

INSPECTION REPORT

Seaton Burn Community College
Newcastle upon Tyne

LEA area: North Tyneside

Unique Reference Number: 108647

Principal: Mr S J Prandle

Reporting inspector: Moira Fitzpatrick

Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708019

Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

Type of control: County

Age range of students: 11 to 18 years

Gender of students: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: North Tyneside

Name of chair of governors: Mr Ian Smith

Date of previous inspection: 28 November – 2 December 1994

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Anthony Fowler	History	
Vincent Gormally	Art Design and technology	
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Alan Ball	Information technology (S)	
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the college does well

Standards of attainment in the sixth form are rising steadily and are now in line with the national average.

Curriculum provision in the sixth form is good; students have a wide range of well taught courses from which to choose.

Standards of attainment in reading are good; students in Key Stage 3 perform well above the national average in National Curriculum tests in English.

Teaching in over 94 per cent of lessons was satisfactory or better; it was good or better in 58 per cent.

A supportive and caring environment promotes positive attitudes, good behaviour and a strong positive ethos.

The principal provides thoughtful and focused leadership and clear educational direction. The senior management team, staff and governors have a strong commitment to raising students' attainment.

Careers education and pastoral guidance are good and procedures for monitoring students' progress are effective in the majority of subjects.

The provision for the social and moral development of students is good.

Financial planning is good and well matched to the college's priorities; financial control and the day-to-day administration of the college are good.

The quality of the college's partnership with parents and the community is good, providing support for students' learning and an enrichment of their curriculum.

Where the college has weaknesses

There is low attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

Legal curricular requirements in respect of information technology at Key Stage 3 are not fully met.

The role of faculty and subject managers could be developed further through the monitoring of teaching in their subjects.

There is no provision for a daily collective act of worship for all students.

The college has many more strengths than weaknesses. The weaknesses will form the basis for the governors' action plan, a copy of which will be sent to all parents or guardians of students at the college.

How the college has improved since the last inspection

The college has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection and all issues identified in the 1995 Ofsted action plan have been addressed effectively. The provision for the spiritual development of students is now satisfactory and whole-college policies are implemented effectively. The college has developed long term strategic planning and successfully links spending with planned developments. Standards of attainment in information technology are rising and are good at Key Stage 4. The college has devised effective systems for monitoring students' attainment, though these are not being implemented fully in the mathematics department. Teaching and curriculum provision have both improved. Over the last four years GCSE results have varied but the average student point score has risen in line with the national trend and is well above the average of similar colleges. Attainment in the sixth form has improved and the average student point score is now in line with the national average. Students make satisfactory progress at all key stages with the exception of mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4, design and technology at Key Stage 4 and in some aspects of information technology at Key Stage 3. The principal provides strong and effective leadership. There is a greater emphasis on promoting consistency of standards and higher expectations through the monitoring of students' attainment. Targets for improvement are set and there is monitoring of teaching and the curriculum by the principal and some faculty managers. Statutory annual reviews of students with special educational needs are carried out effectively and the college recognises the need to provide more specific guidance for the development of numeracy on Individual Education Plans. Systems and structures for improvement are effective and the college is securely placed for further improvement.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1999:

Performance in:	Compared with all colleges	Compared with similar colleges	Key
			<i>well above average</i> A
			<i>above average</i> B
			<i>average</i> C
Key Stage 3 Test	C	A	<i>below average</i> D
GCSE Examinations	C	A	<i>well below average</i> E
A/AS levels	C	N/a	

Results in the National Curriculum tests are in line with the national average overall and well above average in comparison with similar colleges, that is those with a similar percentage of free school meals. The strongest subject in the National Curriculum tests is English, with students' performance well above the national average. The weakest subject is mathematics, with students' performance below the national average. GCSE results are in line with the national average on student point score and they are well above the average compared with similar colleges. The strongest subjects at GCSE are art, information technology, English, German, history and graphics. The weakest subjects are design and technology, food studies, mathematics and physical education. GCSE results for students with special educational needs show that the majority achieve at least five A* - G grades.

Inspection evidence indicates that attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations in science, modern languages, history, religious education, design and technology, art, physical education and music. In mathematics, geography and information technology students' attainment is below the national expectation and in English it is above. By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is in line with the national expectation in English, science, physical education, music and business education. Attainment is below the national expectation in mathematics, modern languages, geography, religious education and design and technology. In art, information technology and history, attainment is above the national expectation by the end of Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 students' progress as judged from observation of their work in lessons, discussions and examination of students' written work is good in science and information technology and it is very good in English. In all other subjects it is satisfactory with the exception of mathematics, where progress is unsatisfactory. At Key Stage 4 students make good progress in history, geography, information technology, art and business education. In mathematics, modern languages and design and technology students make unsatisfactory progress. In all other subjects their progress is satisfactory. Students following Advanced-Level courses in the sixth form make good progress in all subjects except mathematics and music where they make satisfactory progress. Students following General National Vocational Education courses make good progress and obtain results in line with the national average.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	English, information technology and science	Mathematics
Years 10-11	Satisfactory	Art, history, information technology, graphics and business education	Mathematics
Sixth form	Good		
English	Good		
Mathematics	Satisfactory		

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 94 per cent of the 200 lessons seen; it was good or better in 58 per cent at all key stages. When teaching is satisfactory, lessons are well prepared and have clear objectives and students make sound progress. Teachers generally show good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. In the best lessons students make good progress in response to clear presentations, well sequenced activities and a variety of approaches. Although teachers' expectations are satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4, there are still some lessons where there is insufficient challenge for higher attaining students. Teachers' management of students is good and the purposeful atmosphere that results from this makes a positive contribution to the progress students make. Instances of unsatisfactory teaching were restricted to occasional lessons in mathematics, science, geography, modern languages and physical education. Unsatisfactory teaching was mainly due to a combination of some lack of challenge for low and high attaining students, low expectations of students, unclear learning objectives, lack of discussion and review or lack of preparation at the beginning of the lesson. Particularly good teaching was seen in English, science, history and geography, modern languages and religious education at Key Stage 3 and in English, drama, geography, history, business education and physical education at Key Stage 4. In the sixth form there was particularly good teaching in English, business education and geography.

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

Other aspects of the college

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Most students behave well and work well together. The number of exclusions from the college has remained static over the last year.
Attendance	In line with secondary colleges nationally. Most students attend college regularly and arrive punctually.
Ethos*	Teachers create a good atmosphere for learning. Attitudes to work are positive and relationships are good. Staff, parents and most students are committed to raising standards.
Leadership and management	Strong, purposeful leadership from the principal, who is ably supported by the senior management team. Very supportive governing body which is committed to raising standards and developing the sixth form provision. Most heads of faculty and heads of subject provide effective leadership.
Curriculum	Broadly based and balanced at Key Stages 3 and 4. Some aspects of information technology not covered at Key Stage 3. Good provision for sixth form with a wide choice of subjects.
Students with special educational needs	Good provision overall; very good provision for the improvement of literacy in Key Stage 3. Effective procedures for identification of students with special educational needs. Targets in Individual Education Plans are precise for literacy but none for numeracy; systematic assessment and annual reviews are carried out.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Provision for social and moral education is good; provision for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Good; the college has sufficient, well qualified teaching staff. Resources generally adequate, in some cases good. There are some shortages in science, art and design and technology.
Value for money	Satisfactory. Students are well taught, they make satisfactory progress and their attitudes and behaviour are good.

*Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.

The parents' views of the college

What most parents like about the college

The good attitudes the college promotes towards reading

Useful information in half-termly newsletters

The quality of their children's annual report

The support given to students by form tutors

The additional support their children are given when they need it

What some parents are not happy about

Lack of extra-curricular sports for girls

Inspectors' judgements support the parents' positive views about attitudes to reading, the quality of information provided by the college, the support given by form tutors and the quality of annual reports. The English department has a good policy for promoting reading and the college's literacy policy promotes reading in other areas of the curriculum. The special needs department has well-developed procedures for identifying and responding to students' needs and they are active in their intervention strategies so that students are provided with support promptly. The extra-curricular provision for girls is limited and girls have fewer opportunities to join in sports than do the boys.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to raise standards and improve the quality of education provided, the governors, senior management and staff of Seaton Burn Community College should:-

raise students' attainment in mathematics by:

making more effective use of assessment data to ensure that teachers have appropriate expectations of students and plan their teaching to meet these;

providing clearer guidance for the teaching of numeracy, computational skills and mental work;

developing common approaches to teaching the various aspects of mathematics within the department;

writing specific numeracy targets for students with special educational needs;

establishing a numeracy policy for the college which is of the same quality and has the same impact as the literacy policy;

(See paragraphs: 80, 83, 114 –117, 120, 122, 124)

improve the provision of information technology at Key Stage 3 so that it meets statutory requirements;

(See paragraphs: 132, 133, 139, 141)

further develop the role of faculty and subject managers so that they have a more detailed knowledge of the work of their departments through systematic monitoring of teaching;

(See paragraphs: 122, 131, 146, 180, 190)

provide for a daily collective act of worship for all students.

(See paragraph 48)

In addition, the following paragraphs refer to lesser weaknesses which the college should also consider including in the governors' post-inspection action plan:

review resources for teaching in art and design and technology; (157, 164, 172)

review the allocation and distribution of curriculum time in some subjects; (144, 147, 191)

seek ways to provide parity of opportunity for girls' and boys' extra-curricular sports; (43)

develop and refine the use of assessment and student performance data to provide more accurate predictors of what students might achieve; (98, 124, 146, 181)

continue to develop curriculum links with primary schools, especially in mathematics, in order to improve departments' knowledge of students' attainment on entry to the college. (40)

Check equipment in design and technology and take steps to reduce any risks (172)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the college

Seaton Burn Community College is situated in Seaton Burn within the local education authority of North Tyneside. The college provides education for 429 boys and 427 girls in the 11 – 18 age range. The college serves an area of some economic disadvantage, as reflected in the percentage of students eligible for free college meals (22 per cent), which is above the national average. Only one student comes from a home where English is not the first language.

