score. The targets for 2002 are ambitious and the college is confident that 43 per cent of pupils will gain five or more A*-C grades at GCSE and that it will reach its target of 40 average points score and 98 per cent of pupils gaining one or more A*-G grade.

The standard of pupils' written work is good. Pupils write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce an interesting range of extended writing. Most pupils were able to improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Their handwriting is generally satisfactory. The standard of pupils' reading is very good. A majority of pupils read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. Pupils are capable listeners. Standards of numeracy for the majority of pupils are good. The college's very good response to the national numeracy strategy in Years 7 to 9 will support this. Pupils make a good use of number in a range of subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils' attitudes towards their learning have a positive impact on their progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Both in and out of lessons behaviour is very good. Behaviour in the dining areas at break and lunchtimes is outstandingly good.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships within the college are excellent. Older pupils relate extremely well to younger pupils and mentor and support them.
Attendance	Attendance is in line with the national figures and is improving. Pupils are punctual in arriving to lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Very good

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

Teaching and learning are good overall. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good and in the sixth form is very good. Improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection have been good. Of the 137 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 during the inspection over three-quarters were judged to be good or better with only four lessons judged to be unsatisfactory.

The good teaching is having a clear impact on the quality of learning throughout the college and overall pupils are making good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. In Years 7 to 9 the quality of teaching is very good in English and ICT. Teaching is good in all other subjects except for science, modern foreign languages and music where it is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 the quality of teaching is very good in English, mathematics, geography and ICT. Teaching is good in all other subjects except for music and modern foreign languages where it is satisfactory. A particular strength of teaching is the very good knowledge and understanding which teachers have of their subjects. The very good quality of planning ensures that there is a good pace to lessons and that pupils work hard during lessons.

Most teachers share the aims of the lessons with pupils and many teachers test pupils' understanding, to judge whether the lesson's aims have been met. The management of pupils' behaviour in lessons is good and nearly all teachers are consistent in applying the college's behaviour policy. Teachers' expectations are very good in Years 7 to 11. In most lessons pupils at all levels of ability are fully stretched and this ensures that pupils make good gains in acquiring skills and knowledge. The characteristics of those lessons judged to be unsatisfactory were that pupils' behaviour was not effectively managed.

Teachers too infrequently provide pupils with opportunities for independent learning. Too many pupils do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning and are over-reliant on their teachers. Some subjects are making limited use of ICT to support their teaching. The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good. The college has a very effective strategy for teaching the basic skills of literacy. The teaching of numeracy is good and forms an increasing aspect of the mathematics curriculum.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The breadth and balance of the curriculum are good. In the main the curriculum is well matched to meet the needs of pupils. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. It is very good in Years 7 to 9. These pupils are well supported by teachers and learning support assistants alike.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good and provision for moral, social development is very good. Provision for cultural development is good but there are limited opportunities to prepare pupils for living in a multi-cultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The college has a very well developed caring and supporting ethos built on the Catholic faith. Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' welfare are excellent. Pastoral arrangements are strong. Risk assessment is very well monitored. The college has an effective partnership with parents. The assessment of pupils' progress is very good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for the college. He is very well supported by his senior colleagues. The quality of leadership and management by subject co-ordinators is at least satisfactory and often good. It is very good or better in mathematics, art and design, business studies, drama, design and technology, geography, physical education, English, ICT and drama and from those teachers who have pastoral responsibilities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governors are knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the college. They play a significant role in shaping the direction of the college and, both individually and collectively, provide good support for the college.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Performance management has improved the quality of monitoring and development of teaching. The college has made a good start in introducing self-evaluation techniques.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Resources are well targeted to meet the college's priorities for improvement. The accommodation for the number of pupils in the college is inadequate. Learning resources are good and there is a very good match of specialist teachers to meet the curriculum needs of the college. The principles of best value are very well applied in the college. This is well illustrated by recent improvements in the college's catering arrangements.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations for pupils. • Their children are making good progress. • They feel comfortable approaching the school with problems. • They feel that school is helping their child to become mature and responsible. • The school is well led and managed. • The quality of teaching. • Pupils enjoy coming to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some would like to be better informed about how their child is getting on. • Homework. • The school working more closely with parents. • The range of extra-curricular activities.

Most parents are very supportive of the quality of education provided for their children by the college. Inspectors agree with parents on the issues which please them. Inspectors judge that the amount of homework set for pupils is appropriate. However, there is a lack of consistency in keeping to the agreed timetable for homework. Inspectors judge that there are sufficient opportunities for parents to work closely with the college. The inspectors' judgement is that the range of extra-curricular activities is very good and that the quality and frequency of information to parents on their child's progress is good.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form in this large 11-18 comprehensive Catholic college is larger than most sixth forms. Currently there are 205 students, compared with the national average of 166. Girls' outnumber boys in Year 12 but there are similar numbers of males and females in Year 13. Around two thirds of the students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form, which has grown since the last inspection. There is a wide range of academic courses available and some vocational courses. Whilst admission is guided by entry requirements for students for A-level courses and AVCE courses, the college is flexible in individual circumstances. Overall, students' attainment on entry to the sixth form for AS/A-level courses is broadly average and for AVCE and GNVQ intermediate courses is below average. The few students who leave the college during Year 12 or 13 do so to take up subjects that are not part of the college curriculum or to take up local employment. There is relatively little movement between AS courses in Year 12. Most students completing A-level courses at the end of Year 13 go on to higher education. Senior managers and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Overall this is a very good sixth form. The GCE AS/A-level and AVCE average point scores have been below the national averages in recent years. The average point score per entry has improved steadily in the last two years. Results in A-level drama, sociology and mathematics were above the average while art and design, design and technology, history, geography and English Language were below the average in 2001. The wide range of subjects offered results in some very small and non-viable teaching groups in both Years 12 and 13. Teaching is generally very good with particular strengths in the teachers' subject knowledge, planning and classroom management. Relationships between teacher and student are very good and characterised by mutual respect and support.

Strengths

- Standards in work seen in drama, sociology, mathematics, physics, design and technology, sport science, French, German and English are above the national average.
- There has been a significant improvement in students' achievement in many subjects.
- Teaching is very good and teachers have very good specialist knowledge of their subjects.
- Students are very well supported in their personal and academic development. They appreciate the help and guidance they receive from teachers. Students are positive on their views of the college and their experiences in the sixth form.
- The AS, A-level and GNVQ/AVCE courses provided meet students' interests and aspirations well. Students' work is very well monitored and evaluated against a target minimum grade. A very helpful mentoring programme is also provided in Year 13.
- The new management arrangement has strengthened the organisation of the sixth form.

What could be improved

- Standards achieved in examinations in subjects that are below the national average.
- Careers support and guidance during the sixth form course on job prospects.
- Students' study skills and facilities need expanding, so that opportunities for independent research, such as in using ICT, are not curtailed.
- Reducing the high unit costs in the sixth form.

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
English	Very good. In Years 12 and 13, students' attainment in all areas of the curriculum is good. Achievement is good. Teaching is excellent. The subject is led and managed excellently.
Drama	Very Good. Students' attainment is above the national position and attainment in A-level examinations well above average. Students' achievement is at least satisfactory and some students achieve above this. Teaching and learning are very good, built on very good relationships in the classroom.
Physics	Good. Attainment is good in Year 12 and very good in Year 13. Achievement overall is very good. Teaching is good and at times very good. The management of the department is good.
Mathematics	Very Good. A-level results are improving and are now above the national average. Achievement is good. Teaching is at least good and sometimes very good, with students well motivated, ambitious and keen to succeed. Leadership and management are very good and have had a positive impact on the improved standards.
Geography	Good. Although below the national average for the past three years standards are steadily improving. Achievement is now good. This is the result of good teaching, very good leadership and good teamwork among staff in the department.
Sociology	Very Good. Standards of work in lessons and in recent AS and A-level examinations are above the national average. Achievement is very good in Year 12 and good in Year 13. Teaching is very good. Students learn very well due to a strong commitment and stimulating teaching. Leadership and management and a good team spirit are real strengths.
Business studies	Very Good. Attainment overall is in line with the national average. Achievement is very good. Teaching is mostly very good and this is reflected in the quality of students' learning. The department is well led and managed.
Art and design	Very Good. Attainment in recent A-level examinations is well below the national average but the standard of work seen in lessons is much higher than this. Achievement of students over Years 12 and 13 is good. Teaching and learning are very good, based on good knowledge, challenging work and excellent relationships with students.
Health and social care	Very Good. Attainment is in line with the national average. Achievement of students over the period of the course is good. Teaching and learning are very good, with teaching undertaken by a very effective team with very good subject knowledge.
History	Satisfactory. Attainment in A-level examinations over the last four years has been below or well below the national average. Standards of work seen are broadly in line with the national position. Achievement is

	satisfactory. Teaching is good and learning is satisfactory.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
French	Satisfactory. High levels of motivation and independence gained from prior attainment together with satisfactory teaching leads to satisfactory achievement and above average standards.
Music	Unsatisfactory. Standards of work seen are below the national average. Achievement is unsatisfactory overall. Teaching is satisfactory and at times good.
Information and communication technology	Good. Attainment is in line with the national average. Achievement over time is good. Teaching and learning are good. The subject is well led and managed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very Good. Teachers provide very good guidance and support for students' personal development. Procedures for assessing their academic attainment, monitoring progress and setting targets for improvement of standards of work are very well developed. The close monitoring of borderline students, referrals and under-performing students in Year 12 and the mentoring programme in Year 13 are particularly good. There are very good opportunities for enrichment through the sports leadership and community programmes.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very Good. The new management arrangement with the appointment of a head of Year 12 working closely with the head of the sixth form has strengthened the college's provision in the sixth form. There is a clear commitment to the improvement of standards and the quality of provision based on an outstanding Christian ethos and atmosphere that pervade the sixth form. Planning is based on a clear view of the relationship between the sixth form and the main school. Senior staff and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form.

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"> Teachers are accessible for help. The college helps students to settle in well into the sixth form. Students are taught well and challenged to do their best. Students are helped and encouraged to study and undertake research. Students' work is thoroughly assessed so that they can see how to improve it. Students can rely on strong and sensitive support and help from the college if they have personal problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advice given by the college and/or careers adviser on future job prospects. The constructive advice on what they should study in the sixth form. The provision of worthwhile activities, particularly sports, outside their main subjects. The way in which the college listens and responds to students' views.

Inspectors agree with students on the range of positive comments made regarding the sixth form at the college. Inspectors do accept that further improvement is needed in the advice given by the college and/or careers adviser on future job prospects and on the way in which the college listens and responds to students' views. Inspectors judge that the college has the capacity and will to do so. Inspectors believe students receive good guidance on what they should study in the sixth form and that there is a sufficient range of extra-curricular activities.

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

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' attainment on entry is below the national average. However, the prior attainment level of pupils on entry in the current Year 7 is close to the national average. Over recent years the average attainment level on entry has increased year-on-year. As a result of the selection policies within the local education authority many higher attaining pupils attend selective grammar schools. However, the college attracts many higher attaining pupils, but in addition there is a higher than average number of pupils with special educational needs. The college has a positive commitment to social inclusion and evidence indicates that pupils of all levels of attainment make at least satisfactory and often good progress.
2. Pupils' results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in the year 2001 were above the national average in English, mathematics and science. When compared to schools with pupils of a similar background in 2001, pupils in the college achieve results at Level 5 and above which are in the top five per cent nationally and which are well above average for science. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels of Level 6 and above in 2001 was close to the national average for English, mathematics and science. Results for English, mathematics and science show significant improvements on the 2000 results. The performance of boys over the last three years exceeded the national average for English, was in line for science and below for mathematics. The performance of girls was in line for English but below for mathematics and science. The trend in the college's average National Curriculum points score based on the last five years is broadly in line with the national trend.
3. In the 2001 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades was close to the national average, as it has been for the last three years. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades and one or more A*-G grades in 2001 was above the national average. Over the period from 1999–2001 the proportion gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C, five A*-G and one A*-G was close to the national average. The trend in the college's average points score for 2001 was above the national trend. When compared to similar schools the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C and five or more grades A*-G in 2001 was well above the average for these schools. Boys' results were above the national average for boys over the last three years but girls' results were close to the national average. Girls do better than boys, as they do nationally, but the gap is not so pronounced in the college. This is as a result of effective efforts made by the college to tackle boys' underachievement.
4. Analysis of the results for individual subjects in 2001 indicates that there were relatively better results in ICT, design and technology and German. Results for English language, mathematics and religious studies were relatively weaker than the results gained by pupils in their other subjects.
5. Pupils enter the college with standards below the national average. By the end of Year 9 pupils have reached standards that are above the national average and therefore pupils have made good progress in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 pupils achieve appropriately in most subjects, as standards reached by pupils by the age of 16 are close to the national average. However, in relation to the prior attainment of these pupils at the end of Year 9 they have made very good progress, as the average points score achieved by these pupils was well above average. In the work seen, by the end of Year 9 pupils have reached very high standards in English and ICT. They achieve high standards in mathematics and satisfactory standards in all other subjects. By the end of Year 11 pupils' attainment is very high in ICT, high in English and design and technology and standards in all their other subjects that are close to national averages. The rate of progress relates to the prior attainment of pupils. Higher attaining, average attaining and lower attaining pupils make at least good and often very good progress. There are very few pupils from ethnic

minority backgrounds but these pupils are making progress at the same rate as other pupils in the college.

6. By the end of Year 9 most pupils are managing well above average achievement in English and ICT. Achievement is high in mathematics, art and design, design and technology, geography, history and physical education. In all other subjects achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 9. By the end of Year 11 most pupils were managing well above average achievement for ICT. They were achieving well in English, mathematics, art and design, design and technology and geography. In all other subjects pupils were making at least satisfactory progress.
7. Standards in speaking and listening are very good. By the end of Year 11 most boys and girls listen attentively. Pupils are keen to answer questions. This is because they are highly motivated and respond to their teachers' very helpful spoken comments. Where pupils are well prepared for discussions, they make sophisticated contributions and maintain a dialogue at a high level.
8. The standard of pupils' reading is very good. A majority of pupils read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. All pupils are encouraged to improve the quality of their reading by reading aloud.
9. The standard of pupils' written work is good. ICT is used effectively for drafting. Pupils write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce an interesting range of extended writing. Good oral work prior to writing often helped pupils to write more extensively. Most pupils were able to improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Their handwriting at this stage is generally satisfactory.
10. Standards of numeracy for the majority of pupils are good. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum is being planned. The college's very good response to the national numeracy strategy in Years 7 to 9 will support this. The development of pupils' numerical skills forms an increasing aspect of the mathematics curriculum. Lessons in all years involve starting and finishing exercises and pupils show good levels of skill and confidence with number when undertaking these exercises. Pupils make a good use of number in a range of subjects. For example, in science, geography and modern foreign languages pupils demonstrate their ability to draw accurate graphs and analyse and interpret data. In physical education pupils were interpreting and analysing data. In ICT pupils were producing graphs from spreadsheets and demonstrating their ability to handle and interpret data.
11. It is clear that pupils are not restricting their experience of mathematics but are transferring their mathematical learning effectively to different contexts. It is planned that all college staff will be involved in development activities relating to numeracy for one day in April 2002.
12. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs is good. Their good progress is reflected in the proportion of pupils leaving the College with one or more GCSE grades A*-G, which is well above the average when compared with similar schools.
13. The provision that the college is making for gifted and talented pupils is good. The college is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, and has identified a cohort of five per cent of pupils in each year group who are given opportunities for extension of their work, both within the curriculum in college and opportunities out of college. In the majority of lessons the quality of teaching and the ways pupils are extended, contribute to ensuring that the needs of these pupils are catered for. Some pupils in Year 9 are working towards Level 8 in English, mathematics and/or science.

Sixth form

14. The results at GCE Advanced level have been below average over the last three years. In 1999 the students entered for two or more GCE A-levels averaged 11.9 in comparison with the national average of 17.9. In 2000 these results had risen to a score of 12.9 when the national average was 18.2. In 2001 there has been a further improvement with the college's average point score for GCE AS/A-level examinations of 14.3 closer to the national average of 17.4. Results in the AVCE

courses have also improved and in 2001 the average points score per candidate at 9.9 was close to the national position of 10.6.

15. Students were entered for the full range of GCE AS-level examination for the first time in 2001. Comparison with national averages is not possible as the national data are not available. 28.5 per cent of students gained the highest grades of A and B and only 7 per cent were un-graded. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. The standards reached in the GNVQ intermediate level courses in 2001 were above the national average overall. Results in business where there was a 100 per cent pass and health and social care where there was a 93 per cent pass rate were very high against the national position.
16. Students enter the sixth form for AS and A-level courses with attainment at GCSE that is broadly in line with the national average. It is higher in Year 12 than Year 13. It is however, below the national average for students who enter the GNVQ courses in Year 12 and the AVCE Year 12 and 13 courses. The noticeably improved GCE A-level results over recent years and above average AS results in 2001 indicate good achievement when compared with students' GCSE results. Achievement in vocational courses is similarly good overall. It generally shows above average achievement in relation to students' attainment at GCSE. Students with special needs achieve well.
17. In 2001, most students who entered the sixth form in 2000 continued their studies in Year 13. Most of those leaving at the end of Year 12 proceeded to employment following the completion of their one year GNVQ intermediate course but some, in particular those completing the intermediate level engineering course, went on to further their studies at a local college of further education. Some students on completion of the GNVQ course in Year 12 proceeded to commence the Advanced GNVQ course in the same subject in Year 13 at the college. At the end of their time in the sixth form over a third of students proceed to higher education and most of the others continue their education in colleges of further education or seek employment locally.
18. The work seen during the inspection reflected clearly improving standards in most subjects. Standards are above average in drama, mathematics, physics, sociology, design and technology, sports studies, French, German and English. Standards are broadly average in geography, history, business studies, art and design, health and social care and ICT. Standards are below the national average in music and work seen was not at the level to be expected. The programme of study in music lacks structure and, together with accommodation limitations and lack of independent study facilities, adversely affects standards.
19. Achievement is good or very good in most subjects. Elsewhere it is satisfactory in French and history but is unsatisfactory in music. Many students have drawn effectively on advanced skills of research analysis and synthesis to argue convincingly from a good base of knowledge and understanding. They can often place the topic taught within the broader context of study. Most are able to make effective use of ICT in their studies and particularly in GCE project work. Key skills such as communications, study skills and problem solving inhibit the achievement of some students, particularly on GNVQ courses.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

20. Pupils display a very good attitude to the college and as a result make very good progress. Pupils interviewed during the inspection week confirmed that they like college and the parental questionnaire confirmed their views.
21. In the many lessons pupils displayed a great interest and involvement in their activities. For example, in a history lesson, pupils discussed together the merits of the Royalists and Roundheads in the Civil War and were able to give their views and perceptions of the monarchy at that time. Most pupils in lessons listen attentively to their teachers and are very keen to answer questions.

22. They have a healthy respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others. In an excellent assembly observed, pupils emulated victims of the Nazi Holocaust in concentration camps and the whole year group displayed awe, wonder and deep concerns for the victims of Nazi atrocities.
23. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into college life and participate fully in lessons. Attitudes to their work are positive and respond well to the good level of work they receive.
24. Pupils' behaviour is good. There is a very good level of co-operation between pupils, teachers and college staff and in most lessons behaviour was at least good. This has a very positive impact on learning and pupils' progress.
25. The college's ethos and mission statement of 'Inspired by the Spirit of Jesus Christ our college community is for the development of every member through service to each other' is very well understood and demonstrated by the pupils in their daily life and conduct. Pupils identify the high expectation that the college has for pupils' behaviour and they respond accordingly. Although some corridors in the college are narrow and some classrooms are cramped, pupils move around the building without jostling. At lunchtimes, pupils of all year groups mix and integrate well, making them pleasant social occasions.
26. Pupils treat their own property and other people's property with great care. Library books, computer and video facilities are all treated with respect and the college is free of graffiti and litter.
27. The college treats all matters of bullying extremely seriously and, although such incidents are rare, staff are effective in dealing with them promptly.
28. Very occasionally a very small number of pupils display poor behaviour and inattention in class. In these lessons pupils work at a slow pace and lack enthusiasm. These mainly occur where teaching is less focused and lessons are not matched to pupils' needs. Exclusions are rare and only for good reason. Procedures are correctly followed.
29. Pupils' personal development is good. Relationships throughout the college are excellent and pupils interviewed say the college is a friendly place and that they feel safe and secure within it. Pupils are given and accept a good level of responsibility. Two members of each year group are elected to the college council and the senior management team monitors and implements some of their decisions, such as: improvement in college meals, water fountain facilities, change in college uniform and new provision of breakfast facilities. Year 10 pupils go to the local primary school to work with pupils, and the primary school visited during the Inspection week confirms that they find their work invaluable and their behaviour impeccable. Other pupils act as receptionists, help with college productions, liaise well with Year 7 pupils and are very actively involved in fundraising for a variety of charities. They involve themselves in a variety of extra-curricular activities.
30. Pupils' attendance at 92.5 per cent is satisfactory and improving. The college is working hard to improve attendance and attendance is now close to the national average. Parents are made aware of unexplained absences and know that the college will accept only authorised absences. The lack of an electronic registration system means that teachers and staff have to extract information by hand. Pupils are mainly punctual and lessons start on time.