The attainment of the majority of students on entry to the college is overall in line with the national average, which is confirmed by the results of Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests, though levels of literacy are slightly below the national norm. There are 25 students with Statements of Special Educational Need and a further 139 students on Stages 1 to 4 of the Code of Practice. These percentages of students with special educational need and those with statements are broadly in line with national averages. The number of students entering the college has increased steadily in the last four years and there are now over fifty more students in Year 7 than there are in Year 11. The numbers entering the sixth form have also increased in the same period, reflecting the college's commitment to raising the aspirations of its students.

The college's aims and values are suitable. They express the intention to provide education of the highest quality based on a detailed equal opportunities policy that allows everyone to develop to their full potential.

The college was last inspected in November 1994. The college's action plan and all subsequent development plans include its response to all the key issues identified in the report. Central to the purposes of the College Development Plan are the strategies to raise attainment and improve the quality of teaching. The areas identified in the 1998 - 2000 development plan include:

Improve teaching to raise standards in the classroom;

Improve liaison with primary colleges to focus on literacy and numeracy;

Create whole college literacy and numeracy policy;

Review assessment procedures and develop target setting;

Develop systems for classroom observation;

Share good practice across the college;

Challenge variations in student achievement through the use of assessment data.

The governors have set the college a target to achieve 45 per cent of students obtaining five or more A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations in the year 2000.

Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	63	71	134
National Curriculum Test Results	English	Mathematics	Science	

Number of students at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	45	37	39
	Girls	63	35	35
	Total	108	72	74
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	College	81(62)	53(56)	54(52)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	College	39(33)	46(30)	24(21)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(29)
Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of students at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	44	35	39
	Girls	59	38	47
	Total	103	73	86
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	College	77(56)	54(50)	64(52)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	62(61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	College	38(33)	30(30)	26(21)
	National	32(31)	37(37)	30(31)

1 Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:		Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	71	67	138
GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G	
Number of students Achieving standard specified	Boys	26	67	67	
	Girls	24	66	66	
	Total	50	133	133	
Percentage achieving standard specified	College	36(52)	96(98)	96(98)	
	National	46.3(44)	90.7(89)	95.7(89)	

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved all those they studied:	Number	% Success rate
College	0	0
National		N/A

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1999	13	8	21
Average A/AS points score per candidate		For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent		For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent
College		Male	Female	All
		17.4	17	17.2
		0.4	2.4	1.4

National	17.6	17.2	17.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
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Number entered for the IB Diploma, and percentage of *such students* who achieved this qualification:

	Number	% Success rate
College	0	0
National		N/A

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and Percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved these qualifications:	College	Number 15	% Success rate 78
	National		82.5

²Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

³Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:	Authorised Absence	College National comparative data	% 8.5 7.9
	Unauthorised Absence	College National comparative data	1.2 1.1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of students (of statutory college age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	38
	Permanent	2

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	13
	Satisfactory or better	94.5
	Less than satisfactory	5.5

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

The attainment of students on entry is in line with the national expectation; however, a significant number of students enter the college with low levels of literacy and reading ages below the national average for students of eleven.

Results in English in the 1999 National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds show attainment very well above the national average at both the expected level 5 and the higher levels of 6 and above. The results in English have risen significantly over the past four years from below the national average. Girls generally perform better than boys in the national tests. These results are very high compared with the results of students in similar colleges. Results in mathematics in the 1999 National Curriculum tests are below the national average. This overall attainment masks some worrying discrepancies between boys' and girls' attainment. Whereas boys' performance was near the national average for level 5 and above and well above the national average for level 6 and above, the girls' results were well below the national averages at all levels and have the effect of reducing the overall performance of the college. Results in mathematics are below the average of similar colleges. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests in science, results were close to the national average and boys obtained a greater proportion of the higher grades than girls. Students' performance in the national tests in science is well above that of students in similar colleges. Taken over the past four years, students' performance in these core subjects is in line with the national average, with the performance of girls below that of boys overall. The performance of boys is better than that of girls across these core subjects and this is against the national trend.

In the 1999 General Certificate of Education (GCSE) examinations, 36 per cent of students obtained five or more A* - C grades, which is below the national average of 46 per cent, and 96 per cent of students obtained five or more A* - G grades which is above the national average. These results are above the average when compared with those of similar colleges at grades A* - C and are well above the average of similar colleges at grades A* - G. The average students' point score in 1999 was 37 points, which is in line with the national average and well above the average of students from similar colleges, and on the average of the past four years, students' point scores are in line with the national average. Based on averages over the last four years the proportion of students obtaining five or more A* - C was close to the national average. While the performance of girls in GCSE examinations over the past four years has been slightly better than that of boys, the girls do less well when compared with all girls nationally. Compared with all boys nationally, the boys perform slightly better in GCSE examinations.

The performance of students in the sixth form shows a rising trend. In the 1999 General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations, students obtained an average of 17.2 point score, which is in line with the national average and marks another rise for the college in a steadily improving picture of attainment at this level over the past four years. Results in the 1999 General National Vocational Qualification examinations are in line with the national average.

The pattern of GCSE results, across the subjects, at all grades, between 1996 and 1999 shows an improvement in English, information technology, graphics, German, history, art and the short physical education course. Results in geography have remained static, while results in music, food technology and the full physical education course have fluctuated and remain below the national average for these subjects, reflecting the prior attainment of students who took these courses. Results in drama have fallen to below the national average in the current year from a pattern of strong improvement over time. In English, GCSE passes have fallen to below the national average in the current year, though the overall picture is one of improvement. In mathematics there has been a fluctuating pattern of performance and results are well below the national average in 1999, due mainly to unsatisfactory progress in computational skills and significant under-achievement by girls. Overall performance in science in the GCSE examinations is below the national average and there has been a marked fall in attainment in dual award science since 1997, when students were offered the option of

choosing separate sciences. However, this is compensated by a pattern of improving attainment in biology, which is in line with the national average, and in chemistry and physics, which are above the national average.

Inspection evidence indicates that by the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations in science, modern languages, history, design and technology, art, physical education and music. In mathematics, geography and information technology students' attainment is below national expectation by the end of Key Stage 3 and in English it is above the national expectation. In religious education students' attainment is in line with the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. By the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment is in line with national expectations in English, science, business education, physical education and music. In mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography and design and technology attainment is below the national expectation and in art, history and information technology students' attainment is above the national expectation. In religious education students' attainment is below the expectations of the agreed syllabus.

At Key Stage 3, students' progress, as judged from lessons, discussions and examination of their written work, is very good in English and it is good in science and information technology. In all other subjects except mathematics, students make satisfactory progress. Their progress in mathematics, especially that of the girls, is unsatisfactory. At Key Stage 4, students make good progress in art, history, geography, information technology and business education. In mathematics and design and technology their progress is unsatisfactory and in modern languages only the higher attainers make satisfactory progress, while for the rest progress is unsatisfactory. In all other subjects students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4. In the sixth form progress is good in nearly all subjects studied. The subjects where progress is satisfactory rather than good are mathematics and music.

Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress at both key stages and in some subjects - English, modern languages and art - they make good progress at Key Stage 3. In modern languages, design and technology, art and business education, they make good progress at Key Stage 4. In mathematics, students with special educational needs make unsatisfactory progress at both key stages. They are given satisfactory support in class but targets on Individual Education Plans lack specific detail for mathematics, which creates difficulties in judging whether students are meeting targets. By the end of Key Stage 3, students' reading skills have improved considerably. They are able to read independently owing to the very good, intensive literacy course run by the special needs department. The acquisition of these crucial skills before they embark upon GCSE courses is a major factor in the success students achieve in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. While students with special educational needs reach standards which are below the average at both key stages, by the end of Key Stage 4 almost all students achieve five or more A* - G grades in GCSE examinations. Students with special educational needs make better progress in literacy than in numeracy skills.

Students' speaking and listening are generally average for their age. Students can usually explain themselves, though not at length, and they speak reasonably clearly. In geography and drama students have regular opportunities to discuss in groups and in sixth form business studies students speak well in formal presentations, with a good range of vocabulary. Otherwise there is too little opportunity for students to generate ideas through talk. In music students listen well and evaluate each others compositions. In geography there is some excellent concentrated listening with eyes shut to create a picture or contrast in their minds. Students' reading is above average. Art, design and technology and business studies encourage reading and in science students read aloud; the best practice is in humanities where there are reading corners with fiction and non-fiction and where students have regular opportunities to read in groups, in pairs or individually. Students' writing is above average. All subjects display key words in the classroom and most encourage good standards of presentation.

Attainment in mathematics is below the average by the end of Key Stage 3. Students have weaknesses in their understanding and manipulation of number. While they show confidence in the use of calculators there is an over-dependence on these and students' mental skills are not well developed as a consequence. By the end of Key Stage 4 students' attainment in mathematics is still below the average, though higher attainers show good skills in their investigations and many students achieve average levels of attainment in spatial work. Students in the sixth form have a good understanding of integration and differentiation.

In science, by the end of Key Stage 3, students show a broad knowledge across all attainment targets and their

attainment is average. Higher attainers understand the relationship between immunity, anti-bodies and vaccination. Lower attainers know the correct terms for describing reflection but do not fully understand how the concept can be translated into a diagram. At Key Stage 4, students' attainment is average and they have a good understanding of the processes of respiration. In the sixth form, students confidently conduct experiments and process data.

In information technology, attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below the national average. Students can use a variety of software and use information technology to communicate effectively. By the end of the key stage, students understand the social and ethical problems of information technology. The weakness in their attainment is in their lack of knowledge and understanding about data-logging processes in science. At Key Stage 4, students' attainment is above the national average. They have a good knowledge and understanding of all aspects of information technology and are able to use a wide range of software independently. In design and technology overall, students have higher attainments in making than they do in design. Students have a range of cutting and measuring skills that allow them to create their designs either in construction or in food technology. At the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment is below the national average. Although students present well finished designs, the overall quality of work is marred by poorly presented design sheets. There is considerable fluctuation across the subjects, with attainment in graphics well above the national average.

Students' attainments in religious education include both a knowledge and understanding of the major world faiths and the link between belief and practice. Higher attaining students at both key stages develop their own response to spiritual issues and older students at Key Stage 4 show a good understanding of moral dilemmas. At Key Stage 3, students know a range of geographical terms and their meaning. At Key Stage 4, students have a range of skills that enable them to work on a case study of Bangladesh. They show a mature understanding of the effects of flooding on the people and the country. In history at Key stage 3 students have good understanding of the reasons for change in society. They have a sound knowledge of the events of key eras in British history, such as the Medieval and Tudor periods. At Key Stage 4, students develop historical skills of investigation and interpretation and are skilled at researching such topics as the history of medicine. Students in the sixth form develop good debating skills and produce cogent arguments about the causes of the Dutch Revolt in the seventeenth century.