Sixth form

31. Students are very positive in their view of the college. A high proportion of students completed the students' questionnaire and criticisms were few. In discussion students were very positive about the sixth form and would strongly recommend it to others. They are very appreciative of the support they receive from the head of the sixth form, head of Year 12, form tutors and subject teachers. Their main criticisms are the limited opportunities to access ICT facilities for study purposes and the limited range of worthwhile activities, particularly sports, outside their main subjects. While students receive very good advice and support regarding university applications

and choices they feel that advice and information relating to future job prospects is inadequate. The college provides a very helpful options booklet for intending sixth form students but students feel the need for more constructive advice on what they should study in the sixth form. Students feel that the college listens appropriately to their views but that the response is not always clearly conveyed to them.

32. Sixth form students' attitudes towards the college are very good. Students interviewed by the inspection team confirm they enjoy college and feel that staff make considerable efforts to advance their education. They value and enjoy life in the sixth form. A very good atmosphere of understanding and confidence pervades the college from the sixth form and this has a positive influence on the rest of the college.
33. The sixth form students provide excellent role models. Students are positive in their attitude towards their studies. They are extremely anxious to perform well in examinations and work very hard to achieve the results they need. They complete their coursework in the given time limits, pay attention and come to lessons on time. The overwhelming majority of students have very positive attitudes to their work and they demonstrate maturity and very good behaviour in lessons. Exclusions do not occur in the sixth form.
34. Students study skills are generally satisfactorily developed and they work both independently and collaboratively together. Resources are well used throughout the college, though some students feel that careers information could be improved.
35. Students' personal development is very good. They display a sense of pride in themselves, their work and their college. The very good support provided by the college staff for sixth formers has a very positive effect on their progress. Tutors regularly meet them and discuss progress towards the predicted grades. Students are helped and encouraged to undertake research and their work is fairly assessed so that they can see how to improve it.
36. Students can rely on strong and sensitive help and support from the college if they have personal problems. Pupils take on responsibilities which include: supervising pupils at break and lunchtime and providing assistance to local primary schools and acting as mentors to younger pupils.
37. The college is rightly proud of its sixth form.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

38. Teaching and learning are good overall. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good and in the sixth form is very good. Improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection have been good. At the time of the last inspection 18 per cent of lessons were judged to be very good or better and this has now improved to 34 per cent. Of the 137 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 during the inspection over three-quarters were judged to be good or better with only four lessons judged to be unsatisfactory.
39. The good teaching is having a clear impact on the quality of learning throughout the college and overall pupils are making good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. In the best lessons when pupils are taught well the pace of pupils' learning is very good. When teaching is good and the level of challenge is high, pupils' response is good and they make good gains in developing their levels of skills, knowledge and understanding.
40. In Years 7 to 9 the quality of teaching and learning is very good in English, drama and ICT. Teaching is good in all other subjects, except for science, modern foreign languages and music where it is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 the quality of teaching is very good in English, mathematics, geography and ICT. Teaching is good in all other subjects except for music and modern foreign languages where it is satisfactory. A particular strength of teaching is the very good knowledge and understanding that teachers have of their subjects. In the best lessons the

enthusiasm that teachers have for their subjects is reflected in the very high levels of interest shown by pupils. The very good quality of planning ensures that there is a good pace to lessons and that pupils work hard during lessons.

41. Most teachers share the aims of the lessons with pupils and at the end of lessons many teachers test pupils' understanding to judge whether the lesson's aims have been met. The management of pupils' behaviour in lessons is good and nearly all teachers are consistent in applying the college's behaviour policy. Teachers' expectations are very good in Years 7 to 11. In most lessons pupils at all levels of ability are fully stretched and this ensures that pupils make good gains in acquiring skills and knowledge. Higher attaining pupils are well challenged as are average attaining pupils. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and none are at the early stages of learning English but the quality of teaching effectively matches their needs. The characteristics of those lessons judged to be unsatisfactory were that pupils' behaviour was not effectively managed.
42. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods in Years 7 to 11. The variety of teaching methods sustains pupils' interest and concentration in the hour-long lessons. However, teachers rarely provide pupils with opportunities for independent learning. Too many pupils do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning and are over-reliant on their teachers. Many subjects are making limited use of ICT to support their teaching. Teachers are confident about using ICT but the difficulty in accessing computers is the principal reason why there is limited use. Although the college is resourced in line with other schools for ICT, the success of the training teachers have received results in the college being unable to match the demand for the use of computers.
43. A feature of most lessons is the constructive, purposeful relationship between teachers and their pupils. The good use of praise by teachers enables pupils to feel secure and confident enough to answer and ask questions.
44. Teachers mark pupils' work carefully and accurately but most teachers are not using marking to indicate to pupils what they need to do to improve their work. The college has a lot of data from external testing of pupils' attainment that is being used very well to monitor pupils' progress. The weakness is that the targets are not yet shared with pupils in all year groups and pupils do not know what they need to do to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding. These issues are recognised by the college and are a priority for improvement within the college development plan.
45. Several parents raised concerns about the homework set. The inspectors' judgement is that the setting of homework is good. During the inspection week appropriate homework tasks were set. Pupils felt that the amount of homework set was appropriate. However, not all teachers follow the agreed timetable for the setting of homework.
46. The quality of teaching pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers provide appropriately challenging work that encourages pupils to participate fully and which raises self-esteem and builds confidence. The excellent relationship formed with teachers when pupils are withdrawn into smaller groups for additional support leads to good progress. When teachers believe that it is timely, pupils are able to move back into mainstream lessons, having followed the same programme of work. Teachers are well qualified and use successful teaching methods to help pupils with their particular needs, for example, dyslexia and Asperger's syndrome. Teaching assistants are very effective in supporting pupils. They are involved in planning work and reviewing progress. Each subject area has a nominated teacher with responsibility for special educational needs. This group of teachers meets regularly with the special educational needs co-ordinator to discuss progress and share concerns. Form tutors have a pastoral responsibility for those pupils with special educational needs in their tutor group. This work is co-ordinated by the head of year who attends review meetings of pupils' individual education plans.
47. The college has a very effective strategy for teaching the basic skills of literacy. Many departments have developed clear literacy strategies and others are following this lead. Teachers recognise their role in making these strategies work. There are examples of good practice in

most departments. For example, key words are displayed in mathematics. Teachers emphasise the technical application of these words. Speaking and listening skills are well developed in drama, geography and physical education. For example, in geography pupils are encouraged to discuss, analyse and develop ideas for public debate. In modern foreign languages pupils' attention is focused on spelling, presentation and grammatical accuracy.

48. Teaching of numeracy is good. All mathematics lessons involve starting and finishing with numeracy tasks and pupils show good levels of skill and confidence with number when undertaking these exercises. Pupils make a good use of number in a range of subjects and it is clear that pupils are not restricting their experiences of mathematics but are transferring their mathematical learning effectively across other subjects.

Sixth form

49. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. This is seen in the lessons observed and in the evidence such as students' written work, schemes of work and lesson plans. In all lessons seen during the inspection the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better. In almost half of lessons teaching was good and in four out of ten of lessons it was very good or excellent. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Overall teaching in the sixth form has improved noticeably since the last inspection, due to the greater emphasis placed on the development of independent study and students' learning generally. The impact of improved teaching and learning is seen in improved achievement and standards of work.
50. Teaching is excellent in English and very good in drama, performance studies, sociology, business studies, economics, art and design, design and technology, sport studies and German. It is good in mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, geography, history, health and social care, leisure and recreation, travel and tourism and ICT. It is satisfactory in French and music.
51. The strengths of the teaching include teachers' subject expertise, detailed and often imaginative planning and interesting and lively presentation that involve students in their own learning. The teachers' very good subject knowledge is used very effectively to provide clear aims and focused explanations. This enables students to acquire high quality, relevant knowledge and good understanding of the topic taught. This is a strong feature of most lessons and at best the teachers' expertise inspires students to share the teachers' enthusiasm for the subject. This was well exemplified in a Year 12 lesson in English where students' interest and enthusiasm were aroused by the teacher's lively and excellent presentation of the study of the character of Alice in Wonderland. Students were fully involved in their own learning and made articulate responses based on textual evidence that was widened to a comparative analysis of Victorian and contemporary education. Students were confident enough and willing to test their opinions in class. They presented their ideas enthusiastically and analysed each other's work well. There was very good promotion of independent learning. Similarly, in a joint Year 12 and 13 lesson in health and social care, where relationships were excellent, the teacher was extremely knowledgeable about the topic and emphasised the relationship between obedience and residential care. The teacher conveyed great enthusiasm about the subject and motivated students to develop their understanding of the implications of obedience in relation to their own experiences on their visits to local care homes. This led to high levels of achievement as appropriate to both groups of students.
52. Teachers' good expertise also results in good lesson planning, providing clear aims and objectives and helping students to understand the purpose of lessons. Lessons are always well structured and focused and the requirements of the course syllabus thoroughly covered. Management of students is good and built on very productive relationships between teacher and student. Teaching is purposeful, lively, interesting and presented at brisk pace with real challenge and high expectations. In most lessons the question and answer technique is skillfully used, often aided by visual materials, to extend students' knowledge and understanding of the topic taught. In many lessons there are high quality interventions by the teacher to re-inforce theory and this results in very effective learning. This was seen well illustrated in a Year 12 lesson in sociology on the topic of family divorce. Here the teacher established the key terminology and provided high quality

support material that included statistical data. Students were encouraged to contribute to discussion through skillful questioning by the teacher, based on developing their previous knowledge. This led to very good learning as students' understanding of the topic was extended. It was further splendidly consolidated by the students as they discussed their findings in small groups before presenting their views to the class. Achievement was impressive.

53. There were few shortcomings in teaching. However, in some history and geography lessons there was a tendency for teachers to use their good exposition skills well but there was insufficient challenge given to students to develop their contributions in discussion so that students' learning suffered. At times the pace of the teaching was rather slow and there was little independent learning evident. Students had very little ownership of ideas aired during the lesson. In French, while teaching overall was satisfactory, there were opportunities missed in some lessons to develop speaking skills structures and a greater understanding of language in texts used.
54. While learning is very good overall, there is still scope in some lessons for further development of students' capacity for research, critical analysis and wider reading around their subjects so that the context of study is even more firmly established.

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

55. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good in all years. The curriculum is fully inclusive and provides a broad range of learning experiences, which are well suited to the aspirations and aptitudes of pupils. Planning is well developed and there is a clear vision to ensure that all pupils, including those with special education needs, have access to the whole curriculum. The legal requirements of the National Curriculum are met in Years 7 to 11 and all other statutory requirements are met throughout the college. The issues requiring attention, which were identified in the last inspection, have all been resolved successfully.
56. The curriculum has been broadened since the last inspection, especially in terms of vocational provision. The performing arts curriculum has also been strengthened. Good use has been made of performance data to inform curriculum planning. In Years 10 and 11 a high percentage of pupils are disapplied from aspects of the National Curriculum in order to match their aspirations more effectively.
57. In ICT all pupils in Years 7 to 9 have ICT lessons but in Years 10 and 11 the cross-curricular provision is not yet fully developed to ensure equality of experience for the half of each year group who do not take an ICT examination course. The college hopes to remedy this situation by providing ICT lessons for all as soon as the level of resources allows.
58. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 all teachers the college needs to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate for all by ensuring greater consistency in the use of individual education plans (IEPs). In many subjects IEPs contain comprehensive information about pupils and are used effectively to set appropriate targets. The college has an effective policy for gifted and talented pupils and strategies are developing well throughout the college to ensure that they have opportunities to make appropriate progress. This includes visits and attending conferences in some subjects, for example history.
59. The effectiveness of strategies for teaching literacy skills is good. Teachers promote the use of key words within their subjects: these are usually displayed prominently and are being used well. The effectiveness of strategies for improving numeracy skills is satisfactory.
60. Pupils value the comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities. Overall provision is good, particularly in physical education where there is a particularly high take-up. Four out of ten pupils take up some extra-curricular sport, which is well supported by eight members of staff. There are visits to museums, galleries and the theatre as well as numerous outdoor pursuits. Extra-

curricular provision is good in design and technology, and pupils can use ICT resources outside lesson times in most parts of the building. The college has an attached youth club, which provides a range of activities and is well supported.

61. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is very well planned and effective. A sign of the college's commitment has been to change the college timetable, which now has been adjusted to include an extra period every second week to accommodate PSHE. The co-ordinator works closely with heads of year, the careers co-ordinator and other colleagues. The programme is closely monitored and evaluated. A number of outside contributors are used including road safety officers, prison officers, drugs counsellors and careers advisers. Sex and relationships education is delivered through religious education in all years.
62. Careers advice meets all requirements, beginning as necessary in Year 9. All pupils who are disapplied from aspects of the National Curriculum have careers interviews as required. There is a good range of careers software on the college computer network, which can be used by whole-class groups when necessary. All pupils in Year 11 have one week of work experience, which is well planned, supervised, and followed up appropriately. There are very good links with the local business community, which are used to good effect by the business studies department.
63. Collaboration with feeder primary schools is effective and there are links with higher education institutions, including the education department at a local university. There are numerous links with other local organisations, including charities and numerous fundraising events are organised throughout the year.
64. The quality of the provision within the college is good for pupils with special educational needs. The structure of responsibilities and commitment of staff ensures that pupils identified as having special educational needs are catered for, especially in Years 7 to 9. The use of ICT and its relevant, structured programmes, especially 'Successmaker', is well integrated into schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 to support and develop skills in literacy and numeracy. However, not all subject teachers understand individual education plans nor how they influence schemes of work and teaching methods, especially in Years 10 and 11. There is a lack of consistency by all classroom teachers in the use of individual education plans.
65. There is good, effective co-ordination of the provision for gifted and talented pupils by the co-ordinator. The co-ordinator brings together the link teacher for gifted and talented pupils in each subject for reports on progress and sharing good practice on a regular basis. The co-ordinator on an annual basis interviews each pupil formally annually, and they are in regular informal contact as well.
66. All subject and form teachers have a list of the identified pupils in their teaching groups in their mark books. This information gives teachers a greater awareness of these pupils and they respond appropriately. Parents have been informed that their child is part of the cohort and are kept informed of progress and activities through parents' evenings and newsletters.
67. Further opportunities for extension to, and enrichment of, learning experiences and challenges are provided within the curriculum and within the wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities. Funding for these activities and extra resource funding for individual subjects is met from a discrete budget for this group of pupils through the Excellence in Cities initiative.
68. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have attended extension sessions at Wirral Able Children's Centre to take part in the Odyssey Project, which involved aspects of art and design, science and ICT. Music and art and design come together in joint productions as well as individual performances and trips in their own right, along with theatre visits, and pupils represent the college in sporting events.
69. The college's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils is very good overall. Provision for spiritual development is very good. Numerous opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect upon their own and others' lives and beliefs. The Lent assemblies focused upon 'going the extra mile', and during the inspection there was a most effective input from both senior and junior pupils on the horrors of Auschwitz. Senior pupils had actually visited the

concentration camp recently. Assemblies are well thought out and contribute well to pupils' moral and social development. They include focused Christian worship and this provides opportunities for reflection and pupils' spiritual development in which all can share. There is a year group assembly each day and a daily act of worship in tutor time, which is planned and supported by a daily service attached to the bulletin.

70. Elsewhere in the curriculum pupils consider life's fundamental questions. In science they explore the start of life, in geography and science pupils consider natural forces at work in earthquakes and volcanic eruptions – their inescapability and inevitability.

71. Provision for moral development is very good. The college has clear values, recognised and supported by the community. The excellent relationships throughout the college community are based upon mutual respect. Teachers expect pupils to behave courteously and with consideration for the rights and feelings of others – and they do. Classrooms and corridors are enlivened with displays of pupils' work, which, in the main, are thoughtfully displayed, and indicative of the way in which the college values and celebrates pupils' achievements. All work in a clean and almost litter free environment. The taught curriculum makes a significant contribution to pupils' development of a secure sense of right and wrong. The programme for personal, social and health education provides numerous opportunities for pupils to consider the importance of responsible moral behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to consider moral and ethical issues in a number of subjects: in English as response to tragedy and to issues of social class in texts; in science in recognising how scientific knowledge can have harmful as well as beneficial effects; in religious education the issues of developing interpersonal relationships in the area of sex education; in geography in considering the impact of people's actions on the environment and the importance of balancing present needs with those of future generations.
72. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to a real community and are loyal to the college. Pupils respond enthusiastically to opportunities to work together co-operatively, especially in extra-curricular activities. There is a democratically elected college council which meets regularly. The members report back to their year groups. The college listens and responds to pupils' views. Pupils appreciate the range of extra-curricular activities including retreats, charity work, sports and a wide variety of visits. These give them scope to mix and make new friends and deepen their relationships with their teachers. Pupils respond well to these opportunities and are excellent ambassadors for the college.
73. Provision for cultural education is good. Contributions are made to this provision by music, art, drama and a range of extra-curricular activities, for example, visits to art galleries, museums, concerts and theatre. Opportunities are also provided through dance, drama, mime and poetry in assemblies and tutor time. Pupils are introduced well to their own cultural heritage through English, history, and religious education lessons. There are limited opportunities for pupils to prepare for life in a multi-cultural society. The college takes an active part in the Comenius Project which enables students to be closely linked to other European schools.

Sixth form

74. Curriculum planning reflects the college's strong commitment to offer broad and flexible learning opportunities to meet the wide range of students' aspirations. Through Curriculum 2000 the college has provided greater breadth, providing a very large number of AS and A-level courses together with four double award AVCE courses and 4 GNVQ intermediate groups. The college now has 'Cisco Systems Academy' status to provide internationally recognised training and qualifications for ICT technicians. This wide range of courses provides a very good match for students' aspirations and responds to local needs, but many of the teaching groups are small and not necessarily viable in educational or financial terms. The college does try to compensate by doubling up teaching groups where there are different award levels in vocational courses and some students take courses outside timetabled lessons, for example art. Key skills lessons are only offered in ICT this year, however, many students are unable to fit these lessons into their timetables. Support arrangements for students with special needs are satisfactory and the needs of the gifted and talented are recognised with, for example, visits to higher education institutions and conferences.
75. Provision for extra-curricular activities in the sixth form are good. There are also many opportunities to pursue cultural interests and many students take part in very successful charity events. Opportunities are provided for reflection for students who choose to take part in the regular retreats which are offered. Religious education students in Year 12 have a valuable community placement, which runs throughout the year.
76. The PSHE and careers programmes continue into Years 12 and 13, building upon the experiences in earlier years. Students feel that they are very well supported through the pastoral

system in the sixth form and the majority say they are given good advice and guidance in their choice of courses and routes for the future, although a significant minority say they would benefit from more focused careers advice.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

77. The college has excellent procedures to ensure pupils' well-being and health and safety.
78. Child protection procedures are excellent. The designated child protection officer and his deputy have received appropriate training and arrange 'cascade' training for all other members of staff. All staff know and understand the college's child protection policy and adhere to it. The college has very close liaison with the social services department and monitors very well the progress on cases referred to them. Record-keeping is exemplary and 'looked after' pupils and pupils on the 'at risk' register are carefully tracked.
79. Arrangements for first aid are extremely good. The college benefits from having two qualified nurses (one of who is employed full time). The other nurse is employed by the local authority and is available for pupils on a 'drop in' basis. Their work is much appreciated. In addition the college has a number of staff with first aid qualifications. Excellent records of accidents are kept and the administration of medicines by the nursing staff are meticulously recorded.
80. The college has bought in the professional services of the local authority who carry out, on its behalf, risk assessment and health and safety audits. As a result all departments receive regular risk assessment updates and the college health and safety officer, together with heads of departments, promotes the very high standard of health and safety in the college. The fire alarm is regularly tested and regular fire drills are held. Good records are kept and regular and concise reports on health and safety are made to the governing body which has a link governor for health and safety matters.
81. The college has a very well developed caring and supporting ethos built on the Catholic faith. As a result pupils and students are able to learn well and with confidence. Educational support and guidance for them is very good. Staff value and know their pupils and students well. The college pastoral system is extremely effective and relationships among teachers, pupils and students are excellent. Form tutors, who move up the college with their own tutor group, provide excellent role models and continuity of care. Teachers know their pupils well and relate to them easily. They make time and provide opportunities for individual discussion with pupils and each pupil receives a personal progress interview with their form tutor at least once per year in which pupils' achievements and difficulties are discussed and targets are set.
82. Heads of year and 'trainee' heads of year offer high levels of care and provide good support to form tutors whom they line manage. Heads of year and form tutors work very hard together to give help and guidance to pupils who have academic and personal problems.
83. Some pupils at the college come from homes where life is difficult, complicated and challenging. The college staff display very high levels of concern and commitment not only to help this group of pupils, but all pupils in their care. The inspection team confirms the views of parents that their children are well looked after and their needs are met.
84. The college has very good arrangements for promoting pupils' personal development, including mentoring, through the recently appointed mentors who work through the 'Bosco centre'. The PSHE, programme, extra-curricular activities, visits by pupils and visitors to the college ensure that pupils' personal development is well promoted. Pastoral teams actively monitor pupils' personal development and parents receive good information about progress at parent evenings.
85. Procedures at the college for the monitoring and promoting of good behaviour and the elimination of oppressive behaviour are good. The simple and concise system of reward and sanctions and the 'pyramid' system of recording levels of sanctions are well understood by pupils. Behaviour policy is consistently applied throughout the college and in most lessons seen during the inspection week pupils behaved well, remained on task and learned well. In the few instances of

poor behaviour, pupils' needs were not adequately addressed and they found it difficult to concentrate and succeed.

86. Good behaviour is reinforced through the college's Catholic ethos, assemblies, PHSE programme and adult example. The 'Bosco centre', which was opened in 2000, provides very positive support to pupils whose learning is inhibited due to pastoral, social or learning difficulties, and the appointment of three qualified learning mentors, managed by a senior learning mentor, has resulted in help and counselling being given to pupils who are in imminent danger of temporary or permanent exclusion. Whilst the exclusion figures have not yet improved, the operation of the centre is much appreciated by staff, parents and pupils alike and will doubtless have an impact on the work of the college.
87. Pupils and parents interviewed stated that incidents of bullying or oppressive behaviour are few but, when they occur, they are dealt with effectively by staff.
88. The college's procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are satisfactory. The college has not yet installed a computerised system for registration and the education welfare officer, who works well with the college, has to manually trawl the registers each day to identify non-attenders and contact their parents on the first day of absence. This takes a great deal of time. The pastoral team monitors attendance, and learning mentors and parents are contacted if there are any concerns. Good attendance is rewarded and attendance figures are regularly reported to the governors, who set targets. As a result of the governors' pro-active approach, attendance is improving and is now close to the national average.
89. The special needs co-ordinator has a very good knowledge of the pupils and ensures that all teachers have a copy of the college's special educational needs register and the individual education plans of any pupil who is in a teacher's class. Where support staff are timetabled they are effective in ensuring that pupils learn successfully, gaining the knowledge and understanding of the subject to make good progress. It is not possible to have assistants in every class and there are, inevitably, some lessons where support is needed but cannot be provided.
90. Pupils with statements of special educational needs have their progress reviewed annually and their special needs assessed for the following year. Parents are invited to attend reviews and pupils contribute their feelings about their progress. For these pupils at the end of Year 9, special transition plans can be put in place, which help them cope with changes of teaching and learning styles that they may encounter in following new courses. Subject teachers and assistants contribute to the review of the individual education plans. Very good use is made of ICT in producing appropriate and sophisticated documentation for individual education plans, which is also designed to help when these plans are reviewed

Assessment

91. The procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress are very good. The assessment and marking policy clearly details the procedures to be followed for assessing pupils and sets out the basic principle that assessment should recognise achievement and promote future learning. There is a consistent policy for marking used by all teachers, indicating attainment and effort. It has various purposes. It is so designed that pupils should have a clear idea of their own progress, and see what they need to do to improve. Secondly, the recording of progress allows the college to assess how effective teaching and learning have been, and guide plans for developing the curriculum. And thirdly, it keeps parents fully informed.
92. A strength of the system is the meticulous collecting of data from the moment pupils join the college. Each pupil's level of attainment in primary school in English, mathematics and science is recorded, along with tests taken on joining St Mary's, and this information is fed to all teachers, who can use it to monitor progress. Furthermore, this extensive range of data allows the college to set individual pupil targets for all pupils in Years 8 and 9 in all subjects except physical education and religious education. Similar targets will be set for Year 7 by April 2002. In addition, record cards are produced for all pupils in every year, giving forecast grades, details of

special needs, and information about pupils who are gifted and talented. In Year 11 all pupils have sessions with senior staff in which this information is used to discuss progress and give advice before the GCSE exams. The wealth of data allows the college to measure achievement, that is, how well pupils are doing in comparison with prior attainment. It also provides analysis of examination success for every teaching group in every subject.

93. Good assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress was observed in nearly all departments, but particularly in art, ICT and design, mathematics, physical education, history, geography, English and drama. In science and design and technology, however, the pupils were not sufficiently aware of their National Curriculum levels or of what they needed to do to improve. In all subjects there is close co-operation between the teacher and the pastoral staff.
94. Reports are sent to parents twice a year. On the first occasion an interim report tells parents about current attainment and what target grades have been set in each subject. Teachers indicate which pupils are underachieving. They give a grade for effort, and comments if necessary on problems with homework, behaviour or attendance. The main report gives a page to each subject, with an explanation of the course and the way it is examined. All aspects of performance are indicated, such as behaviour, organisation, concentration and homework.
95. Improvement since the last report has been very good. Weakness in assessment was then a key issue. The college has taken all the steps necessary and put in place procedures which have been well thought through. They are applied with consistency, even if a few subjects are weaker in some aspects of their application than others. The accumulation of data is now unusually extensive, making excellent use of new technology. The data is disseminated effectively and in most departments very well used.

Sixth Form

96. Assessment is very good in the sixth form. The very good use of data continues from the main school. Results in GCSE are used to predict "target minimum grades" in all sixth form examinations. Letters sent to parents tell them what these grades are, and whether the student is performing at levels above or below these minimum grades. Students are supported by regular and effective mentoring, a system which allows full discussion of strengths and weaknesses, and ways to improve. Students appreciate the help they are given.

Advice, support and guidance in the sixth form

97. Students are very well supported by their teachers and this is a strength of the sixth form. Student questionnaire responses and the opinions of the students interviewed praised the teachers highly for going out of their way to provide helpful and constructive support and guidance. Advice and guidance is well structured to provide continuing academic and welfare support, as an intrinsic part of sixth form provision.
98. There is a good sixth form induction programme at the beginning of Year 12 and students are well informed about sixth form life and the expectations that staff have of them. The well developed PHSE programme includes study skills, citizenship and careers and liaison with the careers department is good. Students are encouraged to take responsibility within the college and make decisions about their future.
99. The career guidance provided is well structured and there is very helpful support for those students preparing for higher education. While there is good use made of the Careers Connection service, there is insufficient advice and information provided for those students regarding job prospects.
100. Attendance and punctuality in the sixth form are good. Students are very keen to attend and usually are on time for lessons. Staff follow up absences. The very good support and the advice provided by staff enable sixth formers to make very good progress.
101. A significant minority of sixth form students who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire thought that they were not well informed by the college and careers adviser on their future careers. The inspection findings do not concur with these views. Student interviews confirm that the support and guidance given to them is good. The college offers good advice and support to all its students. The career guidance is well structured and the college makes good use of the

Connections Service, who come into college on a regular basis. Tutors and staff in the sixth form are very caring and readily give guidance.

102. Attendance and punctuality in the sixth form are good. Students are very keen to attend and usually are on time for lessons. Staff follow up absences. The very good support and the advice provided by staff enable sixth formers to make very good progress.
103. Students receive appropriate advice on the suitability of Year 13 courses in the light of their achievement in Year 12.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

104. St. Mary's College is the first choice of very many parents and pupils and this is demonstrated by the fact that the college is over-subscribed. A significant minority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that they do not receive sufficient information about their children's progress and the college does not work closely with them. The inspection findings do not concur with these views.
105. The college works extremely hard to support parents and makes great efforts to keep them well informed about their children's progress. The college responds extremely well to parental concerns, contacts parents promptly if they have any cause for concern, and informs parents immediately of any action taken. Parents are encouraged to visit the college without appointments to talk to the headteacher or staff at any time.
106. In Year 7 the college arranges three parents' evenings per annum, one prior to pupils' admission and two during their first year at college. Other Year group evenings are arranged after publication of interim reports which give grades for academic, pastoral and behavioural efforts. Annual reports give precise grades and target setting.
107. The college diary provides a continuous means of communication between home and college. These diaries are well monitored and staff respond very well to comments made by parents.
108. The view expressed by some parents, that their children do not get the right amount of homework, were confirmed by the inspection team. The issue of homework is evident throughout the college - some children receiving too much and some too little. Some departments do have a homework policy but the college does not have a holistic approach.
109. The quality of information provided by the college is good. A regular newsletter is produced which is well written, attractively presented and provides interesting information on activities promoted by the college and pupils' achievements. The college prospectus is professionally produced and again is attractively presented, parent-friendly and contains all statutory information that parents need. An additional guide is provided giving all the information that parents need to ensure their children settle quickly into college. The governors' annual report to parents is extremely detailed and gives a good deal of information on the work of the college, reported department by department.
110. The level of involvement by parents is good. The small home/college association is a lively and successful body, which organises and arranges many fundraising events such as charity auctions, discos, providing refreshment at college events and other functions. During the past year the association has raised the large sum of £8,000 which has been well used by the college for purchasing gardening equipment, physical education kit and library books. Its work is much appreciated by the college.
111. The college has sent a questionnaire to all parents on what parental activities they wish the college to provide and as a result the college has provided facilities for ICT lessons, five-a-side football, aromatherapy, keep fit and slimming clubs. All these activities are hosted by the college and managed by parents.

112. The college actively encourages parents to come in to help. They respond by helping with college trips, helping their own children read at college and helping on retreat visits and to run the SMASH (St. Mary's After School) Club which many pupils attend.
113. Parents' evenings, with 85 per cent attendance, and award evenings, which celebrate pupils achievements, are very well supported.
114. The college has provided a home/college agreement, which clearly sets out the different responsibilities of the college and parents for the successful delivery of their children's education but does not require parents to sign the agreement, merely to observe its terms.
115. An overwhelming majority of parents are fully supportive of the college and are very pleased with teaching, behaviour and the high level of care and support they receive.
116. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are invited to, and attend, annual reviews of their children's progress. They are involved in discussions, updates of the reviews and in target setting.
117. Several parents were very complimentary about the sixth form. They feel that the pastoral support and guidance provided is of a high quality. Sixth formers have a very positive view of the college. They feel that they are treated like adults and given a good level of responsibility and support. Students interviewed during the inspection week confirmed that they felt the sixth form was very successful and would advise others to join. They felt that they were well prepared to advance to the next stage of their life or education.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

118. Overall the quality of leadership and management is very good. The quality of leadership and management provided by the headteacher is outstanding. He is an enthusiastic headteacher who provides clear leadership for raising standards. He is well respected and liked by pupils, parents, governors and staff. He is determined to ensure that pupils and students at the college receive the best possible education. He is well supported by his senior staff. A particular strength of the leadership team is their presence around the college. They are prominent around the college at lunch and break times and it is evident that pupils find senior staff very approachable. They provide calm and confident leadership. The high quality of leadership in the college has created high staff morale. There is a confidence and expertise among those with posts of responsibility to ensure that standards will improve even further in the coming years.
119. The quality of middle management is good. There is excellent leadership and management in English. They are very good in mathematics, ICT, art and design, business studies, drama, design and technology, geography and physical education. For all other subjects leadership and management is at least satisfactory and often good. The leadership and management from those with pastoral responsibilities are very good.
120. The governing body is well informed about the work of the college and uses this information to contribute very effectively to the leadership of the college. Governors are very knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the college. They made a decision to expand the range of courses within the sixth form to encourage more students to stay on at the college. They recognised that this decision had financial implications but determined that the sixth form costs would be subsidised from the main college budget, in the short term, to support some small teaching groups, until these courses became established. From a base of detailed information the governors provide effective leadership in shaping the future direction of the college. The college fulfils all of its statutory duties.
121. The college development plan is good and has an appropriate number of priorities for raising standards. The issues identified by the college reflect the aims of the college. These include

- improving spiritual and moral development, pastoral developments with an emphasis on inclusion, curriculum developments with an emphasis on special educational needs and ICT, implementing the literacy and numeracy strategies. In addition there are development plans for pupils' progress, staff and site. For each of these priorities there are clearly identified strategies, timescales and criteria for success. Good quality department plans reflect the priorities from whole-college planning. There is a shared commitment to improvement and determination to succeed.
122. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching is good. The introduction of performance management has contributed to developing a more rigorous and consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Other areas of the work of the college are evaluated effectively and appropriate action is taken to remedy weaknesses.
 123. The special educational needs co-ordinator has a very good awareness of how pupils learn, and provides clear direction for colleagues. Leadership and management of special educational needs are very good and contribute to the achievement of the college's aspirations for all its pupils. Teachers work very co-operatively with the special needs co-ordinator who, along with the recently appointed assistant special needs co-ordinator, provides support for teachers on how they can best support pupils in lessons.
 124. The provision of teaching staff is good. There is a good match between their teaching responsibilities and their qualifications and there is a reasonable gender balance. Of the eighty-one full-time staff, thirty-one have been in the college for ten years or more. There is a good balance between experienced and inexperienced teachers, four newly qualified teachers having been appointed within the last year. With the closure of St. Benedict's school and the consequent expansion of St Mary's College, twenty-four staff have been appointed within the last two years and only eight have left.
 125. Induction policies for new staff are good and the staff training policy is very comprehensive. Training needs are annually assessed through whole-college, departmental and individual reviews. The review of staff performance management has just completed the first cycle.
 126. There is a very good match between teachers' qualifications and their deployment to meet the needs of the college curriculum. There is sufficient technical support for a school of this size. The office and support staff are an experienced team with a strong sense of loyalty to the college. They bring good levels of expertise to their work and show high levels of professional responsibility. The librarians provide good support and advice to pupils. The caretaking and cleaning staff show clear dedication to the life of the college. The support provided for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the college are very good and valued by participants. Professional development days and other staff training are well planned and have a focus that relates to the priorities identified in the college development plan. Teachers are confident in using ICT to support teaching and learning as a result of the training they have received. The college has recently been awarded Investors In People status.
 127. The accommodation, although in fairly good condition and well maintained, is inadequate except in a few instances. The new development and refurbishment have meant that the English department's accommodation is now good, as is that for geography. However, the accommodation for music and modern foreign languages is not appropriate for the teaching of these subjects. The science accommodation is inadequate at present although eight new laboratories are planned. The library is far too small to cope with the demand. Design and technology lack specific specialist accommodation, as does drama. Rooms in general are too small for the numbers of pupils. The corridors are too narrow, and it is to the credit of the college and its pupils that, in spite of the overcrowding, the displays of pupils' work on the corridors are not damaged. The expansion of numbers that is foreseen in the near future can be planned for in terms of extra space, but the problem of narrow corridors will not go away. This has a detrimental impact on standards.
 128. The college spends much more than the national average on resources for learning. Excluding ICT, however, the amount spent is broadly in line with the national average. The library in particular is far too small to cope with the present demand, having only approximately 40 study

spaces available. It has only half the number of books needed for a school of this size. In ICT, the pupil to computer ratio is about 7:1 which is close to the national average, although the demand by teachers to use ICT outstrips the number of machines available.

129. The expenditure per pupil is above the national average. Finances are managed effectively. The most recent auditor's report in January 2000 contained many recommendations, all of which have been implemented. Opportunities are taken to ensure that the principles of 'best value' are followed when making decisions on the purchases of goods and services. This particularly applied to the awarding of the new catering contract that has led, according to pupils, to improvements in the quality of the food available and a more cost effective operation. Financial planning is very good. The budget for the last financial year shows a deficit of £67,000. However, this figure includes £41,000 owed by the Diocesan authorities for its contribution towards the building project of classrooms for the English department. Specific grants, including those for special educational needs, Standards Fund, Excellence in Cities resources and New Opportunities Funding, are spent effectively on the purposes for which they were intended, and in line with the priorities identified in the college's development plan.
130. The college makes limited use of new technology to aid administration and management. New technology is effectively used for monitoring pupils' assessments but is not used for monitoring attendance.
131. In relation to the level of funding the college receives and the quality of education pupils receive, the college is providing good value for money. At the time of the last inspection the leadership and management of the college were effective and they are now strengths of the college. All of the issues identified for improving the leadership and management of the college have been effectively undertaken.

Sixth form

132. The headteacher provides a clear direction and a very strong commitment to the development and improvement of the quality of provision in the sixth form. The senior management team and governors are well aware of the current strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form. The college has provided considerable additional resources to ensure that the choices, opportunities and experiences offered are as broad and challenging as is possible. There are some formal partnership arrangements with neighbouring colleges or schools relating to sixth form provision. In some subject areas the very small size of teaching groups and the need to reduce the high unit costs in the sixth form could provide opportunities for complementary and mutually supportive arrangements.
133. The new management arrangement, with the appointment of a head of Year 12, working closely with the head of the sixth form, has strengthened the college's provision in the sixth form. The effectiveness of the management is evident from the noticeably improved standards, the very positive experience of students and the outstanding Christian ethos and atmosphere that pervades the sixth form. Students are known and valued by staff and they in return respect and highly appreciate the support they receive from the head of sixth form. The monitoring of attendance and personal study provides a necessary and helpful structure for some students. The close monitoring of borderline entry students together with that of referred and under-performing students from early in Year 12 is especially supportive and effective. It is very well organized and managed by the head of Year 12. Appropriate formal and informal links are made between the head of the sixth form, the head of Year 12 and those with responsibilities elsewhere within the college for academic and pastoral areas. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is very good and students' needs are very well catered for.

Resources

134. The sixth form is well supported financially. Although unit costs are high, financial management and planning are careful. The resources allocated to the sixth form are subsidised to some extent

by resources from Years 10 and 11. Comparison of above average income and expenditure in the sixth form with the above average standards achieved by students indicated satisfactory value for money.

135. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum in the sixth form is very good and the professional development of staff, which is good, contributes to their effectiveness. Learning resources are good overall although the inadequate ICT facilities both for teaching purposes and for sixth formers' independent study are a weakness. Overall the sixth form accommodation provision is satisfactory. Student accommodation in the sixth form study area and common room are very good. They provide a pleasant and adult learning and social environment. However, too much teaching in the sixth form takes place in non-specialist subject rooms and this is unsatisfactory.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

136. In order to raise standards the governors, headteacher and teaching staff should

- (1) Work with the appropriate authorities to ensure that the accommodation meets the needs of the number of pupils in the college.
(Paragraph 127)
- (2) Increase the opportunities for independent learning by
 - All departments identifying within their schemes of work planned opportunities for independent learning.
(Paragraph 42)
 - Increasing the accommodation for the library and improving the level of resources within the library to support independent learning.
(Paragraph 128)
- (3) Improve the level of resources for ICT to ensure that all subjects have sufficient access to new technologies to support teaching and learning.
(Paragraphs 42, 128)
- (4) Improve the use of assessment data by
 - Ensuring that pupils know what they need to do to meet their academic targets.
(Paragraphs 44, 93)

Sixth form

In order to raise standards even higher in the sixth form the governors, headteacher and teaching staff should

- (1) Monitor carefully and take appropriate action to raise standards in subjects where examination performance is below the national average.
(Paragraph 18)
- (2) Develop further students' study skills and facilities and, in particular, opportunities for independent study, including ICT.
(Paragraphs 19, 54, 74)
- (3) Increase the size of teaching groups to reduce the high unit costs.
(Paragraphs 132, 134)

In addition the governing body may wish to include the following issues within their action plan

- Preparing pupils for living in a multi-cultural society. *(Paragraph 73)*

- Music. (*Paragraphs 220-227; 269 –273*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	137
	Sixth form	57
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
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Years 7 – 11

Number	3	41	60	29	4	0	0
Percentage	2.2	29.9	43.8	21.2	2.9	0	0

Sixth form

Number	3	20	27	7	0	0	0
Percentage	5.3	35.1	47.3	12.3	0	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 the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1138	212
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	431	-

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	33	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	279	30

English as an additional language

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	36

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	91	120	211

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	62	67	67
	Girls	107	90	85
	Total	169	157	152
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (68)	74 (62)	72 (56)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (22)	39 (24)	30 (18)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	70	72	80
	Girls	102	97	108
	Total	172	169	188
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (68)	80 (62)	89 (56)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (22)	33 (24)	38 (18)
	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	90	106	196

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	37	83	88
	Girls	54	99	102
	Total	91	182	190
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	46 (38)	93 (95)	97 (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	40 (38)
	National	39 ()

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	67
	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	31	47	78

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	33	46	79
	Average point score per candidate	11.4 ([])	15.5 ([])	13.8 ([])
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 ([])	18 ([])	17.5 ([])

		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	22	35	57	14	14	28
	Average point score per candidate	11.2	16.2	14.3	9.2	10.5	9.9

National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1337
Any other minority ethnic group	11

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	58	1
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: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	86.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.6

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	35
Total aggregate hours worked per week	872

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.9
Key Stage 4	22.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-01
	£
Total income	3,401,192
Total expenditure	3,468,309
Expenditure per pupil	2,689
Balance brought forward from previous year	12,868
Balance carried forward to next year	-54,249

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	8.0
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Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24.4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.5
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	1350
Number of questionnaires returned	525

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	51	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	50	3	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	49	8	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	47	13	4	1
The teaching is good.	43	48	4	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	41	17	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	32	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	30	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	36	43	13	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	50	42	3	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	45	3	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	43	9	3	8

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are very good with sustained improvement.
- Teaching is very good and frequently excellent.
- The head of department provides a clear sense of direction.
- The management of the department is effective and efficient.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning provides guidance on how to improve.

Areas for improvement

- The department needs to further develop strategies to improve pupils' results in GCSE in English language and English literature.

137. Since the last inspection, the performance of pupils at the end of Year 9 has improved. It is now above the national average. This is because teaching is very good and the schemes of work specify the content to be taught. In 2001, Year 9 test results were above the average compared to colleges nationally. When compared with similar colleges results were well above average. The performance of girls was better than that of boys. This difference in the performance of boys and girls is the same as it is nationally. In order to improve the performance of boys at the age of 14, the department has: provided reading role models for boys; introduced ICT supported schemes to promote reading; created small teaching groups for low attainers and pupils with special educational needs staffed by specially trained teachers. Pupils' performance in English was higher than in mathematics and science
138. In 2001 pupils attained standards below the national average in GCSE English language. Standards in GCSE English literature were in line with the national average. Overall, GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. This achievement is explained by: very good teaching; the success of extra classes for pupils who needed examination technique practice; presentations to pupils by teachers who are examiners; the production of revision packs. Although the performance of girls was better than the performance of boys, more boys than girls achieved A grades in both English language and literature. This difference in the performance of girls and of boys is the same as it is nationally. In order to improve the performance of boys the department has recruited more male teachers and has introduced texts that appeal to boys.
139. Overall, pupils' achievement in all years is good. In addition to the overall high quality of teaching, the department has provided well-balanced schemes of work that provide stimulating lessons. These schemes indicate the content to be taught, the teaching and learning styles that may be adopted, literacy strategy contributions, the resources to be used, and the range of the work to be assessed. Teachers make their high expectations for pupils' work and behaviour very clear. The overall effectiveness of teachers' planning is very good, particularly the planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons. Teachers consistently identify the learning objectives for lessons and make them explicit. In a Year 7 lesson designed to enable low attaining pupils to classify and collate information, the teacher made sure that learning objectives were clear and that pupils wrote them in their books.
140. Since the previous inspection there have been some significant improvements. Teaching is very good and frequently excellent. Pupils are offered more opportunities for independent learning. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above the national average. The ability of pupils to speak

clearly and with confidence has improved. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT effectively for drafting their written work. ICT is also used to help pupils to learn.

141. Years 7 to 9 pupils' books show that they acquire literacy skills at a good, steady rate. Most pupils spell short and long words accurately. Higher attainers use and spell polysyllabic words accurately. They use full stops, capital letters and question marks correctly and they organize simple and complex sentences into paragraphs. Teachers' comments on pupils' work strongly emphasise the need for correct punctuation and spelling. All pupils with special educational needs, and gifted and talented pupils make good progress.
142. The overall standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 is above the national average. Standards in speaking and listening are very good. By the end of year 11 most boys and girls listen attentively. Pupils are keen to answer questions. This is because they are highly motivated and respond to their teachers' very helpful spoken comments. Where pupils are well prepared for discussions, they make sophisticated contributions and maintain a dialogue at a high level. In a well-planned lesson in Year 11, for example, a group of pupils arrived at the view that the poetry of Ted Hughes is concerned with "... the imperfections of humanity".
143. The standard of pupils' reading is very good. A majority of pupils read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. All pupils are encouraged to improve the quality of their reading by reading aloud. A shared reading and discussion of Carol Ann Duffy's 'Valentine' by a Year 10 class showed that pupils could understand significant ideas and make judgements based on their understanding of the text. For example, a girl explained, "She gives her lover an onion because it means more than a card. When you get under the surface there's another layer. The taste gets stronger: like real love it lasts."
144. The standard of pupils' written work is good. ICT is used effectively for drafting. Pupils write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce an interesting range of extended writing. Good oral work prior to writing often helped pupils to write more extensively. For example, in a Year 11 lesson a group preparing to write about responsibility for the death of Eva Smith explained that Inspector Goole "makes characters such as Sheila and Mrs Birling reflect on their behaviour and their contribution to Eva's death." Most pupils were able to improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Their handwriting at this stage is generally satisfactory
145. Throughout the college, well-targeted work, combined with high expectations of learning and behaviour, results in the majority of pupils making very good progress. In Years 7-11 the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and with low prior attainment is very good. The attitudes to learning of the majority of boys and girls were very good in each key stage. Most pupils were very well motivated. Good behaviour management encourages pupils to co-operate. The behaviour of most pupils is very good.
146. Teaching was very good or better in seven out of ten lessons. Teachers have a very good knowledge of both language and literature. They all have high expectations of their pupils. They also recognise the need to motivate, encourage and provide pupils with opportunities to succeed. Teachers use constructive spoken comments very skilfully to motivate pupils and to help them improve. Lessons are very well managed. The overall effectiveness of teachers' planning is very good. The planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons is very good. This results in good levels of achievement.
147. The English department has raised standards by: using assessment to inform planning; combining subject matter with the development of language skills; and further developing pupils' confidence and skills to speak effectively in a wide range of situations. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT effectively for drafting their written work. For example, in the coursework folders of Year 10 and 11 pupils there are some very good examples of word-processed essays, stories and newspaper articles.
148. Leadership and management of the English department are excellent. Formal monitoring of teaching and learning provides guidance for teachers and pupils on how to improve. Teachers set

realistic, but challenging, targets to encourage pupils to improve. The department has made a very significant contribution to the education of all of the pupils in the college. The departmental policy documents are clear and well focused on raising pupils' attainment in English and performance in public examinations. All members of the department share a very strong commitment to the college's aims. Resources for teaching are good. Accommodation is very good. All classrooms contain stimulating displays that are well organised and of good quality.

DRAMA

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

Strengths

- The very good quality of teaching.
- The very good relationships in the classroom.
- The improvement in pupils' attainment in Year 11 in 2001.
- The increasing popularity of the course in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- Sustain the efforts to increase the number of boys choosing the subject in Year 10.
- Develop links with English, in contributing to the assessment of pupils' speaking and listening skills and enhancing the study of the play set for the national test in Year 9.

149. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are broadly in line with national expectations. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 are broadly in line with national standards. In the GCSE examination in 2001, the proportion of pupils in Year 11 achieving grades A* to C was broadly in line with the national average, and all pupils entered achieved a grade, which was above the national average. These results were a significant improvement from the previous year.
150. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 develop confident voice and movement skills and speak out unselfconsciously. They acquire a good awareness of the use of gesture and body language to communicate character and feeling. Pupils quickly learn to improvise, roleplay, develop a narrative and follow and perform playscripts. They work co-operatively in pair and group preparation and performance and are able to reflect upon their experiences in written self-assessments. Pupils develop an understanding of the conventions of drama. Pupils in Year 9, for example, quickly recognise the effects of the use of mime, posture and gesture to develop the characteristics conveyed by different masks. Achievement is good, in relation to attainment on entry to the college. Good progress is made by pupils of all levels of attainment as a consequence of the care taken to ensure that lessons accommodate the range of pupils' needs.
151. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 move and speak with confidence, have an understanding of grouping and the use of stage space and can convey character and feeling with voice and movement. They interpret texts perceptively and offer useful suggestions to improve presentation. Pupils in Year 10 showed good skills, knowledge and understanding of Joan Lingard's 'Across the Barricades' in performing and commenting on pair presentations of Kevin and Sadie. Pupils in Year 11 imaginatively incorporate naturalistic and non-naturalistic features to tell a story and create an effect in preparing their devised group pieces for the practical test. Pupils work quite independently and talk about their work capably, though some lower attaining pupils are limited in their writing skills and are dependent on the frameworks provided by teachers to complete their work portfolios. Achievement is good in relation to prior attainment and the evidence of inspection is that attainment in GCSE will continue to improve.
152. Relationships in the classroom and pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They work co-operatively, present confidently and reflect perceptively upon their own and their peers' performance. Pupils enter wholeheartedly into activities and show enjoyment.
153. The quality of teaching is very good. All teaching observed was good or better and half was very good. Very good knowledge and understanding inform lively and very well planned lessons which

accommodate pupils' differing needs. Energetic teaching communicates interest and enjoyment and secure and good-humoured pupil management ensures that relationships are very good. Pupils' learning is very good. They are stimulated and their interest maintained by a good variety of pair, group and whole-class activities in which all can participate equally. Because they are comfortable in their relationships with teachers, pupils respond with interest and enthusiasm and enjoy their lessons.

154. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Drama is the centre of a variety of performance study and activity, both in and outside the classroom, which is very skilfully organised, with appropriate delegation. There is a strong commitment to future development, informed by very good subject knowledge. The programme of study is very well designed to develop pupils' drama skills systematically and all are able to participate successfully and without inhibition, whatever their levels of prior attainment. There is at present no formal link with English, however, despite the contribution made in drama to the development of pupils' literacy skills, speaking and listening in particular. There is very good practice in the assessment of pupils' attainment. Pupils are clear about the standards by which they are judged and are able to reflect on their own progress. The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development through the exploration of issues in lessons, the experience of professional presentations and the opportunities for public performance.
155. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Standards of attainment have risen. Drama is an increasingly popular GCSE option for pupils and the department has worked hard and successfully to encourage more boys to choose the subject.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Results are improving for pupils aged 14 and 16.
- Good progress of the pupils due to high teacher expectations.
- All teaching and learning is good or very good.
- Very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils.
- The teamwork of the department and the vision of the head of the department.

Areas for improvement

- The development of numeracy across the curriculum.
- The continued improvement of GCSE results in line with the improvements in attainment at age 14.
- The sharing of good practice in teaching by lesson observation and discussion.

156. At the end of Year 9 standards of attainment of the majority of pupils are well above the national average for similar schools. Test results in 2001 show that three-quarters of pupils reached level 5 or above and four out of ten reached Level 6 and above in mathematics. This is an improvement on the previous year. Pupils enter the college with results below the national average. Achievement of the majority of pupils between Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress. Boys and girls perform equally well at this stage.
157. At the end of Year 11 standards of attainment are just below the national average. In 2001 the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to C in the GCSE examination was an improvement on the previous year. Almost all candidates who are entered for the GCSE examination in mathematics achieved a grade. Boys and girls perform equally well at this stage. Achievement and progress of the majority of pupils are good.
158. Standards of work seen in lessons and in pupils' exercise books during the inspection are good. Pupils settle to work quickly and have a very good attitude to work. They behave well and concentrate on the tasks set. Pupils are extremely productive in lessons because of their very good attitude. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils are very good.
159. The quality of teaching and learning in the department is a strength. All lessons seen were good or very good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. All lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives and work appropriate to the needs of the pupils. The development of the three-part lesson is becoming normal practice and some very good starter exercises were seen. White boards were used effectively for answering probability questions in Year 9. A number stick was

used with a low attaining group in Year 8 to help the pupils recite tables. Year 9 pupils started a lesson by solving an equation by trial and improvement. The use of information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection. The use of 'Successmaker' in low attaining groups in Years 7 to 9 motivated pupils and was used as an effective tool for revision and consolidation. In a Year 11 lesson the pupils were using graphical calculators to help them to see the pattern in linear graphs and to make predictions. The use of graphical calculators could be developed further. Teachers made effective use of questioning during group work and pupils are encouraged and able to explain their answers and solutions to the rest of the class. Good support is given to the pupils when they are undertaking work on an individual basis. Homework is regularly set, marked and returned to pupils to correct their mistakes and make further progress. The teachers keep good records of individual pupils' progress. Pace of work was well matched to the needs of the pupils.

160. As a result of effective teaching most pupils acquire knowledge of basic concepts and skills which enable them to work on their own to improve their understanding. In a Year 11 foundation level group the pupils were able to solve on their own more difficult equations because of the clear teaching. The pupils have a very positive attitude to their work in mathematics. Mental arithmetic skills are good and pupils use calculators appropriately.
161. The department is an enthusiastic, hard working and committed team of teachers who work well together and have high standards and high expectations of the pupils. They are very well led. Teachers are well qualified and have a secure grasp of the subject and its requirements. The mathematics curriculum is appropriate and meets the statutory requirements, providing equal access and opportunity for all pupils. The national numeracy strategy is being used in Years 7 to 9. The good use of starter exercises, the brisker pace of lessons and the use of the catch up programme have helped to improve standards. There has been a change to a modular syllabus for GCSE in Year 10. Department policies and development plans are linked to the college policies and development plans. Assessment is wide-ranging and thorough and is used in curricular planning.
162. Pupils with special educational needs are taught mainly in small sets by specialist teachers and are making good progress. Gifted and talented pupils are being catered for by the setting arrangements, extension materials and some special resources recently purchased. Literacy skills are improved by the display of key words and phrases and the teachers' insistence on correct mathematical language and full answers to questions. Links with feeder primary schools are developing well.
163. The department rooms provide a pleasant working environment with very good wall displays of pupils' work, key words and ICT work.
164. Improvements since the last inspection are that all teaching is now good or very good. The time allocation is now the same in all years. The quality of resources has improved, mainly because of the development of the national numeracy strategy and the change in GCSE syllabus. The facilities for and the development of information and communication technology have improved.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The department operates as a mutually supportive team of well qualified, enthusiastic and competent teachers.
- Teachers are prepared to take on initiatives to enhance pupil attainment.
- Data are collected and processed to provide high quality information on pupil attainment and on their future potential.

Areas for improvement

- The development of curriculum provision and organisation in the main college to match more closely the learning needs of all pupils.
- The use of assessment data with pupils to set targets and agree action points for further improvement of their work.
- The further development and use of a wider range of teaching and learning strategies to challenge the more able pupils and support low achievers.
- The provision and development of more opportunities for the use of ICT within the science curriculum.

165. Pupils come to the college with attainment in science which is broadly average. In 2001, the results of the National Curriculum tests for pupils at the end of Year 9 who achieved Level 5 or higher were above those attained in all schools nationally. They were well above those for schools that have a similar intake of pupils. The average results for the Year 9 cohort were in line with those which had been predicted for them, showing evidence of the satisfactory progress that they had made from the time they started science at the college in Year 7. Since the last inspection in 1997 results at the end of Year 9 have closely followed national trends but have, until the best results ever in 2001, been just below national figures. Most pupils are entered for the double award GCSE science course at the end of Year 11 but some higher achieving pupils take separate biology, chemistry and physics examinations. In 2001 the overall performance in science was in line with the achievement of all pupils nationally although results before that had fluctuated from year to year. Pupils make satisfactory progress during Years 10 and 11. Almost all of the pupils entered, including those with special educational needs, gain an A*-G grade. However, relatively few pupils, even those taking the separate sciences, achieve the highest A* and A grades. A similar pattern of performance for GCSE was reported at the time of the last inspection.

166. In the sixth form it is unreliable to make comparisons with national data because of the small numbers of students taking the AS and A-level examinations in biology, chemistry and physics. In 2001, the results for the group of 8 biology students gaining A-E grades at A-level were just below the national average. In recent years, results for the smaller number of students taking chemistry have been similar to, but more consistent than, those for biology. Over the last three years all students taking AS and A-level examinations in physics have gained at least an A-E grade.

167. In Years 7 to 9 pupils study biology, chemistry and physics as separate subjects and are taught by different teachers for one lesson each week. This approach ensures that the content of the National Curriculum is well covered and pupils benefit from the expertise of subject specialists. However, pupils are not fully supported to build on their previous science work in the primary school nor helped to make important links between science topics. In chemistry, at the beginning of Year 7, they learn to use basic laboratory apparatus and to work co-operatively in small groups. They are able to follow instructions and complete practical tasks safely. Most pupils find it more difficult to interpret what they see and some are limited by their poor literacy skills and fail to keep accurate and clear records of results. Pupils are generally not asked to plan practical tasks, to predict what might happen and to evaluate what they have done. Experimental and investigative work is left mainly until the end of Year 9 when it is formally assessed. Pupils have insufficient opportunity to develop these particular skills in Years 7 and 8. This was true at the time of the last inspection and teachers now need to use a more problem-solving approach in all their lessons. Pupils like their work in biology particularly in topics about themselves and the environment. They are helped to use scientific terms correctly and confidently by the use of displays of key words in laboratories and by ongoing reinforcement and instruction from the class teacher. However, this approach does not always help them to develop their understanding of the more difficult ideas in science. Most respond well to teaching activities that allow them to be more involved in their learning and give them time to work things out for themselves. This was seen particularly in an engaging lesson on food chains when, by the end, all the Year 7 pupils used the correct terms to explain energy flow from the sun to other plants and animals. A project to develop pupils' thinking skills in science has been introduced in Years 7 and 8. Teachers and

pupils alike find the new ways of working and the activities to be different and challenging. However, evidence from the inspection and elsewhere suggests that when this programme is more firmly embedded in the science schemes of work it will contribute to the provision of very good science education and help pupils achieve better results in tests and examinations. Overall, the time allocation for science in Years 10 and 11 is the same as for other schools nationally but there are significantly fewer lessons each week in Year 11 than in Year 10. This timetable arrangement has an adverse impact on standards particularly for lower achieving pupils doing double award science and for more able pupils who are entered for three separate science examinations. GCSE units of work build progressively on topics already covered lower down the college. For example, pupils could use their prior knowledge of particle theory to explain how different factors change the rate of reaction between magnesium and hydrochloric acid. Many pupils use revision guides well to prepare for the final examinations and they benefit from frequent practice at examination questions. However, some find it difficult to retain and use factual information and to articulate their own ideas and understanding. Most students in the sixth form adjust smoothly to the greater demands made on them. The structure of the modular programmes and the mature relationships that they have with their teachers and each other support them to make good progress. They start to develop more sophisticated skills, new knowledge and a deeper understanding of scientific concepts. ICT is being used more effectively at this level to provide good resources and alternative ways to collect and analyse data.