In modern languages, students gain competence in speaking, listening, reading and writing. They learn to apply the basic rules of grammar. At Key Stage 4, students use different tenses and develop quite a range of vocabulary. The weakness in attainment at Key Stage 4 is in speaking, where students make only short responses to questions. In music at Key Stage 3, students play simple melodies with secure rhythm. Higher attainers are able to add their own accompaniment. At Key Stage 4, students are able to sing with control and play a variety of instruments. They compose for a variety of instruments and show a satisfactory understanding of musical terms. In physical education at Key Stage 3, students perform gymnastics with sound control of jumping, rolling and balancing. By the end of the key stage students understand the rules of basketball and can dribble and shoot effectively. By the end of Key Stage 4, students have a good knowledge of the rules and tactics of basketball, though girls' skills in playing the game are not well developed.

Since the previous inspection the college has taken positive action to improve attainment. The principal has taken a lead in monitoring classroom practice. This, together with other monitoring procedures taken by some heads of faculty, has led to a clearer focus on the professional development of teachers. There is now an emphasis on data collection and interpretation, which has resulted in target setting for students in all year groups. New heads of department have been appointed who have reviewed curriculum provision and where necessary have revised and improved this.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

Students' attitudes towards their work are good. They show interest in their lessons and settle well to tasks set by teachers, with little time wasted. They sustain concentration in activities set by teachers, showing commitment and self-motivation. In Year 7 information technology, they listen attentively to the teacher and respond well to questions. They have good work rates when producing newsletters on computers. Students are able to work productively together in many subjects. In music they are able to work on composing activities in

pairs and in small groups. In mathematics they work well together in practical tasks. In physical education they show good collaboration in pairs and group work in gymnastics in Years 7 and 8 and there is good collaboration in drama. When given the opportunity, students are able to work independently, although in many subjects they have little opportunity to do so. In Year 8 English three students developed a playscript of a court case and made a video recording of this. In art and design and technology students show more independent work in Key Stage 4.

Students with special educational needs show good attitudes to learning. They have a clear picture of their own difficulties and what they need to do to overcome these. They are particularly adept at seeking advice from the special needs team whenever they require additional help with their work. The summer college which they attend prior to starting in Year 7 helps to prepare them for life in the college. They take advantage of the very good intensive literacy programme provided in Key Stage 3 and the paired reading scheme. Students with special educational needs are polite and well behaved in college.

Behaviour in and around the college is good. There is good behaviour in lessons and students are responsive to teachers' instructions. Students are trustworthy, respect property and are happy to be able to leave equipment in unlocked classrooms. The college is an orderly community, with students showing respect to each other and to visitors in the college. In corridors at break and lunchtime they move around sensibly. In long dining hall queues students are well behaved and patient. During the inspection poor weather resulted in many students being in classrooms during a lunchtime but little teacher supervision was needed as students were well behaved. Students are aware of the college code of conduct and the bullying policy. There are very few incidents of bullying and these are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Students feel secure and happy in the college. They value the commendation system, which has been introduced since the last inspection. The number of exclusions from the college over the last three years has been static and is about average for a college of this size.

There are good relationships between students and between students and adults. Students are friendly and courteous and helpful to visitors. There are good relationships in lessons, and students feel confident about approaching teachers over matters of concern such as work or personal matters. They respect each other's opinions, as evidenced by a lively debate on privatisation in Year 12, when feelings ran high, but the students' mature attitude enabled them to see and accept each other's views.

Students' personal development is satisfactory, although there are more opportunities for older students, particularly those in the sixth form, to have responsibilities. There is a college council with representatives from each year group making decisions affecting the whole college. Many students are involved in fund raising for charities. Students in the sixth form make a significant contribution to many aspects of college life. They are involved in paired reading schemes with younger students; they assist in lessons in music and information technology. Further opportunities need to be made available for other students to have more responsibility in the college.

Attendance

Students' attendance is in line with other secondary colleges nationally. This is a positive picture which means that most students are able to take advantage of all the educational opportunities the college is providing. The college has successfully increased attendance by 2 % since the last inspection and it is now stable at around 90%. However, the average attendance of Year 11 students is below 90 per cent and this is a cause for concern. Timekeeping throughout the day is good and lessons start and finish as timetabled. Most students are punctual in the mornings with some occasional lateness when college transport is delayed.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. This successfully promotes the satisfactory and often good progress of students across the curriculum. In over 94 per cent of the 200 lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was at least satisfactory. In 45 per cent it was good and in 13 per cent it was very good or excellent. In the sixth form all teaching was satisfactory, good or very good. Some particularly good teaching was seen in English, science, design and technology, geography, history, modern languages and religious education at Key Stage 3, in English, science, business studies, design and technology, drama, geography, history and physical education at Key Stage 4 and in English, business studies and geography in the sixth form.

Teaching has improved since the last inspection. At that time only 88 per cent of lessons were judged to be satisfactory or better. Since then the college has put a lot of effort into improving the standard of teaching through in-service training courses and consideration of alternative teaching strategies, with the result that the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons has reduced from 12 per cent to 5.5 per cent. These unsatisfactory lessons were in mathematics, science, geography, modern languages and physical education. They were mainly due to a combination of the following: lack of challenge for low and high attaining students; low expectation of pupil performance; unclear learning objectives; lack of discussion and review; lack of preparation at the beginning of the lesson for the skills needed.

Teachers generally show a good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are teaching. This is very apparent in the sixth form and, together with very effective planning and high expectation of student performance, makes a significant contribution to the good standards of work achieved on A-level and GNVQ courses. Many lessons at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 similarly show the results of good planning and high expectation of pupil performance. This was well illustrated in a Year 8 English lesson where clear instructions were given at the beginning of the lesson and learning objectives were discussed with the students. Spelling skills were carefully broken down and meaningful questions from the teacher focused on the tasks to be done. There was a positive approach to students' achievement and a variety of teaching approaches were used. In contrast, the effects of less successful planning were seen in a physical education lesson where there was no discussion of route planning in preparation for orienteering and in mathematics where fractions were not practised in preparation for work on probability. However, even in some of the best lessons insufficient challenge is presented for higher attaining students.

The majority of lessons are satisfactorily prepared and have clear objectives. Teachers employ a variety of organisational strategies, including class teaching, group work, practical activities and individual work. Lessons do not always have an introductory session with the whole class. The benefits of an introductory session can be seen in the strong lessons on literacy at Key Stage 3 where teachers provide clear outlines of the objectives and students listen attentively, are very keen to answer questions and embark upon their work with great enthusiasm and vigour.

Teachers expect and obtain good standards of behaviour. Classes are well managed with effective use of time and resources. However, the information technology facilities in the college are under-used and many opportunities to enhance the learning of a subject through the use of a computer or related hardware are missed.

Support for students with special educational needs is mainly class based and well focused, especially in literacy related work, although there is currently a lack of equivalent focus on numeracy. Teachers set appropriate tasks for students with special educational needs. Activities are appropriately planned to ensure equality of access to the whole curriculum. The quality of teaching in the support base is good and in about half the lessons it is very good. Support teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to plan appropriate activities for students with special educational needs. They develop very good relationships with students and skilfully manage their behaviour and occasional lapses of concentration. The progress made by these students reflects the overall quality of provision and students make good progress in literacy, especially at Key Stage 3.

At Key Stages 3 and 4 day-to-day assessment, such as the use of questions and short tests to assess students' understanding, is satisfactory. Students' work is marked regularly in most subjects; comments are positive but do not always focus sufficiently on standards or on ways of improving performance. Assessment is well used in the sixth form to inform planning.

Students have a programme of regular homework. Timetables are organised to ensure that students do not become overburdened. Homework is used appropriately either to follow up work taking place in class or to provide opportunities for research and enquiry. Arrangements in the sixth form are good but computing facilities are not always available for students wishing to do their own work in college. Responses from parents indicate that they are generally satisfied with the work their children are expected to do at home.

The curriculum and assessment

The breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. They are good in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 all subjects comply with the requirements of the National Curriculum except information technology, where some aspects of monitoring are not taught. The programme of information technology across the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is not yet fully developed and there is a need for monitoring this to ensure that teachers have the resources and expertise to teach the planned syllabus. All students learn both French and Spanish from Year 8. Although the length of the teaching week is in line with the recommended time for secondary colleges, some subjects have less than the recommended time, though progress remains satisfactory.

At Key Stage 4, in addition to the core subjects, all students follow the short course in religious education, though the time allocated is below that recommended by the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Higher attainers may study three separate sciences for GCSE by doing extension work and holiday study in addition to lessons. Students have a satisfactory range of options for GCSE, including drama or leisure studies or art or music, and business studies or history or geography. Students may choose two modern foreign languages, although, in reality, this rarely happens. Students may opt for a full GCSE course in physical education or for a popular short course based on their practical lessons and covering the theory in lunchtime and after college sessions.

In the sixth form students can opt for a good range of A and AS levels, Intermediate or Advanced GNVQ and some GCSE subjects, or a mixture of these courses. A levels include traditional subjects, three science subjects, though there is still too little information and communication technology there, and physical education and general studies. GNVQ courses are leisure and tourism, business studies, engineering, and health and social care. Students follow courses in community and recreational studies, which involve students helping younger students in the college with reading, and in community sports leader awards. However, students are not required to include recreational physical education in their sixth form programme. The time allocated to teaching modern foreign language courses in the sixth form limits progress.

The college meets statutory requirements to provide programmes of personal, social and health education. This includes education on misuse of drugs for all students beyond Year 7 and teaching about sex with a pronounced emphasis on responsible sex and on preparation for parenthood. Social, economic and environmental awareness are in the overall programme too.

Equality of access and opportunity is good at Key Stage 3, satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and good in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 all students are supported through the very good provision for improving literacy. The special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) ensures that all students with a reading age of below ten years are withdrawn from lessons four times weekly until their reading age meets the demands of the college curriculum. She is careful to plan and monitor these withdrawal sessions so that students do not miss contact with the same subject more than once each half term.