168. Pupils who are identified as having special educational needs make satisfactory progress throughout the college. Direct and well-structured teaching provides them with a sound framework for learning the facts, and for acquiring skills and understanding. The individual educational plans are clear and made readily available to teachers and learning support assistants. They have a sound overall knowledge of their pupils and show obvious concern for their welfare and progress. However, assessment data and information are not used fully to prepare lessons that are closely matched to the learning needs of all pupils in each class. In particular more specific literacy support strategies need to be developed and used for helping pupils to record notes and to read with greater understanding.
169. Pupils come to lessons with a positive attitude and an expectation that they will co-operate with their teachers and will concentrate on tasks set. These factors contribute greatly to the standards of work achieved. They enjoy their work, especially when it includes a range of practical tasks allowing them to be involved, busy and independent of ongoing input from teachers. The last inspection noted that pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and this remains the case. Most pupils are good listeners and appreciate the expertise and fluency of their teachers. Others have a limited concentration span and although they do not become disruptive they drift off task and need to be firmly monitored by teachers to maintain their participation in the lesson. Although most pupils respond readily to questions in class and speak clearly in informal situations, they are not allowed enough chances to share and debate ideas with each other in pairs or groups, nor are they encouraged to contribute to extended and more formal discussion with the whole class. Such experiences would allow them to develop further their knowledge and understanding of more difficult scientific ideas.
170. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good throughout the rest of the college. It contributes significantly to the standards of work produced by pupils and by students in the sixth form. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and confident and they plan their lessons in detail to meet the needs of the National Curriculum, the GCSE syllabus and the specifications for sixth form courses. In the best lessons learning outcomes are made explicit at the beginning and time is spent at the end to summarise what has been achieved. Teachers keep pupils working at a brisk pace, moving them on from one task to the next and monitoring the progress of individuals appropriately. Teachers are skilled at giving instructions, carrying out demonstrations and explaining facts and concepts. They use interesting examples from their own experiences and those of the pupils to ensure that science is related to everyday life. This is a strong feature of some homework tasks. Teachers question pupils to check that earlier work has been understood and some teachers effectively use more probing questions to make pupils think in depth about their work. Practical work is always set out by the laboratory technicians and it is well organised by the teachers. Pupils are tightly managed to ensure the effective use of

resources and safe practice in the sometimes limited laboratory space available. Books are regularly checked and marked in line with departmental policy. However, teachers rarely add detailed comments on the work and they do not give advice on what to do next to raise the standard of work. This issue, reported at the last inspection, still needs to be addressed. As part of a whole-college initiative and as a result of specific developments within the department, science teachers now have very detailed assessment data on individual pupils. Whilst this is a commendable start, the information is not fully used to share targets with pupils and plan appropriate action with them on how to improve. Marking, assessment and reporting are used very well in the sixth form to give formative feedback to students on a regular basis and to support their progress through the course.

171. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The recent appointment of a new head of department comes at a key point in the development of the department. Laboratory accommodation is unsatisfactory in some areas but teachers use good display work to make the best of what there is. New provision for science is planned in the near future. There are currently systems in place to ensure that administration runs smoothly, that roles and responsibilities are shared out, that all teachers are involved in discussing and planning work and that financial management is efficient. The previous inspection report highlighted the need for strategies to monitor and evaluate departmental performance. This remains an outstanding area for attention. The department is well resourced except for access to sufficient and appropriate computers and software. The development of more opportunities to use computer software, data logging equipment, data and word-processing packages across the curriculum and in all years would help pupils to learn science even more effectively. The teaching and technical staff work together as a committed, capable and enthusiastic team who are dedicated to support the achievement of all their pupils.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The relationships between the teachers and the pupils are very good.
- The management of the subject is very effective in the promotion of high expectations.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.

Areas for improvement

- To provide more opportunity for three-dimensional work in Years 7 to 9.

172. By the end of Year 9 the standards of attainment are average when compared with national expectation. Pupils experience a wide variety of creative experiences. As a direct consequence of the level of provision, combined with very effective teaching, a majority of pupils show an interest in their work and are achieving considerable success. By the end of Year 9, a majority of pupils draw and paint with a reasonable degree of confidence, have experience of print making and some three-dimensional construction and have some appreciation for the use of colour, line and tone. The overall achievement of the students from Year 7 to Year 9 is good. They increase their knowledge and understanding about certain artists and cultures. Some interesting work is being produced. In Year 7 pupils have produced batik printed textiles based upon aboriginal art. In Year 8 pupils were gaining in skills and knowledge through an investigation into the techniques used by artists such as Lucien Freud. Year 9 students were being introduced to graphic design by developing posters based on 'The Lord of the Rings'. Homework assignments are improving research skills. Pupils are willing to discuss their work and a significant proportion show pride in their achievements, which is a reflection of the quality of teaching and learning. Overall, pupils make good progress and those with special educational needs or who are designated as gifted or talented also progress well.

173. In the year 2001 GCSE examination results at grades A*-C were slightly below the national average, but better than most other subjects within the college curriculum. Over the past two years, all pupils entered for GCSE art and design examinations have achieved a pass. In the three years from 1999 attainment has shown a gradual improvement against national averages. A majority of pupils handle a wide range of materials competently and show a sound understanding of their progress. Research skills are satisfactory. Year 10 students using portraits that were distorted using photo-shop computer software were producing some good work.
174. The majority of pupils from Years 7 to 13 make good, often very good progress due to the challenging and often diverse nature of the experiences on offer and very effective teaching. The achievement of the students in all year groups is improving considerably. Some of the present staff in the department are new to the college and under the direction of a relatively new head of department are providing a very positive influence on the quality of art education now being offered.
175. Throughout all year groups the majority of pupils are often articulate when discussing their work and many are capable of understanding and using technical language. The promotion by teachers of key words in many lessons is having a positive effect upon the pupils' understanding of technical language within the subject. Homework is used to good effect. Some students are producing good research often using computers. The attitude of the students in Years 7 to 9 is good and often good in Years 10 and 11. A majority of pupils show interest in their work and are justifiably proud of their achievements. A minority finds sustained concentration, independent learning, problem-solving, and an understanding of aesthetics difficult. These problems are more common with the less motivated pupils in Year 9 for whom the subject has little attraction. A majority of pupils are more than willing to share materials and ideas and assist in the distribution and collection of equipment in lessons.
176. Teaching is good. The best lessons are challenging and well planned in order to provide all pupils with opportunities to progress and to attain levels of achievement commensurate with their abilities and aspirations. Pupils with special educational needs are well served through sensitive teaching and specially designed learning opportunities, which offer pupils the opportunity to succeed. Gifted and talented students are offered extension studies in order to provide them with additional challenges. Classroom organisation and management are very effective. The relationships between the teachers and the pupils are very good providing a pleasant atmosphere in the lessons. Regular references are made to the work of significant artists and cultures in order to raise creative and visual appreciation and awareness. Connections are also established in many lessons to the college literacy strategy. Pupils are encouraged to read as part of their research into artists and cultures. All classrooms within the department and certain public areas around the college contain excellent displays of work, providing an opportunity for pupils to appreciate the standards of work being produced. Assessment is effective and is used as an influence on future curriculum development and lesson planning. Assessment includes a certain amount of pupil self-assessment and therefore when questioned a majority of the pupils were well aware of teacher expectations and their own strengths and weaknesses. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are given target grades for examinations and are capable of discussing their progress towards achieving their targets. Work is marked at periodic intervals usually linked to the completion of a project. The marking of work is always reinforced by supportive comments by the teachers and therefore the pupils in all year groups are well aware of their level of achievement and what they have to do to make further progress. Pupils with special educational needs are given individual learning targets, which are reviewed regularly by the teachers within the department and the special needs co-ordinator. The department supports the college programme for gifted and talented pupils and also identifies students with particular talent in art offering them extension studies and extra-curricular time in the department.
177. The management of the department is very good, promoting high standards in lessons and giving clear direction. The teachers work as a very effective team. The subject meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Accommodation is good and made attractive by displays of pupil work. Resources are sufficient for need and used effectively. As a consequence of the wide range of opportunities for the pupils together with some excellent teaching the department is improving pupil achievement by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11.

178. The last inspection drew attention to the fact that procedures for assessment were not effective. This is no longer the case. The achievements of all students are assessed and recorded and used to good effect in raising attainment and providing levels of work commensurate with the needs of the pupils in all classes. The amount of storage space, seen as a problem, has been improved. The time allocated to art lessons for Years 10 and 11 was seen as inadequate. The time now allocated conforms to national recommendations.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Very good management and subject leadership.
- Quality of teaching.
- Development of ICT.
- Curriculum development.

Areas for improvement

- The wider application of National Curriculum levels in assessment and planning.
- Accommodation for food technology and engineering studies.

179. In Years 7 to 9, attainment is average. This represents good progress from a below average level of general attainment on entry to the college. Pupils show skills in all areas of the design technology curriculum and are able to combine their knowledge, skill and understanding in project work: in a mechanical toy project, for example, pupils use skills in graphics, systems and control and resistant materials. Good levels of skill in the use of computer control are a strong feature in this project in which pupils learn to co-operate, working in pairs and in groups. In this way, social development accompanies learning and pupils learn to value and appreciate the work of others. Food technology is now a part of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9. This marks a significant improvement since the last inspection, when this area of technology was not available to pupils. A range of skills in the design and preparation of food is now evident. Pupils acquire knowledge of nutritional factors and are able to apply them. They are also able to analyse and evaluate commercially produced items, canned fruit for example.
180. The nature of projects allows pupils to make progress at their own rate and allows pupils with special needs and those with special talent alike to attain their full promise. Literacy is addressed by the study of subject terms and numeracy by calculation.
181. In Years 10 and 11, pupils make good progress to reach an above average level of attainment at the end of the stage. Results in examinations are above the national average, a further improvement since the last inspection and, within the college, results compare favourably with those of other subjects. There are good designing and making skills in graphics and students show rich imagination in their design for a keyboard mouse, for example, which also provides evidence of good 'making' skills and the ability to produce a high standard of finish. In food technology, students are able to pursue research into products in an academic way and, at the same time, produce good quality products themselves showing imagination. A Year 10 cake project, for example, generated a rich variety of individual ideas for form and composition.
182. Attainment in the GNVQ engineering course is limited to completion of Part 1. Students show skills in measured drawing and a range of practical skills in 'making'. This course also represents an extension and development of the curriculum since the last inspection. Work in resistant materials is well designed and carefully constructed, a particular strength being the quality of finish and good standards of presentation evident in graphics. All courses at this stage involve measuring and calculation, which reinforces numeracy, and the analysis of subject terms as they arise promotes literacy.
183. As at the earlier stage, the 'open-ended' nature of projects allows for success by pupils with a wide range of attainments. This enables pupils with special needs and gifted and talented pupils to make good progress.
184. The quality of teaching is a strength of the department. Most lessons seen were good or better and no lessons were less than satisfactory. Work is planned carefully and lessons well prepared. Objectives are clear and well understood by pupils. In Years 7 to 9, the teaching is sensitive to the varying backgrounds of pupils and pupils are encouraged to co-operate and help each other. In

Years 10 and 11 the teaching shows good subject expertise and versatility in the individual help and encouragement given to students. An outstanding feature is the relationship between teachers and between teacher and taught. This promotes good learning at both stages and an excellent working atmosphere in class.

185. Assessment of effort and attainment is thorough but there is a lack of proper emphasis on the application of National Curriculum levels and their use as motivators.
186. The work of the department is very well managed by a head of department. Resources are carefully husbanded and equipment maintained in a serviceable and clean condition. The health and safety policy is carefully followed and monitored. The specialist background of the teachers in the department is well related to their roles and a well-qualified technician provides very good support.
187. The accommodation provided is of good quality, well equipped and well lit by natural light. There is, however, a need for additional rooms for food technology to allow for the development of sixth form groups and for the provision of additional, and more suitable, accommodation for engineering.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Improving assessment levels at the end of Year 9.
- Improving GCSE results and the commitment to raise standards still further.
- The very good leadership, teamwork and efficient administration of the department.
- Good teaching so that pupils make good progress.
- Good progress made by pupils with special educational needs.
- The good behaviour and enthusiasm of most pupils.

Areas for improvement

- Further use of available assessment data to plan the curriculum and to set targets for all pupils which will improve their learning.
- The further development of the ICT entitlement.

188. The standards reached by pupils by the age of 14 were broadly in line with the national expectation in 2001, as reported in assessment results, and show an improvement over the previous three years. The GCSE results were in line with the national average for all maintained secondary schools. The results have also shown an upward trend over the past three years. Levels of entry are accurately determined and challenging targets have been set for 2002. The number of pupils opting for the subject has increased substantially this year. There is no consistent pattern of underachievement by either girls or boys from year to year. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.
189. Pupils make good progress between Years 7 to 9. All acquire a broad geographical vocabulary and are able to use technical terms with accuracy. They can describe geographical features in detail and explain the underlying processes. In Year 7, for example, pupils have a good knowledge of mapwork techniques. In Year 8 they understand the adaptations of tropical forest vegetation to climate. In Year 9 they can evaluate the impact of energy resource exploitation on the environment. Good oral skills were seen in a class presentation on the states of the USA. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress. There are fieldwork opportunities in the local area to develop the skills of geographical enquiry and evidence of individual research and use of the Internet.
190. Pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11. All maintain and most accelerate the progress made by the end of Year 9. They understand the direct and indirect impact of economic changes

on both the physical landscape and on the social and cultural life of an area. This was seen in a Year 10 exercise on outward movement from rural areas near Cambridge. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development. In Year 11 they can explain contrasts in demographic structures in a range of countries. Pupils can select and interpret data from a variety of sources, as well as decide on the most appropriate methods of presentation. GCSE coursework on the Albert Dock provided evidence of very good independent investigation and analysis. Much work was word-processed and graphs and charts were accurately used.

191. Pupils with special educational needs made good progress in the Year 7 and Year 8 lessons, where the learning support assistant kept them on task by explaining new vocabulary clearly and by checking their understanding of each stage of an exercise. In the GCSE classes, a good range of work was available for both the foundation and higher level pupils. In other lessons good behaviour allowed teachers to give focused assistance to individual students. The department makes a good contribution to both literacy and numeracy, particularly to oral skills, and the ICT entitlement is developing well. There are good extra-curricular opportunities for all, such as participation in 'Geography Action Week' and the 'Coastline Britain' project.
192. The overall quality of teaching and learning are good. It was never less than satisfactory and was very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject. Planning is very good in both content and timing. Explanations of new concepts are clear and concise, so that pupils make good gains in knowledge and understanding. In the good and very good lessons seen, expectations were high and lesson objectives for all pupils clearly stated from the outset. There was a brisk pace throughout and a range of challenging activities. Teachers' enthusiasm for geography is shared with the pupils who are motivated, sustain concentration and are keen to succeed. They are supportive of each other in paired and group work. They are courteous and respectful of staff and the learning environment is positive and purposeful. Some distracting behaviour was seen towards the end of lessons. Appropriate homework is regularly set and marked, with positive and supportive comments. These do not yet clearly tell pupils how to make specific improvements.
193. The department is very well and conscientiously led. Expectations are high and there is clear direction as to how the curriculum should be implemented. Documentation is excellent and the quality of planning is very good. Steps have been taken to observe lessons and to monitor the quality of teaching in the department. The department's self-review sets high standards for development which link well with the college improvement plan. Accommodation and resources are well managed.
194. Standards reached at all levels have improved since the last inspection. Schemes of work have been thoroughly revised to match recent curriculum changes. Additional fieldwork has been arranged in the local area and there is now an integrated programme. The use of ICT has improved. The department has moved to new accommodation and an additional classroom acquired. There is very good teamwork among the staff, who share both teaching strategies and a commitment to raising standards.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Commitment of teachers to care and progress of pupils.
- Very good relationships and positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- Improve opportunities for pupils to become active learners.

195. Pupils enter the college with standards slightly below the national average. By the end of Year 9 attainment is in line with national averages, indicating good progress up to that time. GCSE results have improved significantly over the last three years, but are still below national averages. However, these results show improvement on prior attainment. The grades that candidates achieve are better than those predicted by their attainment in Year 9. GCSE results in history are in line with results achieved by these candidates in other subjects. Over the last five years there has been no significant difference in attainment between boys and girls.
196. These standards are confirmed by observation of lessons. Pupils can write clear accounts of the events they have studied. They can research and then describe the way people lived in the nineteenth century, giving details of transport, entertainment, crime and disease. They use ICT to investigate the 1801 census, and analyse what it shows about the movement of population. Pupils in Year 11 can write clear accounts of key aspects of twentieth century history, for instance describing the way in which Hitler manoeuvred himself into power in 1933. They are aware of the pressures that led to prohibition in America. They write well about the Depression and can show how its effects were felt in Europe. They display a positive attitude to the subject, and respond well to the teacher's questions.
197. However, they are weaker in some historical skills such as probing how interpretations of events have often differed. For instance, they ignore opportunities for investigating whether Guy Fawkes was the victim of a government plot rather than the villain of popular history. They seldom discuss how historical sources came to exist or whether they are reliable. They need to practise writing extended essays in which they show more clearly the relationship between cause and effect, and how the evidence supports such conclusions. They have access to plenty of sources, but seldom use them in their essays. Moreover they do not remember accurately what they have covered previously.
198. Teaching is good throughout the main college. Teachers plan conscientiously and take much trouble with preparing materials. Their subject knowledge is extensive, and they use it to make the lessons interesting. Perhaps their greatest strength is the care they demonstrate for their pupils' progress, manifested in very good relationships and thorough marking of books. As a result pupils behave well and work hard. Teachers make good use of data on prior attainment to set targets, and in this respect expectations are high. But they do not sufficiently require pupils to speak about what they know, pushing them hard to defend their opinions. Nor do they expect pupils to write at length, using the results of their research or quoting the sources that would lend support to their conclusions.
199. Learning is good in the earlier years but only satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In Year 7 very good learning was observed taking place in small group work. Pupils were given cards containing facts about the Black Death and had to decide whether they represented causes, symptoms or effects of the plague. They were well motivated and learnt much from each other. The activity allowed the learning support assistant to be particularly effective throughout the lesson. In a Year 11 lesson about the means by which the Nazis asserted control over everyday life in Germany the teacher talked so persuasively, using detailed knowledge of the period, that pupils gained clear insights into the minds of both police and ordinary citizens. But this was rare: in later years the pupils tend to become too dependent on the teacher, and are less often required to think for themselves. In all years those with special educational needs are well integrated into the work of the whole form, and learn well, benefiting from materials specially adapted to their attainment.
200. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. This is particularly marked in GCSE results. All the strengths mentioned in the previous report have been well maintained, and most of the weaknesses addressed. It is still very much a hard-working department, strongly led. Assessment and target setting, previously found to be weak, are now assiduously managed and effective. The provision of textbooks and the state of the accommodation are now much better than they were. However, the quality of learning still needs to be improved. Teachers should expect pupils to rely less on notes and instead talk about history more vigorously. There needs to be more research, more discussion, a more sceptical approach to the evidence, and more argumentative writing. In this way pupils may remember more of what they have learnt and write about it with conviction.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning in ICT lessons.
- Materials published on the college Intranet to support learning.
- Development planning for ICT.
- Technical support for ICT.

Areas for improvement

- More consistency is needed across departments in the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.
- Greater use of ICT to measure, record, control and automate events.

201. By the end of Year 9, standards of attainment are very high - assessments are well above the national average, and the value added analysis shows the highest results within the college. By the end of Year 11, standards of attainment are also very high. The GCSE results are well above the national average for A*-C grades, and the value added analysis indicates that this is not because the pupils studying ICT are necessarily more able.
202. Higher attaining pupils show understanding and achieve above their expected levels, as do the pupils of average attainment. Lower attaining pupils are given extra help where needed and show perseverance and determination to succeed. They are buoyed up by their successes, which are considerable. Extension work is available for gifted and talented pupils, and much of the work produced is of outstanding quality.
203. Pupils are adept at using computers for word-processing and desktop publishing. Skills in the use of databases and spreadsheets are developed to an appropriate level in Year 7. Pupils have opportunities to develop these skills further in Years 8 and 9. Many good examples of animated presentations were seen, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Slides contained text and pictures and were usually effectively enhanced with animation effects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to progress to using more sophisticated database software and to using more complex spreadsheet functions.
204. Pupils give extended answers to questions and show good listening skills, listening carefully to their teachers and to their fellow pupils. Reading is generally from the VDU screen and comprehension is good. In numeracy, there is good reinforcement of mental arithmetic, indeed one pupil, when doing a piece of work involving a spreadsheet, preferred to use mental arithmetic instead of 'all that hassle with formulae'. Literacy generally is well promoted - lists of technical keywords are on prominent display in every classroom.
205. Pupils are well motivated in ICT lessons. They are keen to learn and usually apply themselves diligently. Pupils are able to co-operate effectively when required and many examples of effective peer support were seen in all years. Pupils are well monitored in lessons and over time - progress is well recorded. Extra help is available when needed and there is good access to ICT equipment out of hours, for those pupils who do not have access at home. Behaviour in lessons is very good for the most part, those few incidents of less good behaviour being firmly but sensitively dealt with by staff. There are good relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils.
206. Teaching and learning in ICT lessons were very good in all years, enabling pupils to make good progress. Lessons are well planned and tasks are appropriate for a range of abilities. Support for individual pupils was good in all lessons seen. The teaching shows good subject knowledge and planning, with excellent communication of learning objectives. There is good discipline and relations with pupils are good. Teachers know their pupils' strengths and their weaknesses. Homework is set and marked regularly, and there is a consistent system of assessment for each unit of work. The criteria for each level are clearly indicated on the assessment sheets and pupils

are aware of what is expected to achieve a given level. Although some assessments of these pupils' work are carried out by other departments and shared with the ICT department, there needs to be closer monitoring of all pupils' progress in ICT. This could be achieved either by more detailed mapping of their progress, or by the extension of discrete ICT lessons to all pupils in Years 10 and 11.

207. The ICT department is well led by the head of department, and both he and the ICT co-ordinator to whom he reports have a clear vision for ICT in the college and where they are heading. Since the last inspection, the action points have been dealt with; there has been a radical change in approach, moving from obsolete computers to modern networked PCs with proper commercial software. There is mutual respect between staff and pupils in all lessons and staff are good role models in classrooms. The curriculum contributes to the spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of the pupils, for example, the work on foxhunting, global warming and animal experimenting.
208. In Years 7 to 9 all pupils are taught specific ICT skills. Group sizes in all years are approximately 20, which means that the PC/pupil ratio in all lessons is 1 to 1. Any overflow due to slightly increased pupil numbers or to any PCs being out of service is managed by relocating reliable pupil(s) to the nearby resource area. All pupils follow a scheme of work for which there is a simulated website containing differentiated learning materials for each of Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, approximately 50 per cent of the year group study ICT as a discrete subject, Year 10 have started Part 1 GNVQ, while Year 11 are completing one of two courses for GCSE ICT.
209. The ICT department is based in a suite of four ICT rooms, which are all well equipped with 20 modern personal computers (PCs) in each room, with printing and scanning facilities. All the PCs are linked to the college Intranet and provide controlled Internet access for pupils using a white list system. Each PC has a powerful suite of software. Good quality colour printing and graphics software are desirable additional features, which should be provided as soon as resources permit. A video projector is usually available for demonstrations in lessons.
210. The system is well maintained by the two well-qualified technical staff, and there are plans to recruit at least one more technician. A commercial training unit has been set up in the college and there are plans to use this resource to provide technical support for the college and also its feeder schools. The teaching staff are all well qualified and extremely knowledgeable, bringing enthusiasm and excitement to their teaching.
211. The ICT department has ensured that the 'New Opportunities Fund' programme of professional development in the use of ICT has been made available to all teachers, which has had the effect of raising the awareness of the potential of ICT for enhancement of learning in all subject areas. Unfortunately, the resources available have not kept up, resulting in a certain amount of frustration.
212. In English, 'Successmaker' and 'Accelerated Reader' are both very successfully used to enhance pupils' learning. A suite of computers is available in the department and pupils use ICT for presenting their work. Little use is made of ICT in drama, although research can be done on topics in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 using the Internet and CD-ROMs. In modern foreign languages, the overall provision is very good. Teachers make good use of materials downloaded from the Internet and Year 10 and 11 pupils are encouraged to use the Internet for research. Pupils and staff use presentational software to prepare work. In mathematics, much use is made. There is display work on graphical solution of equations, and in Years 10 and 11, pupils make very good use of spreadsheets and word-processing in their coursework. 'Successmaker' is used with the lower attaining pupils in years 7 to 9.
213. In geography, pupils make use of CD-ROM's for mapwork on Europe, and spreadsheets to graph their results from surveys carried out. They use specific Internet sites for a variety of topics for example, volcanoes. Pupils can usually get access to ICT if they are organised well ahead. The art department has recently acquired some powerful computer equipment and software including a digital camera. The pupils use ICT to manipulate images as part of lessons on distortion. Internet

access is available for research purposes. In design and technology, a suite of computers has been acquired for the purpose of teaching control. Pupils prepare their sequences of instructions for a small motorised buggy using appropriate software, and test the effectiveness by transferring the instructions to a small 'chip' which is then placed in the buggy. The department also has several CNC machines which are used to realise simple computer aided designs. In physical education good use is made of the limited resources available.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in German are above average.
- Pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards achieved in French.
- Accommodation for the subject is unsuitable and hampers pupils' progress.
- Resources for the subject are unsatisfactory.

214. Standards achieved in German are above average overall. In French they are average. This represents satisfactory progress and achievement overall. In GCSE examinations in 2001, the proportion of candidates achieving A*-C grades was above average in German and well below average for French. Pupils do better in German than they do in other subjects, in French slightly worse. In French girls achieve significantly better than boys. In German they achieve better than boys do nationally. Higher attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs achieve well in German and in French but there is some underachievement amongst average and lower attaining pupils in both languages.
215. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in German and below average in French. Higher attaining and gifted and talented pupils display a good understanding of grammar and apply rules successfully in their writing in both French and German. They write at length and for a variety of purposes, including letter writing, narrative and to express their opinions about a variety of topics, linking their ideas successfully using a good range of vocabulary and structures. Average and lower attaining pupils write successfully following a model and all have a good understanding of grammar rules. Pupils' progress is hampered by their dependence upon written notes and prompts. This adversely affects their pronunciation in French and they are not confident in speaking or in writing without reference to their notes. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their prior attainment and all pupils entered for examination achieve a grade. In German pupils are confident in speaking and in writing. Listening and reading skills are well developed in both languages and pupils identify the main points from extracts of speech and short texts, higher attaining pupils needing less guidance and identifying more detail. Progress overall is satisfactory.
216. By the end of Year 9 standards achieved in French are average and in German they are above average. Teacher assessments indicate that standards are well above average but work seen during the inspection does not support this. Higher attaining pupils are confident in speaking and writing. In a Year 8 German lesson for example, they took part in lengthy dialogues exchanging information about their home, family and college, giving opinions and justifying their views. In Year 9 in French they are confident in describing activities in the present and the past and in expressing their opinions. Lower and average attaining pupils lack confidence in speaking and often place too much reliance on their notes to be able to respond spontaneously or accurately. All pupils have a good understanding of the way the languages work and are able to explain and apply rules successfully but do not always have sufficient opportunity to try the languages out for themselves in order to become confident in manipulating them to express their own ideas.

217. The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory. More than eight out of ten lessons were satisfactory or better. More than four out of every ten were good or better. An example of very good teaching was seen in Year 8 in German. However, two unsatisfactory lessons were observed in German that led to pupils' making unsatisfactory progress. The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent but there are significant strengths in teaching in both languages. Teachers have a good command of the languages they teach and usually use this effectively to conduct activities in the language being learned. Listening skills are therefore well developed in classes where this is the case, and in some lessons higher attaining pupils are effectively challenged to interpret more complex instructions for others. Presentations using the overhead projector or the board are usually clear, so that pupils rapidly identify patterns in the languages and are able to apply them effectively for themselves to express their ideas. In a Year 7 German lesson for example, pupils were rapidly able to express their likes and dislikes because they identified the pattern for themselves and then the structure to use was clearly noted on the board. Similarly in a Year 10 French lesson, pupils extended their range of language when dealing with instructions and expressing obligation because the key words and phrases were noted on the board and then skilful questioning by the teacher enabled them to use these for themselves. In a Year 9 lesson the teacher made good use of ongoing assessment to address the difficulties pupils were having with expressing quantities in French, and in other lessons teachers monitor pupils' progress closely during tasks and intervene where necessary to ensure all pupils succeed in tasks. Activities are usually appropriate and well sequenced so that pupils are able to build effectively on previous learning. Recap at the beginning of lessons and review at the end effectively consolidate what has been learned. Management of pupils is good; despite the distractions and difficulties presented by the accommodation, lessons take place in a calm and supportive atmosphere where pupils quickly settle and listen attentively. Teachers make good use of games to consolidate learning and pupils respond well to this; in a Year 7 French lesson pupils rapidly grew in confidence in describing and recognizing leisure activities because guessing and Lotto games were used. In a Year 8 French lesson, lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs made good progress and achieved well because they were given the opportunity to work informally in pairs and small groups with support teachers and with the French assistant on a variety of activities to practise describing themselves and others. Pupils' progress is sometimes hampered because they are not always given sufficient time or opportunity to practise new language informally or because they move too rapidly to the written form of the language. As a result, although as a class they appear competent with new language items, individual pupils are unsure or lack confidence in using it for themselves. This is particularly noticeable in French where pupils' dependence upon the written form adversely affects their pronunciation. In other instances activities lack sufficient focus; for example, lower and average attaining pupils have difficulty following activities when they are conducted entirely orally or from the textbook and in completing listening activities when they are given inadequate guidance.
218. Overall pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and their behaviour is good. In the majority of lessons they settle quickly, listen attentively and are concerned to do well. In a minority of instances, pupils display negative attitudes towards the subject and show little interest in their work or behave poorly. This is usually because they find tasks too difficult or because they are asked to listen for lengthy periods rather than attempting tasks themselves.
219. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Although the head of department has only taken up her post recently, she has a clear idea of the way forward; evident in development planning and in department documentation. Since the last inspection, there has been sufficient improvement. Standards in German have improved but in French they have declined. Pupils' over-reliance on written notes and their lack of confidence in speaking spontaneously remain the same. Although teaching and learning are now being monitored and evaluated, this has not yet had any significant impact, and inconsistencies in teaching and learning remain the same. The department has worked hard to identify opportunities to use ICT to support and extend learning but is frustrated in its efforts to put this into practice for all pupils because access to computers is difficult and because the subject -specific software cannot be used effectively on the machines available. Procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress have improved and this is evident in the increased proportion of pupils gaining A*-C

grades in German. However, there is scope for further development of the use of assessment to provide pupils of differing abilities in lessons with the means to achieve their potential in tasks set. Accommodation for the subject is entirely unsuitable and severely hampers pupils' progress in speaking and listening. Two of the rooms used act as corridors to other classrooms so that time is lost on a regular basis while pupils move to their classrooms. Walls are very thin and there is no carpeting so that acoustics are poor and lessons are disrupted because of noise from adjacent areas; this makes listening and speaking very difficult indeed. Rooms are also small and this restricts the range and variety of activities which can be provided. Resources for the subject are also unsatisfactory; there are insufficient textbooks and tape recorders are old and in poor condition, so that recordings are of low quality. Since teachers are committed to raising standards and are beginning to work together to share ideas and spread good practice, they have a good capacity to improve.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Departmental documentation is very good.
- Instrumental resources for teaching are good.
- The extra provision in Year 11 for GCSE music is excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is very poor.
- Very few pupils have instrumental lessons.
- The standard of teaching across Years 7 to 9.

220. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 is unsatisfactory overall in that too many pupils are achieving at a level below national expectations. The number of pupils studying music in Years 10 and 11 has been very small for a number of years and it is not appropriate to make any comparison with national standards over a period of time. However, most of the pupils taking GCSE music in 2001 achieved a grade C or higher and this represents good success. Standards in the present Year 11 are satisfactory.

221. In Years 7 to 9 many pupils are working to a high standard, but there is an overall inconsistency in standards, which is a cause for concern. Where pupils are doing well they are often working at a level above expectation and this is because of the very good quality of teaching that some pupils experience. In a Year 9 class pupils were making very good progress. Working well in pairs, they were putting together the tune and accompaniment of the song 'Thank You'. They showed musical capability and considerable insight into what they were doing. Where they are doing less well, and achievement is unsatisfactory, it is because of ineffective teaching. This lack of effectiveness is apparent in the low level of attentiveness displayed by the pupils, the persistent talking and the distinct lack of motivation. Behaviour throughout these three years is very variable. In some lessons it is exemplary, with the result that pupils learn well, but in some other lessons behaviour is poor, with the result that conditions for teaching and learning are difficult. Most pupils with special educational needs achieve well in performance activities in music.

222. Standards observed in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory to good, with most pupils showing good ability upon instruments and in the use of ICT. The presentation of work in Year 11 is good and the composition work shows interest and competency within the given exercises. In Year 10, pupils showed they were able to understand the idea of improvising. In an exercise related to a project on Indian music a violinist, in particular, was able to work very freely within the Indian scale. Behaviour in Years 10 and 11 is very good and pupils are clearly using all the time profitably. It is to the great credit of the department that arrangements have been made to accommodate some pupils, of clear musical potential, who were unable to take music within the

normal options arrangements. Lunchtime sessions for these pupils are proving successful, although the noise problems from the adjacent yard do present severe difficulties.

223. The overall standards of teaching and learning across Years 7 to 9 are inconsistent. At its best, in half the lessons seen, it was very good or excellent. These lessons were characterised by good lesson planning and good subject knowledge on the part of the teacher. There was good interaction between the teacher and the pupils. In a quarter of the lessons observed the teaching lacked rigour and was unsatisfactory. This lack of rigour showed in the number of pupils who were not on task and in the consequent, often excessive, noise, which inhibited teaching and learning. There was also some lack of rigour in the use of keyboards and pupils' achievement was restrained by lack of keyboard technique. Sometimes lesson material was not planned carefully enough, nor was the lesson structured effectively. Where teaching was unsatisfactory there was a weak teacher / class relationship. Attitudes were not good and there was a considerable amount of unacceptable behaviour.
224. Facilities for using ICT are not consistent within the department. Pupils in Year 11 make good use of the limited facilities in their GCSE composition work. However, pupils in Year 10 are not able yet to use the same facility. There is similar inequality in the access to ICT across Years 7 to 9. Within the department provision for ICT has improved since the last report but it is still below expectations.
225. The departmental documentation is very good and includes a well constructed scheme of work, with good policies for assessment and marking. The implementation of this policy is not always consistent. Some marking is detailed and helpful to pupils' progress whilst at other times it is lacking in constructive comments and is simply a grade. Pupils' written work is usually well presented and there is evidence that homework is used to extend lesson activities.
226. The overall day-to-day management of the department is satisfactory. There are a number of local education authority instrumental teachers who visit the college. Where their work was sampled it was of a very high quality and constituted a most valuable input into the department's work. The number of pupils taking advantage of this teaching is low with only 3 per cent, or so, of the college population having instrumental lessons. There are many opportunities for pupils to participate in musical activities outside of the classroom, from early morning music breakfast club to productions of musicals organized by parents, with music department help. Other departments such as special needs and religious education also make a significant contribution and within the department there are singing clubs and a college band. Over the course of a year there are many opportunities for pupils to perform, from awards ceremonies to Christmas celebrations, and college musicians make a major contribution to the liturgy throughout the year. There is already much evidence that the recent appointment of a second music teacher within the performing arts faculty, and a full time member of staff, is a considerable asset to the development of music within the college.
227. Improvements since the last inspection are limited but have been very effective in some areas. The purchase of a considerable number of new keyboards has greatly enhanced the provision for practical work in both music rooms and resources for teaching and learning are good. There is now access (although limited) to relevant computer music programs for GCSE work. No progress has been made in replacing the sub-standard 'music huts' and exactly the same comments made in the last report still hold. In addition to that report, the disturbance caused by ball games in the adjoining yard makes lunchtime activities an ordeal for all concerned within the music rooms. This disturbance has a significantly detrimental effect upon the quality of the musical experience of the clubs and extra GCSE classes. There are plans for new accommodation but until these plans become a reality the accommodation issue will continue to contribute to unsatisfactory provision.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management.
- Pupil-teacher relationships are very good.
- Curriculum opportunities and extra-curricular provision are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Extra specialist indoor space is required to enhance pupil learning.
- Further development of information and communication technology, particularly with examination groups.
- To continue to update the schemes of work and promote more advanced techniques in Years 10 and 11.

228. In work seen during the inspection, pupils attain average standards by the end of Year 9. This is in line with the teacher assessments in 2001. Pupils enter the college with below average basic skills but make good progress to the standard required after three years. The majority of pupils demonstrate badminton basic skills, sequences in dance and knowledge of health related activities to the standard required. One group of Year 9 boys in gymnastics found difficulties in controlling movements but another group performed quality sequences. In difficult weather conditions, passing and moving into space in a girls' netball session was above the national average. Pupils are given the opportunity to evaluate their work and the majority of pupils have a good understanding of tactics and strategies during games sessions. In lessons, especially where there is a support teacher, lower attaining pupils progress at the same rate as others and standards are raised.
229. Pupils attain average standards by the end of Year 11. The Year 11 GCSE examination groups last year were below the national average in terms of A* - C grades but above in A* - G grades. The option is popular and all the pupils who enter are placed in the appropriate ability group. The present Year 11 group is showing a good understanding in theory work and their practical ability is above national expectations. Their written presentations are neat and handouts are reinforcing the learning process. The results are expected to be higher than last year's grades. A GCSE Year 10 class showed good knowledge of fitness training and demonstrated their understanding in practical and discussion activities. The GCSE dance group in Year 10 showed initiative, understanding and above average practical ability in spite of the absence of their specialist teacher. Non-examination groups are limited in space and standards in trampolining are affected by the amount of practice each pupil can receive. Soccer and badminton groups performed at the national average whereas the netball groups have acquired more advanced techniques. There are inter-school fixtures that provide opportunity for the more talented to test their skill. Lower attaining pupils in the subject have the same opportunity to improve their standard because of the appropriate matching of tasks with different abilities.
230. Nine pupils are taking the AS-level sports studies option and their standards vary from above to below average in terms of contribution to questions. About half are expected to proceed to next year's A-level examination course. Other opportunities in the sixth form include an afternoon option on a variety of activities including inter-school soccer fixtures, off-site opportunities and following the community sports leadership award. About half of the students in this age range take up the offer.
231. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good and often very good. Relationships between pupils are very positive. They co-operate with each other during lessons and show initiative when the opportunity is given. They are keen and enthusiastic and change quickly for their lessons. The cramped conditions for year 10 and 11 pupils have not deterred attendance and participation rates. Many sixth form students are keen to continue with some form of physical activity in their allocated time.
232. Overall teaching and learning are good. Lessons range from very good to satisfactory. Experienced part-time specialists support the four full-time physical education teachers. The planning and knowledge of the subject are a feature of the good and very good teaching especially

with the GCSE and AS-level groups. They are given the opportunity to evaluate their work and comment on their own and others' work. Homework is set and marked consistently in the Years 10 and 11. On occasions, especially in soccer, lack of challenge and advanced techniques prevent higher standards being reached. Explanations at the beginning of lessons are well delivered and the warm-up is often the responsibility of the pupils. Demonstrations promote quality in basic gymnastic movements and consolidation is provided by feedback at the end of each lesson. More use of ICT, particularly with the GCSE theory groups, would impact more on pupils' learning. Generally the good teaching in the department accelerates the rate of pupil progress. Pupils of all abilities make good progress because the teaching tasks match the needs of the pupils. Resources are well used in the individual, paired and group work sessions. Pupils are efficiently managed in lessons and the large groups for trampolining are sensibly controlled. The quality of the teacher-pupil relationships assists the progress throughout the age range and has a major impact on pupils' learning.

233. The curriculum fully meets the statutory requirements and there are very good opportunities offered to the pupils. From the age of 14 there is an opportunity to opt for a GCSE course in physical education and GCSE in dance. From the age of 16 there is the opportunity to opt for A-level sports studies. A community sports leadership award course is available for the same age group. Extra-curricular sport is very good and nearly half of pupils take up the offer and 11 staff contribute to these sessions. Subject assessment procedures are effective and schemes of work are being updated to meet the relevant criteria. Future planning includes more use of information and communication technology and an indoor space for dance. The staff relate well together and the relatively new head of department is providing very effective leadership and management. The resources for games and gymnastics are good. The accommodation lacks on-site playing fields and indoor space is inadequate for the increasing numbers of pupils. Outdoor work is carried out on the hard play area and some fitness sessions are taught in the busy dining area.
234. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have improved in netball and gymnastics. Teaching is now good overall. The department is very well led and managed. Pupils are progressing in the GCSE courses and GCSE dance has been introduced successfully. A-level sports studies and a community sports leadership award scheme are offered in the sixth form and extra-curricular sport is very good. The department needs to continue to develop the use of ICT. The schemes of work need updating and to offer greater challenge to pupils in Years 10 and 11. More indoor space would allow the pupils to be taught in specialist areas, which would impact more on their learning.