Provision for students with special educational needs is good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3 Individual Education Plans for literacy are well written. Students following the intensive literacy course have a good programme of reading and writing skills, which is progressive and accelerates students' learning. The extension of the literary focus to the whole college has further enhanced the provision for students with special educational needs as they benefit from departments' provision for developing reading and writing skills. The absence of numeracy targets for students is a weakness that the college already has recognised and has plans to address.

Planning of the curriculum to enable students to make steady progress from one key stage to another, and within each key stage, has some unsatisfactory aspects at Key Stage 3, especially in mathematics. It is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Liaison between headteachers and governors of the college and its feeder schools is good, leading to a smooth transfer of students' records and ongoing pastoral care. In English, the college teachers have found out about what students are learning in the Literacy Hour and how this is conducted in Year 6. The co-ordinator for special educational needs tests students in Year 6 to discover their reading and spelling ages and any special educational needs. These contacts combine with the 1999 summer

literacy college and the college's established literacy policy to enable students to make good progress, often very good progress, in English and humanities at Key Stage 3. Higher attainers are less well identified than lower attainers on entry and they are less well catered for in Year 7, for instance, in some mixed ability English classes in Year 7. Geography and history assess students at the start of Year 7 and build their courses on that. However, overall there is insufficient continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3 in mathematics and this affects students' progress. As yet there is no whole-college numeracy policy though this was proposed for the 1998 - 1999 College Development Plan. The college needs to take urgent action to deal with weaknesses in computation and mental mathematics which affect students' progress at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Between Key Stage 4 and the sixth form the transition is satisfactory. Sixth form tutors develop students' study skills and most subjects have appropriate topics for introducing students to sixth form work.

The timetabling of most subjects allows for steady progress over the week but in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 the uneven distribution of lessons impedes progress. In Year 11 science the middle and lower attaining sets have all their lessons in the afternoon when their concentration is flagging. English classes split between two teachers in Year 7, Year 9 and Year 11 make less progress than other classes in the same year.

Schemes of work are good in most subjects throughout the college. They are very good at each key stage in geography where they are very detailed with key vocabulary, key concepts, teaching strategies and opportunities for assessment, as well as interesting case studies and opportunities for practical activities in each year. Schemes of work are very good in GNVQ courses in the sixth form. Homework supports learning in most subjects. The emphasis on regular reading for English throughout Key Stage 3 turns students into interested and competent readers.

Extra-curricular activities enhance students' learning, The provision for music is very good, with a large choir producing high quality singing, and there is a well directed small orchestra. The choir sang the 'Faure's Requiem' in a local church in July. On the same occasion one of the popular twice-yearly drama productions occupied half the evening. Music and drama combine very successfully in productions like "The Pirates of Penzance" involving about 120 students and some staff both on and off stage. The English faculty and the library stage annual book events and there are visits to the theatre, for instance to Grimm's Tales for Year 7 and to Ibsen's "A Doll's House" for the sixth form. The modern foreign language work-experience for sixth formers, the science trip to Disneyland for Year 10, and geography field trips, as well as the college's link with Kenya, widen the students' horizons. There are fewer extra-curricular activities in sport than are often found. There are limited opportunities except in soccer, which attracts both girls and boys, and some cricket. There is some mixed basketball in the sixth form. There is a little hockey with a coach from outside the college but no netball, so extra-curricular opportunities for girls in sport are limited.

Careers education is good. Students in Year 7 begin to be made aware of career opportunities. Year 10 do a week's work experience and sixth formers may do at least a week. The local careers service gives a lot of support to the least enthusiastic students. Older students learn to compile their 'curriculum vitae' and write job applications and governors and employers give them mock interviews.

The college's systems for assessing students' attainment have much improved since the previous inspection. They are now satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and good in the sixth form. There are several well-devised policies on marking and assessment and students are now clear about how assessment works in each subject, about what National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades mean and about what they should do to improve. This is particularly successful in science where students' test results, class averages and effort grades are kept on a faculty database, where students are well aware of the level and grade criteria and where in Key Stage 4 the faculty calculates each student's rate of progress and informs the student and parents of this. Students learn to assess their own and other people's work in art, music and drama and in English the teachers encourage students to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of example examination answers. The physical education department asks students to assess their own work at the end of units of study but there is not enough of this process during lessons at Key Stage 3. Students in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 have target levels or grades for each subject, which they record in their diaries so they are constantly aware of how well they are doing. Assessment in the mathematics and modern foreign languages departments is less consistent than their assessment policies would suggest. There is a good deal of thorough marking of sixth form work, which stimulates students to think further and indicates what to improve.

There is unsatisfactory use of assessment data in mathematics at both key stages and in physical education at Key Stage 3. The use of assessment data is satisfactory in the sixth form. The college has the data from Key Stage 2 tests at the start of Year 7 but does not disseminate these to teachers straightaway. The result is that, although students with special educational needs are identified and given help from when they join the college, higher attainers and potential under-achieving groups of students are not identified early. The college realised some years ago that a literacy drive was needed to improve students' attainment in reading and writing and this has had a marked effect on raising standards in English and humanities. On the other hand, the college did not recognise that girls have been under-achieving in mathematics and that girls have sometimes failed to reach teachers' expectations in English where boys have been improving more steadily over time. All students in Years 7 - 11 have had individual targets from 1998 and in Key Stage 4 students who are under-achieving are monitored and given advice to good effect. This system is less used for higher attainers who are under-achieving. The college is not yet using its assessment data to set targets for faculties, classes or groups of students against the overall college target for improvement at GCSE. The college has started to use the YELLIS system with Year 10 this year, which should yield useful information about the progress of individuals and groups.

The systems for reporting to parents are satisfactory. They comply with statutory requirements. The reports consist of an end of year report and a mid-year progress report. The end of year report includes the student's current level or grade in a subject, indications by the teacher and the student of progress made and how to improve and a check list regarding attendance, punctuality, concentration and behaviour.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The college provides an environment in which, although there is some variation, the overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Assemblies are provided for different year groups on different days and most students attend one per week. Occasionally, visiting speakers take the assemblies and at other times assemblies are taken by staff members. These assemblies offer a positive social experience and most include a spiritual element to the topic or issues and offer a time of reflection. On the days when there is no assembly there is no provision for any form of collective worship or thought for the day and so the college is not complying with statutory requirements for this. As stated in the last report, consideration must be given as to how a daily act of collective worship can be provided.

The spiritual provision within the curriculum is satisfactory. A whole-college training session was held in September; a curriculum audit has been undertaken to ascertain the contribution made by different subject areas and development is continuing. Some curriculum areas are making a very positive contribution. In religious education lessons students are able to consider values and beliefs and opportunities are provided for students to consider the nature of the world around them and to experience a time reflection. In art consideration is given to the feeling of the artists whilst composing their work, empathy is common within English and in music students are asked to consider the effect that the music has on them. In the previous inspection report it was stated that the spiritual development of the students was limited but there has now been a significant improvement in this within the lessons.

Provision for the moral development of students is good. They are expected to behave well, care for others and have a clear sense of right and wrong. The college aims include this aspect and the college has effective procedures to help the students in their decision making. Although there is some litter around the playground, the college makes students aware of the need to take care of the environment and respect each other and property. Moral education is included in a variety of subjects and is seen in the day-to-day work in the classroom. Moral dilemmas are considered in drama with topics such as bullying, racism, homelessness and topical issues such as foxhunting. In geography Year 8 students consider the conflicting interests in the conservation and possible development of Antarctica. Year 10 and 11 students are helped to have a very clear sense of moral decision-making as seen in religious education when considering abortion, euthanasia and suffering. These skills are also seen in the sixth form when students are considering issues associated with the privatisation of education. The college is a caring community where staff and other adults within the college provide good role models for the students. The majority of parents believe that the values and attitudes of the

college have a positive effect on their children.

Provision for the students' social development is also good. There are many opportunities within lessons when teachers offer opportunities for students to work co-operatively, in pairs and in small groups and these involve a range of activities. A range of extra-curricular activities provide students with the opportunity to mix with others of different ages. Citizenship is included at various times within the personal and social development programme and covers areas such as human rights, equal opportunities, the role of the magistrate's court and how courts function. As a consequence, the students develop an understanding of their present responsibilities and those they may face in the future. Sixth form students have opportunities to take responsibility in helping with younger students during information technology lessons and in the paired reading scheme and last year a group of sixth form students organised a social visit for some students from Chernobyl. There is a college council which makes decisions about the charities which will be supported by the college and Year 10 students also help with a paired reading scheme but there are relatively few other opportunities for students in the main college to take responsibility.

Provision for the cultural development of the students is satisfactory: there are a number of opportunities where students are able to appreciate their own culture and that of others. The development of the understanding of the students' own culture is stronger in English, where they use a wide range of literature from different periods, looking closely at middle and old English literature. Business studies students consider cultural changes associated with smoking. A number of local theatre visits are arranged and students take part in concerts in the locality arranged by the music department. The link with Kenya offers a chance for all students to hear first-hand experiences of staff and the good display strengthens understanding. Music from a variety of cultures is studied and in modern foreign languages the culture and life of France, Germany and Spain is considered. Some sixth form students undertake overseas work experience. The quality of the display work around the college is good, some of it showing other cultures, and there is a display of Chinese artefacts and art within the art department. There has been some improvement in the provision of the cultural development of students since the last inspection.

Support, guidance and students' welfare

The overall quality of support, guidance and the procedures in place to help ensure students' welfare is satisfactory. The college has successfully maintained the standards seen during the last inspection.

Procedures for monitoring students' academic progress are satisfactory overall. Whilst there are some areas for development in the use of whole-college assessment data, there are examples of good practice in the college with regard to the way students set themselves targets to aim for. Students are clear about how they are progressing and what they are aiming to improve. The use of National Curriculum levels, where students are made familiar with what they have to achieve to gain the next level, is helping to raise academic standards. For example, in an art lesson, samples of work were shown and students completed a critique and judged which level of work they were examining.