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

In the inspection, thirteen 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 college.

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	3	100	62	33	15	2.33	1.51
Religious Studies	1	100	85	0	26	3.00	2.38

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	9	100	96	11	46	4.89	6.57
Biology	8	88	88	13	34	4.0	5.25
Business Studies	3	100	92	33	32	6.00	5.50
Chemistry	3	67	90	33	43	4.00	5.90
Drama	7	100	99	71	38	7.71	6.59
Economics	6	83	89	0	36	4.00	5.52
English Language	5	80	91	0	30	2.80	5.27
English Literature	28	100	95	29	37	5.36	5.91
Design and Technology	8	75	91	13	30	3.00	5.38
General Studies	54	61	85	4	30	2.22	4.91
Geography	8	88	92	0	38	4.25	5.74
History	8	50	88	0	35	2.25	5.45
Mathematics	5	100	87	40	43	6.00	5.80
Other Social Studies	16	100	87	6	34	4.75	5.30
Physics	2	100	88	50	40	5.00	5.67
Religious Studies	12	100	92	25	38	5.67	5.84
Sociology	6	100	86	33	35	6.00	5.32
Sports/ PE Studies	4	100	92	25	25	4.00	5.09

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Post 16 VQ	9	100	N/a.	67	N/a	10.00	10.45
Health and Social Care Post 16 VQ	9	100	N/a	78	N/a	11.33	10.79
Leisure and Tourism Post 16 Vq	7	86	N/a	33	N/a	8.00	10.06

Caution should be exercised in the reliability of these statistics when the number of students in some groups is small.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students are well motivated.
- The department is well managed.

Areas for improvement

- The further development of independent study.

235. Standards of attainment at the end of the upper sixth form in the A-level examination are above average. Standards of attainment at the end of the lower sixth form in the AS-level examination are satisfactory, considering the students' prior attainment.
236. Work seen during the inspection showed that the students are well organised. Homework is set regularly, together with test and examination questions. Practice examination papers seen were marked in a detailed way to help the students make progress in their understanding.
237. Teaching is a strength in this area. In all lessons seen teaching was good or very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They give clear explanations and relevant examples where appropriate. For example, in a lesson in Year 12 the difference between mass and weight was suitably illustrated. In a Year 13 lesson on correlation good examples of the use of correlation were given. Lessons are well planned. The pace at which the work is undertaken is well matched to the students' needs. Teachers question the students skillfully and students answer questions confidently showing a good level of understanding. The use of information and communication technology is encouraged and some good coursework was seen using the students' skills in this.
238. The teachers work well together to deliver the different parts of the course and the sixth form work is well managed. Teachers know individual students' strengths and weaknesses well. The mathematics curriculum is appropriate and meets the needs of the students. Students are happy with the provision in mathematics especially in the choice available between statistics and mechanics for one module. The number of students studying AS-level in mathematics has greatly increased in the last year. This is thought to be due to the new setting arrangements in years 10 and 11 and to the students' enjoyment of mathematics in the main college. The students

recognise and appreciate the support given by the teachers. Relationships between students and teachers and between students are very good.

239. Very good detailed reports go to parents every half term giving a full record of homework marks and informative teachers' comments.

SCIENCES

The science focus was on physics but a sample of lessons was seen in biology and chemistry. In biology eight students were entered for the GCE A-level examinations in 2001; the results were below the national average. Only three students took the A-level examinations in chemistry in 2001 with average point scores below the average. However, statistical analyses are not valid given the low numbers involved. In the lesson seen in biology and chemistry teaching was good and standards matched the average.

Physics

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

Strengths

- The sixth form physics department is well organised and well staffed.
- The intake of students to sixth form physics is increasing in ability.
- Teaching was good or very good in all lessons.
- Standards of attainment in the AS and A- level classes are high.
- Physics students display very positive attitudes in the classroom.

Areas for improvement

- Independent note-taking system needs to be monitored regularly.
- The marking of homework could be more detailed and constructive.
- Short-term targets, that are monitored, could help individual students to make better progress.
- Some students need more individual attention when they face difficulties.
- Positive attitudes towards physics need to be encouraged in girls who are, and have been, largely unrepresented in the sixth form physics groups.

240. Examination results in the past few years have tended to be close to or slightly below the national average. The 2001 examination results showed that at A-level two students achieved an average grade of C/D. The five students in last year's Year 12 took the new AS-level examination, achieving an average grade of B/C so the intake of students to sixth form physics appears to be increasing in ability.

241. Standards of attainment in the AS and A-level classes are high, particularly in the very able A-level class, where students are on target to achieve good or very good A-level grades. The AS group are good and many of them will continue with physics in Year 13. Most of the AS and A-level students in the physics department are from the two highly selective separate science GCSE physics sets of Year 11, rather than the mixed ability double award groups, and they have a good grounding in the subject.

242. Physics students display very positive attitudes in the classroom, where they have a keen involvement in the subject. They appear to enjoy the subject very much, and they show enthusiasm and interest for it. Most take care with their written work. They show respect for the knowledge and expertise of the teachers. They are maturing well, developing independent learning skills in preparation for higher education, and gaining confidence through speaking out in class and explaining the solutions to problems from the front of the class. Many are planning to study physics or related courses at university.

243. Teaching was at least good and often very good in all lessons seen. Teaching staff showed technical competence, enthusiasm, and a dynamic approach, maintaining pace. Practical

demonstrations were used well. Independent learning is encouraged by not giving dictated or photocopied notes; the students write up detailed notes after the lessons with the help of secondary sources (books, Internet websites and the college computer Intranet). The independent note-taking system is not being monitored regularly to ensure quality and quantity and so that students have a valuable revision resource. The marking of homework is not detailed and constructive enough and does not identify strengths and weaknesses. The half-termly reporting system is valuable to parents. Short-term targets are not being set and systematically monitored to help individual students to progress. Teaching styles were limited, without the use of some handout and worksheet material, and the use of video to show the applications of physics in areas beyond the college's equipment provision, such as particle accelerators and bubble chambers.

244. Learning was good or very good in all the lessons seen. Students enjoy the subject, and show enthusiasm and knowledge of current work. The teaching style encourages them to respond in class. They concentrate well, showing a good knowledge of formulae and principles. Most are good at recalling equations and in transposing the equations to reach a solution. The students concentrate well and often compete to answer questions so that progress is rapid. Some of the less able students do have individual problems, such as in transposing equations, and in dealing with the algebra of calculating answers to problems. At times they may need to be given individual attention, perhaps even outside the lesson time, to ascertain where difficulties lie and where help may be needed. Some students have areas of weakness in their written notes, especially in the early part of the AS year. Explanatory text, titles and labels are not always added to explain diagrams.
245. The management of sixth form physics at A and AS level is good. The proposed new science laboratories and improved computer facilities will make an excellent attraction to potential pupils.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING.

No subjects were focused on in depth but work in design and technology was sampled.

Eight students were entered for the design and technology GCE A-level examinations in 2001 and average points scores achieved were well below the national average. In the lessons seen during the inspection teaching was good or very good and attainment was above the average. Students made good progress.

BUSINESS

The focus was upon business courses but economics was also sampled. Attainment in recent A-level examinations in economics has been below the national average but not significantly so. In the lesson observed teaching and learning were very good with students understanding relationships of firms in different types of markets particularly well.

Business Studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching is at least good and more often very good.
- The department is very well managed and teachers work very well as a team, which helps to enhance teaching and learning.
- Business and community links are good and used effectively to support learning.
- The use of ICT to support learning in business subjects is good.
- Assessment is very thorough and students know what they need to do to improve.

Areas for improvement

- The number of students on some courses should be increased to ensure that they are viable.
- Some of the accommodation for the teaching of business courses is inappropriate and frequently results in several courses being taught in the same teaching area.
- Access to computers is sometimes restricted because of high demand for available resources.

246. Overall attainment in sixth form business courses is in line with the national average. The number of candidates taking A and AS-level business studies has fluctuated considerably in recent years but results have shown an improvement since 1999, in the last 2 years they have been in line with the national average. In vocational courses there has been a good improvement in attainment and in 2001 they were in line with the national average. In both cases results were good in relation to similar schools. Results in economics were satisfactory when compared to similar schools. Attainment in lessons and work seen was good in the AVCE business course and in A-level economics. In a Year 13 AVCE class, students had developed a good understanding of quality issues in relation to business management and were able to illustrate these well, using examples from local companies which they had visited and studied at first hand. Attainment was satisfactory in AS business studies and GNVQ part 1. In an AS business studies lesson, although attainment was in line with expectations overall, some students found it difficult to interpret stock control data and to draw appropriate charts without help.

247. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers engender a very positive attitude among students, who respond well and are keen to produce a high standard of work. They are becoming independent learners who make good, effective use of ICT for research, presentation of work and analysis of data. Schemes of work are detailed and lessons are very well planned to ensure that all pupils are included and can make progress. Students are made aware of what is required of them and, through regular marking, thorough assessment and target setting, are aware of how well they are doing and how to improve. In order to put the work of the department into context, very good use is made of the local business community in terms of visits and contributions in college including the Young Enterprise scheme. In addition, work experience and knowledge gained from part-time work are also used as a valuable resource in lessons and in coursework. Whole-college restrictions upon Internet use were seen to reduce the effectiveness of this essential research tool in business studies.

248. The department is very well led and managed. There is an excellent working atmosphere in the department. The staff work very well as a team and have been able to adopt a very flexible approach to the use of rooms and resources. The inappropriate nature of the accommodation in the department frequently results in several different groups working in the same space, especially when computers need to be used. Teachers are able to work successfully in these conditions ensuring that pupils are taught well and continue to make good progress. The number of students on some courses has tended to fluctuate in recent years and the broad curriculum offered by the department sometimes results in groups which are too small to be viable. Provision for business courses is very good; the department offers a broad range of courses which cater for a wide range of abilities.

249. Recent examination results indicate a rising trend in standards in the sixth form and the department has successfully updated the curriculum offered in the light of recent changes in courses and requirements. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus was upon the AVCE course but key skills and the course for ICT technicians were also sampled.

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Assessment of students' work is good.

- Management of ICT and curriculum development in the sixth form are good.
- Management and reliability of ICT equipment are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The number of computers for sixth form courses is adequate but overall the high level of demand for computers by sixth form students is not always met, putting some students at a disadvantage.
 - More students would benefit from having the opportunity to continue the development of their ICT skills.
250. Provision for students who take ICT courses is good. Courses provide suitable progression from Year 11 and the range of courses is expanding. As well as the AVCE ICT course in Years 12 and 13, there are timetabled ICT key skills lessons in both years, although not all students are able to attend lessons to develop their ICT skills further. A new course aimed at developing technical skills is now underway. The number of computers in the college is in line with the national average but access to computers is sometimes difficult because of the high demand.
251. Attainment on the GNVQ ICT course, which was examined in 2001, was in line with the national average and this represents good achievement for the students taking the course. Students in both Years 12 and 13 now follow the AVCE ICT course. Attainment in lessons was good in Year 12 but more variable in Year 13. A small number of students are now following an innovative technician course in collaboration with a multi-national ICT company via the Internet. Initial results are very good and the college plans to expand this collaboration.
252. Achievement in ICT is good. Most students on the AVCE ICT course make good progress with some making very good progress. Students in Year 12 were devising very well planned presentations, using a range of software in an imaginative way, to produce guides for various activities or organisations. In Year 13 a minority of students are over-reliant upon guidance from the teacher. Those students who are able to attend the key skills ICT lessons which are offered in both Years 12 and 13 make good progress, building effectively upon skills developed in earlier years. All were able to demonstrate a good level of keyboard and word-processing skills, while spreadsheets were used effectively. However, some students are concerned that the timetable constraints, which prevent them from attending these lessons, put them at a disadvantage. Students have a very positive attitude towards the use of computers and are able to use machines without close supervision throughout the day, if they are not being used for lessons.
253. Teaching in the ICT department is consistently good. Teachers' knowledge and planning are very good. Detailed schemes of work are in place, lessons are well structured and students know, in detail, what is required of them. Teachers ensure that activities have appropriate challenge for the whole range of abilities. Students are well supported in their work. Marking is regular with detailed diagnostic comments, and feedback during practical activities is very effective. Assessment is thorough. The regular 'on-line' assessment for the technician course is rigorous with immediate feedback, which is analysed in detail by the teacher and students, allowing further work, and appropriate supporting practical activities, to be organised straightaway. These activities frequently involve improving and extending the college's ICT infrastructure.
254. ICT in the sixth form is well led and managed. The recent restructuring of responsibilities for different aspects of ICT in the college has had a positive impact, enabling staff to focus upon specific tasks. Development planning is good with proposals to increase both the range of courses offered and resources. Stringent control on access to Internet sites does restrict research activities. The ICT department is aware of the need for some more flexibility but has yet to arrive at a suitable solution.
255. There have been good improvements in provision for ICT, the management structure and in attainment since the last inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL.

No subject was inspected on in depth but the AVCE leisure and recreation and travel and tourism courses were sampled. The classes observed were made up of joint Year 12 and 13 students who were working at standards in line with the national expectation levels at the corresponding stage in their courses. Teaching was generally good but not all students had completed their homework assignments, thus hampering learning. Sport science was also sampled and the standards of work observed were sound. Students' attitudes and achievements were good. Teaching and learning was very good.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The focus of the health and social care inspection is based on vocational education courses taught in the subject in Years 12 and 13. Students can study the subject to intermediate or advanced levels. A small number of students spend three years in the sixth form, initially taking intermediate level and then progressing to advanced level.

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

Strengths

- Relationships between students and their teachers provide a good basis for effective learning.
- The structure of the courses is well planned and therefore offers all abilities the opportunity to succeed.
- The quality of teaching is good, providing the students with challenge, developing their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject and raising levels of achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Students' skills of critical analysis and evaluation are not particularly well developed.
- Students require a greater level of understanding of the unit grade criteria in order to reach their true potential.
- Consideration should be given to replacing the old computers at present in the department with up-graded systems capable of being used for research and with the facilities to store and generate both text and images.

256. Standards are good. Standards of achievement at intermediate and advanced levels are broadly in line with the national average. The relatively small number of students makes comparison with national examination outcomes difficult. Almost all students taking health and social care to either intermediate or advanced levels do achieve a full award. Evidence based on a scrutiny of student portfolios including the unit tests results indicates that standards of achievement continue to improve. This is primarily as a result of effective teaching and the very good subject knowledge of the teachers. When consideration is given to the students' previous average points score in GCSE examinations, their levels of achievement by the completion of their intermediate or advanced course are good. The majority of the present Year 12 students have made a good start to their course. It is evident from scrutiny of their work that Year 13 Advanced students understand the concepts of health and social care. The students appear to respond well to the consultative style of teaching. Their skills in critical analysis and evaluation, although satisfactory, are not so well developed. Also a significant number of students at both intermediate and advanced level fail to fully appreciate the demands of the course in relation to the mandatory evidence, which must be provided on the completion of any unit. Students' written work is generally well organised and free from grammatical or spelling errors, often including charts, graphs and other images created using computers.

257. Teaching and learning are good. Evidence indicates that teaching includes effective planning, very good relationships, together with very good subject knowledge and strong teamwork. All work is assessed accurately, constructive advice and guidance are given, providing high levels of support to the students. Theory and practice of health and social care are well connected in both intermediate and advanced classes, promoting good learning and some significant levels of

achievement. The enthusiasm of the teachers creates a positive environment for learning. Students are developing an appreciation of the impact of health and social care on society. Work placements are arranged, giving the students first hand experience of the subject in a practical setting. Students appreciate the freedom they are given to pursue independent study. This style of teaching and learning is generally effective because of the clear structure of the experiences being offered. The majority of students are attentive, listen and show a positive attitude to their work. They are practised in discussion and, with few exceptions, contribute through effective encouragement. Communication skills are improved through the regular discussions that take place in lessons. Students speak highly of their supportive relationships with their teachers. Work is assessed regularly and students are given appropriate and constructive feedback. Teachers are well qualified and have relevant specialist and vocational experience. Accommodation is satisfactory. There is a good range of resources available and students have access to computers, although these are in need of replacement. There is a good selection of books available both in the classrooms and in the college library.

258. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear vision and an appreciation of what is required to support the development of the subject and the attainment levels of the students. The staff within the department work as a very effective team, generating a very good atmosphere. This has a positive effect upon the quality of teaching and learning. Knowledge gained regarding student progress and attainment is used effectively. Student academic records are comprehensive. High standards are promoted and expected and, as a consequence, student portfolios are generally well presented and well organised. Consideration should be given to the ways in which key skills are introduced into the courses, improving literacy skills at both intermediate and advanced levels. Some students would benefit from key skills being offered as discrete lessons rather than the present integrated approach.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level art and design, drama and music although performance studies was also sampled. There are three students on both the AS and A-level performance studies courses. The number of students entered for the 2001 examinations is too small to make valid comparisons with national data but attainment was good. Achievement in relation to attainment on entry to the course was good. The quality of teaching is very good, enabling students to integrate imaginatively the three elements of the course in well-researched and documented performance pieces.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- The standard of achievement in the sixth form is improving due to the quality of teaching and the range of opportunities available to the students.
- The teachers work as an extremely effective team, offering complementary skills that bring benefits to the students.
- The attitude of the students and their relationships with their teachers are very good, providing an effective learning partnership in lessons.
- The quality of leadership and management of the subject provides clear vision and the promotion of high expectations is having a positive effect upon student achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Consideration to be given to offering students vocational education qualifications as a strategy for improving the numbers of students electing to study art in the sixth form.

259. Overall the standards are good. Standards of achievement have improved in the last twelve to eighteen months in part as a result of changes in staffing within the department. In the GCE AS-

level and A-level 2001 examinations all students entered achieved a pass grade. Results were well below the national average for higher grades A-B. The numbers of students in both AS-level and A-level are small and therefore accurate statistical analysis is difficult. The quality of work in the students' portfolios and sketchbooks confirms that standards are improving. Some of the work produced is very impressive, particularly in drawing, painting, printing and textile design. Some students on both courses show flair and imagination, producing work of quality and originality. Student portfolios demonstrate very good research skills and attention to detail. The work produced by students in Year 13 demonstrated that the development of skills and knowledge improved over the two years of their studies. The majority of the students are confident when working with a variety of materials and resources. Students in Year 13 were producing some impressive studies on comparisons in architectural design and also a critical analysis of the work of four different fashion designers. The students are articulate and can discuss their work with confidence and pride in their achievements. Their attitude toward the subject borders on excellent, and is probably a major contributor to the quality of work produced in their portfolios and displayed throughout the art department and the public areas in college.

260. Teaching is very good overall. The lessons are challenging and well planned in order to provide all students with opportunities to progress and to attain levels of achievement commensurate with their abilities and aspirations. Classroom organisation and management are extremely effective. The relationships between the teachers and the students are often excellent, providing a pleasant atmosphere in the lessons. Regular references are made to the work of significant artists and cultures in order to raise creative and visual appreciation and awareness. The department has made regular use of the skills of artists in residence, which is making a considerable contribution towards the quality of education being provided. Students are also given the opportunity to make visits to regional art galleries and also visit cities such as Paris, Rome, Florence and Sienna. All classrooms within the department contain excellent displays relating to the work of significant artists or cultures, which provide an opportunity for pupils to learn and appreciate the wider aspects of art education. Students learn well as a direct result of very effective teaching. They are attentive, productive and have excellent relationships with their teachers, due primarily to the variety of very effective teaching styles employed by their teachers. They rise to the challenges set by their teachers and use their time well, often working outside set lesson times in their designated area within the department. Students support and help each other, talking and listening to each other. There is a very good level of independent learning as a consequence of the teachers' encouraging the students to attempt to solve their own problems. This generates good levels of originality in finished work. Assessment is particularly effective as an influence on future curriculum development and lesson planning. Assessment includes a certain amount of pupil self-assessment and therefore, when questioned, students were well aware of teacher expectations and their own strengths and weaknesses. Work is assessed at periodic intervals, usually linked to the completion of a project.
261. The quality of leadership and management is very good. There is clear vision and very effective planning which promotes high standards in lessons. The teachers work as a very effective team. The quality of the work of the students on display in the art department and around the college is impressive, promoting high standards and interest in the subject and celebrating achievement.
262. The previous report drew attention to the fact that time allocated for art was below recommended levels. This is no longer the case.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Very good results in the 2001 A-level examination.
- Very good quality of teaching.
- Increasing take-up of the subject by male students.

Areas for improvement

- Sustain the improvement in attainment.
- Sustain the increase in numbers of students taking the course at AS into A-level.

263. Attainment in drama has improved in recent years. The numbers of students, mostly female, taking the previous A-level drama course have been too small to make valid comparisons with national data but, though no student failed to achieve a grade, the average grade has been below or broadly in line with the national average. In 2001, however, it was well above the national average. Currently twelve students, including 3 males, are taking the new AS course and five, including 3 males, are taking the new A2 course. The take-up from AS to A-level has been satisfactory, with five of the eleven AS students last year continuing into Year 13. Attainment in the AS examination in 2001 was good and likely to be above average when national comparisons are available. All eleven students obtained a pass grade, including three at grade A, which represents at least satisfactory achievement in relation to the levels of attainment on entry to the course.
264. The standards of work seen are good. Students demonstrate, in both class and written work, good capacity to explore and present drama texts. They are able to inform their understanding with quite extensive research and study of drama theory and of literary and historical background material. They show good skills in the use of voice and movement to interpret texts in performance. Their writing includes well-organised accounts of the devising of group presentations, clearly explaining the process of research, planning and development. Coursework pieces on chosen texts show a good capacity to respond critically, with perception and scholarship. Students work very well together, exchanging ideas freely and articulately and co-operating unselfishly to refine and improve the quality of interpretation.
265. Students in Year 12 show good knowledge and understanding of John McGrath's 'The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil' in a lively discussion of the text. They pick up the implications of characterisation, which they are able to model skilfully in pair presentations, capably using voice, movement and space. Good interaction with their teacher and fellow students explores different approaches and presentation devices to improve the quality of interpretations very effectively. Students in Year 13 contribute actively and with commitment to a practical workshop on their adaptation of Sarah Daniels' "Masterpieces". Very good relationships enable good co-operation in a productive exchange of ideas, developing perceptions of the essence of the play. Students have sufficient skills to explore alternative presentations, incorporating both naturalistic and non-naturalistic devices. They use voice, movement and space very confidently.
266. Students are very enthusiastic about the course. They enjoy their good relationships with teachers and appreciate the open discussion and teamwork in lessons. A number have found the written requirements a little daunting, but feel they are well supported. Significant numbers express the intention to continue with drama when they leave the college.
267. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have very good drama skills which enable them to illustrate and explain what is required. Lessons are very well prepared, informed by very good knowledge and understanding of the course requirements. Very good use is made of questioning and commentary to challenge students, develop their understanding and improve their skills. As a consequence, students learn very well and make very good progress. Relationships are very good, students and teachers relate in a mature and good-humoured way, which encourages the exchange of ideas.
268. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is enthusiastic commitment, good delegation, and a clear and ambitious vision of the future development of the performing arts, reflected in the recent bid for arts college status. Good resources are well deployed to the benefit of the students, and the current unsatisfactory nature of some of the space that has to be used for teaching is recognised in the planned building developments. Progress since the last inspection is good, with improved standards of attainment, increased numbers following the course and a post-16 curriculum enhanced by the development of performance studies.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- At present, the college is not organised for teaching A-level music.
- There is no planned scheme of work for music.

269. There have been no candidates for A-level music in the college for several years and, therefore, no national comparison can be made. There is one candidate on a nominal Year 12 course. He is actually in his third year of sixth form studies. He decided, last September, when the term was already underway, that he wished to pursue an AS-level course in music. The college made the decision to give the student the opportunity to undertake the course, although there would be only two taught periods possible within a week. Being in the third year sixth, the student is two years removed from his GCSE studies. Normally an AS student would be moving straight on from one course to the higher one.
270. The student is a flute player of reasonably advanced standard with experience of a number of ensembles. He is also a capable guitarist within popular styles. He has already completed a GNVQ course in ICT and is now pursuing studies in ICT networking. He has, therefore, considerable strengths, from sources other than the music department, which are of help to him in his AS-level music studies.
271. From lesson observation, scrutiny of the student's work and conversations with both student and teacher, it is apparent that his progress is behind schedule. It is also apparent that the two-year gap since GCSE is resulting in uncertainty in some areas of musical theory and understanding.
272. There is no scheme of work or programme of studies for an AS-level course, to inform the teaching and to give it structure. However, the student's work has been well marked, with a considerable amount of analysis and with helpful and encouraging comments. There is considerable evidence that the quality of teaching is good.
273. The accommodation for music within the college is totally unsatisfactory for A-level studies in that there are no facilities to pursue independent work. There are no practice rooms and therefore no space in which to work either at a keyboard or with ICT music programs when both teaching rooms are in use. Facilities are inadequate.

HUMANITIES

AS and A-level lessons were observed in geography, history and sociology in Years 12 and 13. Students' work was also scrutinised.

Geography

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

Strengths

- The improvement in standards reached in A-level examinations.
- The very good leadership, teamwork and efficient administration of the department.
- Students achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The quality of assessment and personal guidance given to students.

Areas for improvement

- An accelerated pace of working on the part of some students.

274. The provision of geography caters for one group of students in each of Years 12 and 13 who follow the AS and A-level courses. Approximately one quarter of pupils on the GCSE course continue with geography into the sixth form and the retention rate between Years 12 and 13 is high. The geography staff also teach on several of the vocational courses.
275. Standards overall are good and are improving. Over half of the Year 12 students gained grades A-B in the 2001 AS-level examinations and this reflects their GCSE performance. Standards at A-level remain below the national average, with few students gaining the highest grades, but they have shown an upward trend over the past three years. There were no significant differences in the standards attained by boys and girls.
276. The overall level of achievement is good. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of samples of their work confirm that it is in line with the national average. Students show good knowledge and understanding of topics in both physical geography, such as their climate and coastal work, and in their urban and population studies. Their enquiry and data analysis skills are good. They use these well to support their fieldwork assignments, such as beach profile and pebble studies on Hilbre Island and a survey of the retail health of Chester.
277. The overall quality of teaching is good. Lessons have a clear structure and resources are used effectively. All teachers show very good subject knowledge. The quality of assessment is very good. A wide range of tasks is thoroughly marked and guidance given as to how to improve. Students are thoroughly prepared for examinations. Staff give generously of their time outside lessons to support them on project work. Students produce carefully researched oral presentations in groups, but in some discussion sessions there is need for greater pace so that they can fully articulate their ideas.
278. Work in the subject is led and managed very well and the teamwork among staff is good. Students receive very good personal and academic guidance.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Teachers successfully share their enthusiasm for history with students.
- They provide very good marking and assessment.

Areas for improvement

- Students should research more widely.
- They need help with the writing of essays.

279. A-level results have been well below national averages for the last five years. However these results show progress in relation to prior attainment. Boys' results have been better than their results in other subjects in all recent years except 2001. Girls' results in history have been slightly worse. AS results in 2001 were in line with students' prior attainment.
280. Standards observed in lessons were broadly in line with national expectation, and achievement is satisfactory. Students can draw confidently on the knowledge they have derived from textbooks and the wealth of sources provided by the teacher. They make perceptive and apt comments. This was particularly noticeable in a lesson in Year 13 when students responded intelligently to the teacher's questions about Stalin's motives in abandoning the New Economic Plan. In Year 12 a student wrote well about the difference between the policies of Lord Salisbury and Sir Edward Grey. Others could give an acute analysis of the causes of the First World War. In Year 13 some students argued at length about whether the Weimar Republic was doomed to fail, or why Lloyd George fell from power. Argument and analysis are rare, however. Students rely on too

narrow a range of reading. They do not refer to that reading in their essays. Nor do they provide bibliographies, nor discuss the divergent opinions of historians.

281. Teaching is overall good, but the quality of learning is only satisfactory. This is because teachers devote the greater part of their lessons to imparting information – which they do very well – rather than getting students to research, to ponder, and to argue. Teachers know the subject well, and explain difficult issues with great clarity, with humour and apt reference to modern parallels. In a lesson on Stalin's assertion of dominance over his closest rivals the teacher did provide many references from contemporary sources, including Stalin himself, and from modern historians such as Fitzpatrick, Whittock and Phillips. Students had time to consider these, and use them to support their conclusions. This was very good, but essays looked at during the inspection did not generally make use of an equivalent range of source material. They are heavily weighted towards narrative and are weak on analysis.
282. Students speak well of the way they are taught. They receive help whenever they ask for it. Lessons are interesting. Marking is thorough. They are aware of the progress they have made in the sixth form, particularly in Year 13. They enjoyed and were stimulated by a historical conference in Liverpool and a holocaust presentation in Birkenhead. There are several text-books for each topic, all useful for assimilating historical background. But students admit they do not read very much outside those text-books. Most importantly, they are not shown clearly enough how to write the sort of essay required for A-level work.
283. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection five years ago. A-level results have varied according to the prior attainment of the students, with better results in 1998 and 1999, particularly among boys, and rather weaker results in 2000 and 2001. The report said that students work hard and possess analytical skills. Students currently still work hard, but need to develop historical and analytical skills more fully.

SOCIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are above or well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Students are well motivated and have excellent relationships with their teachers.
- Course leadership and management are effective and staff work splendidly as a team.

Areas for improvement

- Further develop study skills such as selective note taking and summarizing of texts.
- Further develop data response analyses and in some groups ensure more interactive teaching and learning.
- Provide the necessary accommodation and resources to support teaching and learning.

284. The most recent GCE A-level results in sociology have been well above the national average. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades of A or B has been at or above the national position. Recent results have been sustained at a level above the national average and have improved since the last inspection. When compared with other A-level subjects studied within the college, sociology results have been well above the average as in 2001. The subject is more popular with girls than boys most years. There have been no significant differences in the standards attained by girls and boys.
285. Standards of work seen during the inspection in both the AS and A-level courses are above or well above the national average. They are consistent with standards of attainment in the GCE A-level examinations. Comparison of standards seen in relationship to the standards at entry to the sixth form shows good achievement in Year 13 and very good achievement in Year 12. These high

standards are the result of consistently good or very good teaching and students who are well motivated and work hard on their studies to do their best.

286. Year 12 students have made a very good start to their course. They have a clear understanding of different theoretical positions relevant to topics taught. They can define and illustrate key concepts well by reference to the family and religion in contemporary society. They show surprisingly good skills of critical analyses as exemplified in the assessment of Marxist theories of education and how the functionalist theory relates to the college mission statement and standards. Higher attaining students are adept at critically evaluating statements in a broader sociological context although this is still a difficulty for lower attaining students. Generally intellectual skills are much better developed than is normally the case at this stage in an AS course. However, students need to be more selective in note taking and in summarising texts.
287. Year 13 students have a good understanding of the requirements of the course. Higher attaining students analyse very well, have good synthesis skills, weigh up evidence appropriately and reach well considered conclusions. They write up their findings in a convincing manner. Average attainers can assess well the work of individual theorists in relation to topics studied, such as secularisation and rationalisation in the sociological study of religion. Lower attainers do not develop their conclusions sufficiently in written work. For students of all attainment levels data response analysis is not as strong as other aspects of the course. A particular strength in Year 13 is the high quality research studies presented as A-level course work.
288. Overall the teaching of sociology is very good. The depth and breadth of the teachers' understanding of the subject enables them to give clear explanations of concepts, theories and principles. Lessons have a clear structure and focus on learning. This is based on very precise aims that are shared with students at the beginning of the lesson and tested for effectiveness at the end of the lesson. Teachers are committed, caring and very supportive of their students. Relationships are excellent between the teacher and students and it is the basis for productive learning. Expectations are realistically high and the pace of lessons brisk. Teaching is enthusiastic, lively and interesting. Best lessons ensure that students are directly involved in their own learning. Case studies are analysed and applied, as in a Year 13 lesson on 'labeling' where students established a flow chart from the start of a deviant career to 'master status' based on a recently learnt theory. Lessons are always meticulously planned and built on a very secure knowledge foundation. At times lessons, although of good quality, are too teacher led, with insufficient opportunities for students to investigate situations and issues for themselves. However, where there is good dialogue between the teacher and students that extends their knowledge, there is greater understanding of the topic taught. In most lessons there are high quality interventions by the teacher to reinforce theory and this leads to very effective learning.
289. The assessment of students' work is of very good quality. Work assignments are regularly and thoroughly marked. Students are provided with detailed, helpful comments that aid their development. They are also informed of how they can further improve their work. There is close and effective monitoring of students' projects.
290. Students' attitudes to learning are very positive and most display a real interest in their studies. In lessons they work conscientiously and concentrate well. They persevere to understand quite challenging concepts, particularly in Year 12, where they have no previous background in the subject. Behaviour built on excellent relationships is a noticeable strength. There is a real rapport evident in lessons in both Years 12 and 13. Students' contributions to discussion in Year 12 are very good but in Year 13 at times it is less well developed. Students take responsibility for their own learning and co-operate well with teachers.
291. The head of department appointed at the start of the academic year provides very effective leadership and management of sixth form courses in sociology. The two subject specialists are well trained and their combined teaching strengths and talents promote very high standards and quality of work. They work excellently together as a team and share good practice regularly through informal and formal discussion. The two specialist teaching rooms have good wall displays that provide a pleasant learning environment. However, too much teaching takes place

away from these rooms, often in classrooms where teaching facilities are unsatisfactory. This reduces the effectiveness of teaching and standards of learning. Resources are satisfactory overall but there is urgent need of new textbooks for students in Year 13 and the provision of an overhead projector in each of the specialist teaching rooms as standard equipment. There is also need to provide a suite of 6-8 up-to-date computers for A-level coursework requirements to support teaching and students' independent learning.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English and French. Lessons in German were sampled. Two students study German in both Years 12 and 13 with attainment above average in Year 12 and average in Year 13 in lessons observed. Teaching and learning was good or very good. In recent years very few students have taken A-level German and no students were entered in 2001.

English

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is excellent; students are intellectually challenged as teachers pass on their subject expertise.
- The teaching of literary criticism is a strength and students have a good grasp of the study of literature from different periods and cultures.
- Students receive high quality support throughout the AS-level and A-level courses, which they recognise and value.
- The subject is very strongly led and very well managed.

Areas for improvement

- A minority of students is passive in oral work, and even though they are skillfully brought into discussion, they do not readily volunteer a response.
- Students need further training in revision and examination techniques to improve their performance at A-level.

292. A-level English language examination results in 2001 were well below the national average. A-level English literature results were in line with the national average. Achievement, however, is good when related to students' GCSE results. In 2001 all students gained A to C grades in AS-level English language and Combined English, and most gained A to C grades in AS-level English literature. In 2001 GCSE English language results were good, 43 per cent of students entered gained a grade C. This is because: teaching is excellent; students are intellectually challenged; students receive high quality support.

293. Students perform better in the classroom than they do in examinations. Further guidance for revision and examination technique may reduce this gap. Students achieve very good standards in discussion and the analysis of texts. In a Year 13 lesson on William Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' all students presented an analysis of 'Chimney Sweep' from an innocent or experienced perspective. Their responses and questions to presenters showed that they had a clear understanding of themes. Students' critical writing is good. Teachers encourage them to develop and express a personal response to literature.

294. In Years 12 and 13, students' attainment in all areas of the curriculum is good, especially in reading and interpreting literary texts. Year 12 students enjoy speaking and listening and most make significant contributions to oral work. They express their viewpoints clearly and are prepared to express their ideas; necessary skills for meeting the requirements of the assessment objectives in the examination. They understand how to initiate and sustain discussion. By Year 13, students have developed in greater depth the skills of speculation and forming hypotheses as seen in their work on 'Songs of Innocence and Experience'. Explaining and illustrating their views

with evidence are prominent features during discussion of literary texts in both Years 12 and 13. There are, however, a small number of passive students who contribute very little unless they are drawn in to the discussion.

295. Although Year 12 students have only completed one term of their course, they are reading analytically. From the start, students establish a good standard of critical reading. They read quickly and perceptively as observed in a lesson where they analysed 'Alice in Wonderland' to create a quotation bank designed to support planned written responses. In this lesson, students responded critically to the use of language. They talked with ease and understanding about the images and themes as they developed their hypothesis. During the inspection, their comparative analysis of William Blake's poetry from perspectives of innocence and experience showed a clear understanding of how writers use specific features to express meanings. Higher attaining students have a secure knowledge and understanding of texts. They explore texts with ease, giving personal and alternative interpretations in which they can identify the implicit meanings. In contrast, average students do not always sustain their interpretation even though they can give a personal response and a reasonably well constructed answer.
296. Students write effectively and their achievement is good. Planning is thorough, as is their comprehension work. High attaining students write effectively showing skilful control and great confidence when expressing their ideas. They produce well-structured essays, draw on a wide vocabulary and use technical literary terms well when conveying their response to literary works. Average attaining students give a good overview but some do not take sufficient care when editing their work and, as a result, there are significant errors in their use of language.
297. Teaching is excellent. Teachers know their subject very well and adopt a scholarly approach to prepare and deliver intellectually challenging lessons. They provide a wealth of information on the background of literary texts and use this information to assist students in interpreting texts. Teaching is committed to students' using a range of knowledge and skills, so planning for progress, which is always good, identifies specific and substantial learning outcomes.
298. The use of talk is central to all lessons as teachers extend students' communication skills and encourage them to adopt a critical approach. The skills of intellectual enquiry through research, effective questioning and assessment are used in lessons. Expectations are high and teachers support independent learning. Marking is thorough and assesses strengths and areas for improvement.
299. The subject is led and managed excellently. The department is well established and its members have a shared commitment to teach students a love of literature and language as serious critics aiming for a high standard. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work and careful deliberation takes place before decisions are made. The department monitors students' achievement and provides appropriate advice about how to improve and succeed.
300. Two of the major strengths of the department include: one, the excellent contributions it makes to cultivate students' personal development; two, the enthusiasm and expertise which all of the teachers bring to the subject.

French

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in French in Year 12 are above average. Speaking and listening skills are particularly well developed.
- The students' high level of independence and motivation enables them to make good progress and achieve well.
- Contact with native speakers is effective in increasing the students' confidence in oral and aural skills.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support and extend learning.
- Improve the focus of lessons to enable the students to increase their accuracy and repertoire of structures.
- Accommodation and resources available to the subject are unsatisfactory.

301. There is only one student studying French to AS-level. Standards achieved are above average and, because of the student's high level of prior attainment and high levels of motivation, he displays a good level of independence in manipulating the language to express his ideas and is achieving the standards expected at this stage in the course. He displays a good knowledge of contemporary issues and French culture and is able to express his views clearly and fairly fluently in conversation - for example, about the problems of racism. He identifies the main points and specific detail from a variety of sources, including the Internet and the media and uses the information gathered to present factual accounts about, for example, the French education system or to explain young people's preferences in television programmes. In writing he manipulates the language well to present and link ideas in essays on a variety of contemporary issues such as problems faced by young people.
302. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Lessons are conducted in French and this is effective in developing listening and speaking skills. Skilful questioning enables the student to manipulate the language successfully and respond appropriately in discussions. Activities and resources are appropriate and well sequenced, enabling him to increase his understanding of contemporary issues and French society and contact with native speakers enables him to further develop speaking and listening skills. Although teachers reinforce key words and phrases effectively at the beginning of lessons, the development of new language and structures are not planned for in sufficient detail. Opportunities to exploit resources and topics to focus on and develop the student's linguistic accuracy and repertoire are often missed, so that progress in this area is developed mainly through reading and writing tasks. The student is very well motivated and uses his study time well to research new topics and increase his range of vocabulary. He has good relationships with his teachers and is well informed about the standards he is achieving and how to improve.
303. Access to ICT is difficult and software, which could effectively support and extend learning, cannot be used effectively on the machines available. The course relies upon access to up-to-date information but since there is no access to the Internet within the department, this cannot be easily exploited. Accommodation is unsatisfactory since poor acoustics and noise from adjacent areas seriously impede speaking and listening activities. Resources and equipment available to the subject are inadequate; tape recordings are of poor quality because of the age and condition of the machines.