Marking in books is usually good and individual targets for each unit of work are set for students, as part of this process. Displays in most classrooms help to provide clear guidance for students on how to set out their work, with useful literacy prompts and explanations about National Curriculum levels. The college has recently introduced a comprehensive student review exercise. This is where students look back over the year and re-evaluate how they have progressed in all areas, such as behaviour, work, after-college activities etc. This provides a useful exercise in refocusing students on goals for the next academic year. All these strategies currently in place are serving to raise students' aspirations and levels of achievement.

The monitoring of students' personal development is satisfactory and pastoral managers keep a logbook of any relevant information about students in their year group. The information recorded on students' annual reports confirms that most of the staff take the trouble to get to know their students well.

Procedures for providing discipline and encouraging good behaviour are good. The Behaviour Code and

“Making it easy for everyone to learn” posters are both clearly displayed all through the college and these help to reinforce the expectations of good behaviour - which are clearly achieved. Staff are experienced in handling any incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour and there is an appropriate system in place for keeping a detailed record where pupil’s behaviour falls below that expected.

The college has a leaflet for students and parents which explains how it approaches any incidents of bullying. Systems in place are satisfactory and students are happy that staff act swiftly to deal with any incidents of bullying. The college’s personal and social education lessons include advice for students on how to cope with bullying - certainly none was witnessed during the inspection.

The monitoring and promoting of students’ attendance is satisfactory overall. The college has succeeded in maintaining attendance at around 90 per cent and this is a rise of two per cent since the last inspection. Whilst the attendance has stabilised the college acknowledges the need for more time and resources to actually improve attendance. The involvement of the Educational Welfare Officer has been reduced and is now very limited. Time allocated for visits to the college is often used elsewhere. As a result, only high priority cases are dealt with. There are still many students who have a casual approach to attendance and take a number of occasional days off college. Pastoral managers do their best to monitor attendance, within the constraints of their time. The attendance of Year 11 students falls below 90% and this is a cause for concern. There is also little provision of educational welfare support for the small numbers of students with poor attendance patterns who live in Newcastle area - which is outside the college’s area of authority.

There are satisfactory systems in place to encourage attendance. The college sends out firm letters in response to parental requests for holidays during term time and not all requests are granted. Various certificates both for individuals and tutor groups are awarded, to reinforce the importance of regular attendance.

Child protection procedures are good overall. The college’s policy is clear and the designated teacher has received additional training recently. Staff have a good level of awareness and training has also been provided for lunchtime staff. The college acknowledges the need for a second person to be trained to designated teacher status, in view of recent staff movement.

Students are given a good level of guidance through personal and social education (PSE) lessons. The PSE curriculum is delivered well by form tutors and those lessons seen during the inspection provided some useful guidance for students to help them cope with different situations they may meet as part of every day life. The PSE programme is well organised by individual pastoral managers and PSE is seen as an important part of the curriculum. Certainly, students spoken to valued their lessons. The provision of two “drop in” sessions taken by medical professionals serves to enhance the college’s own provision and is providing a valuable service for students.

A well-organised careers education programme is provided for all year groups and is an integral part of the PSE curriculum. In the lessons seen during the inspection, Year 7 students were visited by different members of college staff, such as the secretary, kitchen staff and college nurse, who spoke about their jobs. This provided useful first-hand experience which is helping to broaden students’ experiences of the world of work. The college receives good support from the Careers Service and all students have good opportunities for individual career guidance.

The college has an appropriate policy for health and safety. A recent survey of possible areas of concern highlighted the need for the development of more comprehensive risk assessment procedures. The training of staff and subsequent implementation of procedures is needed. The following areas were highlighted as being a cause for concern in the interest of health and safety: machinery in the design and technology department, broken tiles in the boys’ changing rooms and the position of basket ball posts on the netball courts.

Partnership with parents and the community

The partnership the college has with parents and the links with the wider community are good. The positive

picture seen during the last inspection is still in evidence.

The quality of information the college provides for parents is good. Newsletters from the principal are regular, well presented and provide a good insight into college news and events. The college values parental views and a space is included for parents to sign to confirm receipt of the newsletter and to comment on any of the news items included. The prospectus, which comprises an information booklet for parents and a more detailed curriculum leaflet, provides a satisfactory level of detail and complies with all legal requirements. The governors' annual report is informative but does not tell parents about the college's progress on the action plan from the previous inspection. An appropriate home and college agreement is in place.

The college has produced very useful leaflets for parents covering different aspects of college life; titles include advice on how parents can support their child with homework, reading and spelling skills and one which explains the college's policy on dealing with any cases of bullying. The production of these leaflets for parents is an example of good practice which is helping to ensure that parents are well informed, in order that they can support their child's education.

Parents are generally happy with most aspects of college life and this was reflected in the results of the Ofsted questionnaire and in the views of parents at the meeting with inspectors. The college is a popular choice for parents living in the locality.

Parents are kept well informed about how their child is progressing at college and this is confirmed by the results of the Ofsted questionnaire. Pupils' annual reports are of a satisfactory quality and are complemented by a useful Progress Check sheet, which is sent out at a relevant point during the academic year. Annual reports contain an indication of how the student is progressing compared to the previous progress check grade and targets are set for development in all subject areas, as well as the students' own targets for the year. Provision for parents' evenings is also satisfactory.

Parents provide a satisfactory level of support for the work of the college, although the Parent Teachers Association is no longer active. Attendance at parents' evenings is good and many parents regularly sign homework and reading diaries. Both these systems are used well to provide a means of communication between home and college.

A few parents at the meeting with Ofsted Inspectors had concerns about the amount and frequency of homework set. They felt that there was more homework for Year 7 students than there was for Year 8 and that staff do not always follow the homework timetable. Inspectors asked a cross section of students for their views about homework and examined homework recorded in books as well as that set during the inspection week. Generally, students had little concern about homework and were aware of the routines in most subjects. The standard of homework in the college is judged satisfactory for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good for students over the age of 16 years.

There are good links between the college and the wider community. These are helping to add interest and variety to the curriculum whilst broadening students' horizons in a range of areas. The college has worked hard since the last inspection to establish the college as a centre for adult education in its widest sense, with a good deal of success. There are now several further education providers who run courses at the college during the evenings and occasionally in the daytime. This has brought benefits to the college in increased information technology equipment, increased availability of courses for students and their parents and increased income from lettings. It has also helped to encourage residents to be more involved in the college as a focal point for community life.

The college has also established a tradition of taking music into local churches for the benefit of the wider community. During the inspection, the orchestra was busy rehearsing for a Christmas concert in a local church, following on the heels of previously successful summer and autumn concerts. In geography, the local environment is well used; a presentation from the Northern Offshore Federation led to a walk along the River Tyne looking at the development of local industry. A developing link, of which the college is justifiably proud, is the relationship with a college in Kenya. Staff visited the college during half term and a pen pal network and

visits from Kenyan staff and students are already planned for early next term.

The last inspection report, which came very soon after a major re-organisation of the college, acknowledged that arrangements for liaison with primary schools were new and required development. Since that time, relationships between some departments had developed and positive links were made. A complete review of curriculum links was then felt to be necessary by many of those involved both at primary and secondary level. The relationships between the English department and primary schools have been successfully maintained and the organising of a summer literacy college this year is testimony to this. The current situation is that links for mathematics between the college and primary schools need to be strengthened to ensure progression when students start in Year 7.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE COLLEGE

Leadership and management

The principal provides effective and purposeful leadership. There is a clear and well-understood educational vision based on raising attainment through the provision of an appropriate curriculum and good support for the development of literacy. The principal has succeeded in creating an environment in which staff and students can achieve. Under his leadership the college has succeeded in raising the aspirations of its students. There is now a higher proportion of students joining the sixth form and moving on to higher education than at the time of the previous inspection. Priority is given to raising students' attainment and developing the use of assessment data to set individual targets in order to support progress. The college's performance in Advanced level GCE courses has risen steadily since the previous inspection and students are attaining in line with the national average point score. The college's GCSE results for 1999 were lower than in 1998 and below the national average but were in line with the performance of similar colleges. Since the previous inspection, there has been a satisfactory rate of improvement and the pace of change is measured and appropriate. One of the major challenges facing the college at the time of the previous inspection was the amalgamation of a middle schools with the existing 13 – 18 high school. This has been successfully managed, with the development of faculty and pastoral systems to support the integration and professional development of staff.

The monitoring of teaching and learning has been undertaken across the college by the principal, who has a thorough knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in his staff. This process has begun in a number of faculties using the model adopted by the principal of focused observation followed by target setting for individual teachers. The college needs to expand this practice to ensure that the good and very good teaching found in some departments is shared for the benefit of all teachers and students. Some heads of faculty and subjects monitor the work of their departments through the scrutiny of students' work and test results. These systems could be usefully extended to all departments as a way of improving the detail of assessment information about students.

There is an effective senior management structure, with defined roles and responsibilities for each member of the team. Despite a recent and temporary reassigning of responsibilities in the college, due to the secondment of a deputy principal, the management of the college has not been affected and the measured pace of development is being sustained. The senior management team are expert in their areas of responsibility and work hard to support the development of the college. The management skills of middle managers are improving in most areas. Among the subjects of the curriculum there are examples of good leadership in art, design and technology, information technology, history, English, science and music. There is very good leadership in humanities and business education. Leadership in physical education is unsatisfactory with little co-ordination of the department and a lack of focus on raising attainment. At department level, the quality of curricular planning is generally strong; schemes of work are detailed and provide an effective framework for teaching. Where this is not the case, as in the mathematics department, the lack of clear guidance for teachers results in low attainment for students. Lines of accountability are clear and are well known to staff. This makes a significant contribution to the smooth running of the college. While the overall quality of

management in the college is good, there is scope for improvement for all department leaders. There is a need to extend the practice of classroom monitoring to them, so that they each have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the attainment and provision in their departments and are able to plan developments on the basis of this knowledge.

The governing body is committed to and very supportive of the college. There is an appropriate committee structure, with clear terms of reference and a regular programme of meetings. With the exception of information technology in Key Stage 3, an omission from the annual report to parents and the provision of a daily act of collective worship, the governing body meets statutory requirements. Positive relationships and mutual trust exist between the governing body and senior management of the college. Governors understand their role in strategic planning, critical support and monitoring and evaluation. Governors are kept well informed about all areas of the college and its development by the principal's reports. They have a clear understanding of the developments of the college and are directly involved in these as the college expands. They monitor standards in the college through discussions with the principal and heads of faculty, holding them accountable for examination results and seeking explanations for these in the autumn meeting following the publication of the college's results. The governors monitor the work of the principal and the senior management team through a process of annual target setting and evaluation.

The college has an appropriate mission statement and aims, with a clear focus on raising students' attainment. All of the college's aims are supported by policy documents and are being well implemented. A new policy on the provision for spiritual development is an example of this. Provision for students' spiritual development was found to be unsatisfactory at the previous inspection but the well implemented policy on spiritual development has now corrected this weakness. There is a successful pastoral system, which supports and promotes the welfare of students. Relationships at all levels are good and support the positive ethos in the college. Staff and students alike are aware of the increasing level of expectation of academic success. Over the last five years the GCSE point score has shown an increase. The average point score per pupil is in line with the national average but is well above the average for similar colleges.

The special needs department is very well led. There is a clear focus on high achievement for all students and this is communicated to all who work in the department. The special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has established an effective network of link teachers to liaise with other departments and monitor the progress of students with special educational needs. She has succeeded in convincing the majority of her colleagues of the importance of literacy in unlocking the curriculum for students with special educational needs. The effective implementation of the college's literacy policy is due to her determined commitment to make all students functionally literate before they leave the college. Individual Education Plans for literacy are well written and provide good guidance for the classroom teacher; however, there are no targets for numeracy at present and this is a weakness in view of the low attainment in mathematics. There are very good links with the local authority support teams. The involvement of parents in reviewing the progress of their children and in setting targets is well developed and the SENCO has succeeded in winning their support in establishing a partnership focused on their children's needs. Good monitoring of students' progress, combined with good teaching, ensures that students move off the register when their learning needs have been met. That this happens regularly is a reflection of the high quality of work in the department.

The College's Development Plan focuses on improving educational provision in order to raise standards. It is strategic in its scope, covers a four year cycle and is supported by department development plans. The plan has some good features, such as clearly defined tasks, responsible staff and strategies for developing the use of assessment but it lacks precision. The development plan addresses the weaknesses which have persisted since the previous inspection and includes strategies for remedying them. It recognises the need to improve and extend systems for monitoring, evaluating and further developing good classroom practice. Faculty development plans do not make success criteria explicit and none refer to outcomes for students. In order to identify what constitutes good practice in raising attainment, the college needs to know the impact of its developments on students' progress and needs to devise systems to measure this.

The day-to-day administration is efficient and lines of communication are clear both within the college and between the college, parents and the wider community.

The college now has a strong commitment to raising students' attainment. The recent literacy initiative and

closer links between the English department and the pyramid primary colleges have had a significant effect on raising standards of literacy, particularly reading, in the college. The college's planned developments for numeracy need to be undertaken with equal thoroughness if standards of attainment in mathematics and numeracy are to be raised to similar levels. Since the previous report the college has made steady improvement. The college has extended the curriculum in the sixth form to provide a wide range of vocational courses and recruitment to the sixth form is expanding. Improvements have been made to the Key Stage 4 curriculum, with the provision of short examination courses in religious education and physical education. The GCSE point score and the A-level point score have both risen to in line with the national average. Under the strong leadership of the principal and the good support of governors the college is well placed for and is capable of achieving further improvement.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

The number, qualifications and experience of the teaching staff are well matched in all subjects to the curriculum offered, with the exception of physical education where there is only one full-time female teacher. This presents problems for the supervision of changing rooms and restricts the range of both curricular and extra-curricular activities that can be offered. This restriction is a concern to some parents. The deployment of support staff satisfactorily meets requirements. The provision for staff training since the last inspection report has been good. A range of courses have been attended, with emphasis on subject specialisms, management training and pastoral issues. Good provision has been made for the training of staff who are teaching vocational education in the sixth form.

Much emphasis is placed on training. The college was granted Investors in People status in 1997 and a Staff Training and Development policy exists. This document clearly itemises the stages in staff development and training and makes suitable links to the college's strategic development plan. Each faculty must produce its own training budget plan. All staff have their own training plans, which are reviewed twice yearly. There is a planned programme of appraisal, which is now in its third cycle.

Newly qualified teachers are involved in a mentoring programme. Though the staff involved see this initiative as being generally beneficial, the help and guidance available end abruptly after the first year. Planning needs to be enhanced so that staff new to the profession can be supported and encouraged beyond their first year. The college is also committed to providing places for trainee teachers. Strong links exist with two local universities and a number of student teachers are accommodated annually. Though some parents expressed disquiet about student teachers working in the sixth form, no evidence emerged during the inspection to suggest that such deployment is adversely affecting the attainment and progress of any students. Likewise, though the college has endured a relatively high staff turnover in recent years, such transition has been appropriately managed with no discernible effects on attainment and progress.

Accommodation

The overall quality of the accommodation is satisfactory and the college is able to teach all areas of the National Curriculum. The buildings, grounds, extensive nature area (believed to be one of the largest in Europe attached to a college) and playing fields provide a pleasant learning environment which is clean and mostly free of litter. The overall condition of the buildings is satisfactory, although there are places where roofs let in water. The heating of the gym is inadequate and the current state of the boys' changing rooms is poor. The poor quality of changing rooms and problems with flat roofs were both mentioned as being of concern in the last inspection report. The condition of some floor covering is unsatisfactory because of worn-out areas and holes are forming in older classroom floors due to the movement of the building. The sixth form accommodation is just adequate but the mobile classrooms are nearing the end of their useful life. Displays are generally used well to stimulate students' interest; for example those celebrating creative writing and literature and the displays about the visit and development of links with a Kenyan college. Overall, specialist accommodation is satisfactory for current needs, with good provision for music, information technology, art, English and physical education. The ground floors are accessible for those with limited mobility but the first floors are not.

Resources

The general level of resources made available for the teaching of the curriculum is satisfactory. In some curriculum areas resourcing is good, or even very good. Resources in physical education are very good. They are also very good in humanities, where the management is strong and the quality of education provided is enhanced by an international link with Kenya, fieldwork and museum visits in both geography and history and links with the Education and Business Partnership in business studies. In other areas, the range and quality of resources available are less satisfactory. This is especially true in art and design and technology. The college also manages its own nature reserve. This is a large tract of land adjacent to the western edge of the college site. This is a valuable resource for the college, though no clear rationale has been developed about how this land might be best used.

The previous inspection report criticised the college library and the accessibility and deployment of computers. The library is now in a period of transition. The present librarian has been in post for just over a year. During this time a review of the library stock has been completed and many dated books have been removed. Some stock has also been transferred to faculties so that specialist libraries can be developed, though some subjects, such as design and technology, remain poorly resourced for books. The present library has some good displays and is being developed as a resources centre with the addition of computer equipment and CD-ROMs. The library administration system is being revamped to allow better record keeping and the librarian has a clear vision of how the centre might be developed further.

Since the last inspection, extra computers have been acquired and there is presently a ratio of one computer to every 10 students. This is about average for the size of the college. Most of the computers are situated in three designated rooms around the college. Though such deployment has helped to alleviate some of the problems referred to in the last inspection report, the problem of accessibility has not been resolved. Students in some classes still have to share machines and timetable clashes cause frustration. Some machines are rather old and slow and this causes further frustration. A clear strategy needs to be developed further.

The efficiency of the college

The college has a level of funding delegated by the local education authority broadly in line with that of similar colleges nationally. In the financial year 1999-2000 the budget share per student when compared with other community high colleges is slightly below the average. Financial planning and management are secure and since the last inspection good progress has been made and there now exist effective systems for linking projected income and expenditure to the College Development Plan.

Expenditure on teaching staff is relatively high when compared to similar colleges nationally. This enables the college to have a more favourable ratio of teachers to students and this, together with a higher than average class contact time, provides more opportunity for time to be given to individual students. Teaching staff are efficiently deployed and there is an equitable distribution of teachers and expenditure in relation to the needs of students and the income received by the college for students of different ages. Funds allocated for students with special educational needs are effectively used and the whole college strategies to improve levels of literacy represents well targeted resources. The range of curricular opportunities available to post 16 students has increased without disadvantage to younger students.

The college roll is rising and the larger numbers currently in Key Stage 3 will lead to an increase in income when they move forward into Key Stage 4. In its four-year strategic development plan the college recognises that until this works through, projected balances will have to be very small in relation to the total college budget. In this context there are good arrangements for monitoring spending and seeking best value for money with services and supplies at whole-college level. The systems for reviewing and evaluating the impact of organisational and financial decisions within faculties are now more efficient than at the last inspection and overall satisfactory use is made of resources for learning and the facilities and accommodation of the college. The investment in improving resources for information and communication technology gives students greater access to computer facilities but not all areas of the college are making sufficient use of these opportunities.

The college allocates sufficient sums to provide quality learning for students with special educational needs. Funding for the special needs department has generated a good stock of appropriate schemes and materials to develop literacy. Through careful management of its resources, the special needs department has been able to provide additional learning resources for use with special needs students in modern languages, geography and physical education. Current use of staff for teaching in the department is good, resources are well used and the special needs department achieves good outcomes in literacy at Key Stage 3 and in GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4.

Day-to-day organisation and financial administration are good. Support staff are efficiently used and the Admin. Officer and Finance Clerk work closely with the principle and assistant principal responsible for organisation and finance. The governing body has a clear understanding of its duties and through the finance and premises committee there are well defined terms of reference and good procedures for monitoring the college's income and expenditure. This is confirmed by the local authority auditor's report.

The college is an orderly community and there is good support for raising achievement. When the college's current performance is measured against the resources available to it, the college gives satisfactory value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

Students' attainment in English at the end of Year 6 is slightly below the national average. With the summer literacy college and strong encouragement for reading and writing this term, the current Year 7 have established a regular routine of personal reading. They enjoy writing about themselves, which they do with some interesting detail, an appropriate tone, secure paragraphing and punctuation of sentences and reasonable spelling. They have now reached expectations for their age. They effectively word process their work from time to time.

By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above average. Over the last three years results in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved significantly from below the national average in 1997, to close to the national average in 1998 and to very well above it for both the average and the higher levels in 1999. Results were also very well above the average for colleges that are similar, based on the proportion of students entitled to free college meals. English results at Key Stage 3 were better than mathematics and science results in 1999. Girls do better than boys but girls were below the national average for girls in 1998 and did rather less well at the higher levels than teachers had expected in 1999, whereas boys did better than expected at these higher levels. Students' speaking and listening are average for their age. They can explain themselves reasonably fluently but often they do not speak out or speak with sufficient expression unless the speaking activity specifically requires this. Reading is above average. Nearly all students are competent readers by Year 9 and have developed a regular reading habit. Many higher attainers and some middle attainers choose to read demanding books. Many are able to infer meaning in their class readers; for instance, a class of middle attainers build up a picture of life on the ranch in "Of Mice and Men". Writing is also above average. Many students write effectively for different purposes, such as persuasive travel brochures, news reports, playscripts, letters and literary essays with apt quotations. In the final draft the writing is usually very well presented. Lower attainers in Year 9 have written beautifully presented, well punctuated, effective travel writing. Teachers display such work very attractively.

By the end of Key Stage 4 students' attainment is average overall. In English at GCSE all students have passed in the years since the previous inspection. Results at grades A* - C rose from below the national average in 1996 to slightly above in 1998 but dipped to below the national average in 1999, with the girls dipping more than the boys. All but one small class in each year enter for English literature at GCSE, where again all candidates pass. The results at grades A* - C have fluctuated. They were well above the national average in 1997 and above it in 1998, when English literature results were significantly above the results in other subjects in the college, but they dipped below the national average in 1999. In lessons and other work seen, students' speaking and listening are average. Students speak clearly but they do not naturally speak out and they do not readily elaborate on their ideas. Attainment in reading their set texts is often above average, especially in understanding character; many are able to infer deeper meaning and to comment on the effects of style and language. Standards of writing are also often above average. Many students write fluently and with enjoyment about themselves and they write for a range of purposes, including persuasion and argument. There is some very extended literature coursework by higher attainers and some effective empathetic writing, for instance, a diary of a combatant on D-Day. The lowest attainers can write extended pieces but are well below expectations in planning their writing and in punctuation and spelling; some of their handwriting is poorly formed. All students learn how best to approach examination questions.

At the end of the sixth form attainment is in line with expectations for the course in English literature at A level. All candidates have passed in this subject for seven years. Results at grades A and B fluctuate: they were well above the national average in 1998 and just below the 1998 national average in 1999. Students' understanding of plot and character is good. Their grasp of the author's intentions, of themes and of the effects of form and language is less strong. They write competently, using quotations aptly. A few students are rather repetitive or over-emphatic in their personal written style.

Students make very good progress in Key Stage 3. The college's literacy strategy, the emphasis on personal

reading, which is the main English homework at Key Stage 3, and the setting of personal targets contribute to this. Moreover, students meet challenging literature throughout the key stage: they taste excerpts from Shakespeare in Years 7 and 8 before they study a full play in Year 9, they read pre-twentieth century prose from Year 7 and in Year 8 they look at samples of old and middle English, as well as reading novels and poetry throughout Key Stage 3 that many colleges leave until a year later. They learn to write for a range of different purposes, planning thoroughly and re-drafting carefully. Year 8 lower attainers plan the content and tone of a letter from Buddy to his mother when she is away from home. A higher attaining group devised a courtroom drama with a firm grasp of legal terminology to explore how far the accused was really to blame for an accident. Some higher attainers are not always sufficiently stretched in the mixed ability classes in Year 7. A class in Year 9 that has two teachers makes less progress than the parallel class.

Although progress is satisfactory overall, students often make good progress in Key Stage 4, especially in studying demanding fiction and non-fiction texts, and in understanding plot, character, setting and the effects of language upon the reader. Year 10 have already covered a lot of work this term. However, students read less for personal pleasure than they did in Year 9 and some students are slow to recall what they have learnt in recent lessons, both of which impact on the rate of progress they make. The lowest attainers in Year 11, who did not benefit from the college's literacy strategy and who do not receive extra support in class, are not making sufficient progress for this stage in their college career.

Students in the sixth form make good progress. They make very thorough notes at all stages of their study of a text, thus gaining a strong grasp of details of plot, character and setting. The best teaching encourages them to use this knowledge when thinking for themselves. Thorough marking prompts them to think more deeply and to refine their written style.

Students with special educational needs make good progress overall. This is the result of small classes from Year 8 onwards, some withdrawal from lessons and reading with older students, as well as carefully structured teaching. A class of Year 8 students have written atmospheric horror stories using effective adjectives and similes. Year 10 students have written a news report on the happenings in "The Lady of Shalott" with a good understanding of events.

Students' attitudes to English are mainly good. When they are given the opportunity, they work sensibly in pairs and small groups. Most students work willingly, though in the week of the inspection middle and lower attaining groups in Key Stage 4 showed less interest than other students.

The teaching is good overall. A small proportion is very good. Of the rest, half is good and the remainder is satisfactory. The strengths of the teaching are thorough knowledge of the subject and challenging schemes of work and lesson tasks. Teachers plan well, indeed very well, when structuring the learning of lower attainers. They generally manage their classes well, usually stimulating the class with some variety of activity in each lesson. The teachers use assessment very effectively by consistent, encouraging and helpful marking, setting realistic targets for improvement and involving students in examining the strengths and weaknesses of specimen answers. In the best lessons both the teacher and the students enjoy the lesson; the teacher focuses on what the students need to learn in that lesson and plans to enable them to achieve those objectives; questioning stimulates students' thinking and the teacher is alert to opportunities for expanding students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their vocabulary. Such lessons are succinctly reviewed by the teacher and the students at the end. A weakness in the teaching is that a number of lessons are over-dominated by teachers who do too much of the reading aloud and too much of the talking, even answering their own questions. In such lessons the students lose interest and stop thinking for themselves. Sometimes this loss of interest is exacerbated because the teacher emphasises first the need to write an examination answer on the topic rather than the intrinsic interest of the topic.

The faculty benefits from strong leadership and over the years since the last inspection has cooperated enthusiastically to improve reading, writing and examination technique. It has improved the schemes of work and organised a good range of resources as well as stimulating events, such as theatre visits and annual book weeks.

The policy for language across the college is well established in English and humanities subjects, which are actively developing reading, writing, speaking and listening. This good practice now needs to spread to other areas of the curriculum.

Students' speaking and listening are generally average for their age. Students can usually explain themselves, though not at length, and they speak reasonably clearly but not expressively or with confidence, unless this is required of them. In geography and drama students have regular opportunities to discuss in groups and in sixth form business studies students speak well in formal presentations, with a good range of vocabulary. Otherwise, there is too little opportunity for students to generate ideas through talk. In music students listen well and evaluate each others compositions. In geography there is some excellent concentrated listening with eyes shut to create a picture or contrast in their minds. Students' reading is above average. Having built up interest and competence in reading in English during KS3, students are ready for more reading in other subjects than they actually encounter. Art, design technology and business studies encourage reading and in science students read aloud; the best practice is in humanities where there are reading corners with fiction and non-fiction and where students have regular opportunities to read in groups, in pairs or individually. Students' writing is above average. Several subjects display key words in the classroom and most encourage good standards of presentation. In science higher attainers write excellent evaluations of experimental work and humanities subjects use writing frames to guide students in using the appropriate style for their writing. However, there is less variety of writing across the curriculum than is often found in other colleges.

Drama

Students learn some drama within English at intervals in Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 they may choose it as an option for GCSE within the expressive arts faculty. More girls than boys opt for drama, the subject attracting between sixteen and twenty three students each year. By the end of Key Stage 4 students meet the expectations of the GCSE drama course. All students pass. The proportion gaining grades A* - C was well above the national average in 1998 but well below in 1999. Students work well in groups, imaginatively using the informative stimulus material. They make effective use of drama techniques, such as freeze frame, flashback, thought tracking and voice and pace in choral speech. In college productions observed on video, actors speak expressively and on cue, they use pauses for effect and they act and sing simultaneously, for instance, in "The Pirates of Penzance". Higher attainers write reflectively and they express themselves well, though they do not always analyse the effects of movement and expression. Middle and lower attainers write honest evaluations of their performances and determine to improve on them; some are not fluent writers.

Students of all levels of attainment, including students with special educational needs, gain confidence in this subject. Year 10 have already amassed a number of drama techniques and have learnt to gather ideas and come to conclusions in groups. The students enjoy the subject and work well with each other.

The teaching is good; it is stimulating, well planned and well resourced, with good use of assessment by both the teacher and the students to help them refine their presentations.

The college productions, usually two a year, involve about a hundred and twenty students from all years in the college and are obviously highly popular with the audiences.

Mathematics

Overall, attainment in mathematics is below the national average at the end of both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

The level of attainment in mathematics of students entering Year 7 is near to the average level for students achieving level 4 in their Key Stage 2 National Curriculum assessment. Over the period 1996 to 1998, results in the National Curriculum Key Stage 3 assessments in Year 9 have been below the national average. In 1999, results are below the national average for those achieving level 5 and above. Boys perform better than girls, a situation not reflected nationally. This difference is very apparent in the 1999 Key Stage 3 tests, where the

boys' performance is near to the national level for level 5 and above and well above the national average for level 6 and above but the corresponding results for girls are well below the national averages.

GCSE results over the period 1996 to 1998 have been above, below or near to the national averages as measured by the proportions of students achieving either A* to C or A* to G grades. However, the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades in 1999 is well below the national average. There is a difference between the performances of boys and girls, with boys performing better than girls. This difference is not found nationally.

The levels of attainment shown in external tests and examinations are demonstrated in the lessons seen and in the written work examined. Number work is the main weakness shown by students, with many having a poorer grasp of computational skills at the end of both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 than found nationally. This limits their ability to cope with number skills in topics such as probability. Many students show a confident use of calculators but others throughout Years 7 to 9 are using their calculators for simple calculations. This over-dependence is not always discouraged. Mental skills, which are not sufficiently practised throughout the college, are low. At the end of Key Stage 4, some students show a great confidence with standard form but others still have a poor grasp of computation. Spatial work is stronger than number, with many students achieving average levels of attainment at the end of each key stage, especially in work on Pythagoras, vectors, angles, symmetry and trigonometry. There are good applications in the work on aerial perspective in art. Students can use a range of measures, choose appropriate units and measure with confidence in mathematics and other subjects, such as when assessing proportions in art and doing two-point perspective work and graphics in design and technology. Good use is made of graphs in mathematics and a range of other subjects such as science, geography and business studies. Investigation work at each key stage allows students to show good skills in the use and application of mathematics. Special education needs students are satisfactorily supported in class but targets on Individual Education Plans are not very subject-specific, which creates difficulties in judging whether students are meeting targets.

Standards in A-level classes are equivalent to national levels, with students showing particularly good understanding in differentiation in Year 12 and integration tasks in Year 13. Some sixth form students successfully improve their GCSE grades by following a well-designed course.

In comparison with the last inspection, standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are not as good as previously reported and no gender difference was found last time. Standards in A-level work are the same.

Given the apparent average level of attainment each year on entry to the college, students do not make satisfactory progress throughout Key Stage 3, as is indicated by the below national average levels achieved at the end of the key stage. In particular, the below average performance of girls is a great concern, not currently being addressed by the college. The lack of well-developed computational skills and poor attention to mental work contribute to this under-achievement. 'Success-maker' is being well used in Years 7 and 8 to assist with the improvement in number skills but the initiative is not sufficiently well planned into a balanced programme throughout the key stage. A similar situation of poor progress exists at Key Stage 4 where the progress of girls is again a cause for concern. Students with special educational needs are not making appropriate progress as a consequence of the lack of suitable mathematical focus on Individual Education Plans. Students in the sixth form work well to achieve the targets set for them. Grades achieved in A-level examinations match well with GCSE grades achieved previously.

At Key Stages 3 and 4, students are well behaved, show good responses to the tasks set and maintain good levels of concentration and application. They are attentive and interested in their work. They co-operate well when doing practical tasks. Relationships are very positive. Boys and girls relate well together in class. Students in the sixth form show good levels of commitment, motivation and interest in their work and good attitudes to the subject.

As reported in the last inspection, there is considerable variation in the quality of teaching within the department. Of the lessons seen in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, 40 per cent were found to be good, 40 per cent satisfactory and 20 per cent unsatisfactory. Teaching was found to be satisfactory in the sixth form. Teachers

show a satisfactory knowledge of the subject at each key stage, tasks are generally well planned, the management of students is good and the methods used match the curricular objectives of the subject. The planning of lessons lacks a consistent approach throughout the college. Mental work is under-emphasised in each year group. Teachers do not always appreciate the wide range of attainment in the classes. Progress is often allowed to be determined by the slowest students in the class because of the whole-class, small-step-at-a-time approach taken. Higher attaining students are rarely well challenged. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs are satisfactorily supported with individual help in class and by the setting of appropriate tasks. The low expectation of pupil achievement in many classes contributes to the under-achievement in the subject. Pace is frequently slow. Homework often involves finishing work done in class. This lacks the rigour of a well planned task which complements the work done in class.

National Curriculum requirements are fully met, with an appropriate amount of time allocated in each year. There is a satisfactory system of assessment, record keeping and reporting, which is in line with the college's policy. Some marking of work is up-to-date, positive and informative to students but practice is inconsistent.

The subject lacks clear leadership. There is insufficient commitment to raising standards of attainment and an unawareness of the under-achievement of students, especially girls. There is a need for clearer guidance for numeracy, mental work, computational skills and common approaches to teaching. External assessment information is not being used effectively to inform planning. Relationships with students are satisfactory and often good.

Science

Attainment in science is close to the national averages at all key stages. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the results were close to those expected for all colleges and well above those in similar colleges. This year, as in previous years, boys attained more of the higher grades than girls, contrary to the national trend.

Up to 1999, the proportion of students attaining grades A* - C at GCSE in the science subjects has closely followed the national average for all colleges. For the last two years one group of students has been entered for the three separate science subjects. In 1999 these results were above those expected nationally for chemistry and physics and slightly below for biology; girls attained more of the higher grades than boys. The proportion of students attaining grades A*- C in double award science at GCSE in 1999 was well below the national average with no difference between the attainment of boys and girls. However, the proportion attaining A*-G grades was well above those expected nationally. Taking all science subjects together, this year grades A*-C were below those expected nationally for all colleges but, in comparison to similar colleges, results in science subjects in 1999 were well above those expected nationally.

Each year students take A-level examinations in any of the three science subjects. The small entry number makes comparisons difficult between years and subjects but the average point scores for each subject show an increase over the last four years. The attainment in biology and chemistry is consistently better than in physics.

In three quarters of the lessons observed, the attainment of students is that expected nationally at the end of the key stage. Attainment is best in the sixth form in all three sciences, in line with or above course expectations. In seven out of eight lessons at Key Stage 3 the majority of students are broadly in line with national expectations but at Key Stage 4 the proportion is smaller. Higher attaining students at Key Stage 3, when talking about the spread of disease, could explain the meanings of immunity, vaccination and antibodies. At Key Stage 4 they could compare the different processes of breathing with and without oxygen in terms of their efficiency and products. Low attaining students at Key Stage 3 could name the process of reflection in a mirror but could not construct an accurate ray diagram to show how the image is formed. In the sixth form students confidently process data on energy changes in chemical experiments or how light travels through different media and can describe in detail the processes involved in controlling the body's sugar level.

Students are making satisfactory or better progress at all key stages. The progress students make through each of the key stages is tracked by the faculty using data from the national tests and that generated within the

courses. These data are shared with student, and allow those under-achieving to be identified and helped to improve. Within lessons, the majority of students are making satisfactory or better progress. At Key Stage 3 in over half of the lessons seen, the progress students are making is good or very good. The best progress is seen when students are given many opportunities to consolidate their knowledge and understanding within the context of the lesson and build on previous work. Newly acquired scientific terms are reinforced in a variety of ways so allowing students to develop further understanding, such as when observing the dissection of sheep's lungs after learning the parts of the human breathing system. The progress of boys is more marked when they are able to talk confidently about their understanding or during practical tasks. Students with special needs make satisfactory progress when the resources used are matched to their needs or the targets on their individual plans.

Students show a positive response to science at all key stages. The best response seen was at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form; at Key Stage 4 some students did not respond well when the science lessons were last lesson in the afternoon. Students of all ages show an interest in the subject and most sustain it but if the tasks set are not challenging enough application falls off and concentration falters. Behaviour is generally satisfactory and is particularly good at Key Stage 3. Students show respect for equipment and without exception observed safety procedures during practical tasks. Particularly at Key Stage 3 the general standard of written work is good, but there were several examples of poorly presented, unfinished work at Key Stage 4 by both boys and girls.

In eight out of ten lessons seen the standard of teaching was satisfactory or better and in over half of all lessons seen the teaching was good or very good. The best teaching was in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, with the few unsatisfactory lessons seen mostly at Key Stage 4. Where the teaching is good the teacher has high expectations of all students and provides a variety of tasks to challenge them irrespective of their ability. A structured framework to the lesson is planned with time limits for completion of activities, ensuring that a brisk pace is maintained and students concentrate on their work. All students are given opportunities to gain confidence and demonstrate their understanding by class questioning, group discussions and individual work. Praise and encouragement are given throughout the lesson, as well as through the marking of the books. Less effective teaching was characterised by the teacher giving little reinforcement and not making it clear to students what was expected in terms of their response, application to tasks and completion of work. This meant many students allowed their attention to wander and made little progress.

The faculty is well managed by a head of faculty who has clearly identified the major strengths and weaknesses and has a clear direction for future development. Resources and funds are just adequate and, while not affecting the standard of education provided for students, this is preventing the full entitlement to the data capture section of the information technology National Curriculum. The last inspection highlighted this weakness and, while there are now facilities within college for the students to use information technology for word-processing and spreadsheets for their science work, there is not the necessary hardware to support work in the laboratories. Since the last inspection, new courses have been introduced which provide resources at different levels of difficulty, removing a weakness highlighted in the last report.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Information technology

The attainment of students in information technology (IT) at the end of Key Stage 3 is below national expectations. Students in the current Year 7 have higher attainment than those in Year 8 and are set to achieve at least in line with national expectations by the end of the key stage. By the end of the key stage, students can use a variety of software packages with some independence. Strengths include using information technology to communicate effectively as in Year 7 with word-processed letters which culminate in students mastering the skills of formatting. In Year 9 students use desktop publishing to produce brochures and are able to discuss the social and ethical problems associated with information technology. In Year 8, students develop skills in control technology in design and technology lessons, though these skills are not fully developed. The main weakness in IT is in data-logging in science, where there are no opportunities for students to monitor data in the course of experiments. The absence of this strand in students' range of skills reduces the standard of their

overall attainment in the subject.

In the 1999 GCSE examinations, results in the short IT course were well above the national average in the A* - C grades and all students gained a pass in the A* - G grades. There were no gender differences in attainment in these examinations. At Key Stage 4 the majority of students receive their IT entitlement through either the short IT course or the business studies course. Students are able to identify their own problems and design systems, choosing a variety of software solutions, such as desktop publishing, spreadsheets and data handling.

There has been a significant improvement in the capability of most students in information technology capability as a result of the recently introduced scheme of work at Key Stage 3. Progress in the subject is good from the beginning of the key stage when Year 7 students begin the discrete course and this level of progress is sustained in Year 9 in the discrete course. In Year 8 progress in the subject is barely satisfactory due to the lack of a discrete IT lesson and the absence of a systematic use of IT skills across the curriculum. In Years 7 and 9, students' knowledge increases as they meet well-sequenced problem solving exercises. For some topics progress is complemented in other subjects, such as English and modern foreign languages. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in the subject, where they are taught the skills in discrete IT lessons.

The progress of students at Key Stage 4 is good in both the short course and in the IT component of the business studies course. Students in Year 10 made good progress in a lesson in their understanding of data base structure and the need for field types. In Year 11, students made good progress using an Excel database to prepare their independent projects and develop their understanding of the importance of error checking. In the sixth form students also make good progress in business studies and GNVQ courses. They increase their skills in using 'Excel' formulae and in formatting cells.

All students have a positive attitude to IT. Behaviour in lessons is good. The students are focused on the task in hand. Relationships with each other and with staff are friendly and positive. There was evidence that students use IT at home to complete tasks both in IT and other subject areas, an example of which was a story, completed as homework using a word processor, which was then used in a desktop publishing project in class. They work well independently to develop ideas and also work well in groups.

The quality of teaching in IT is satisfactory or better in all lessons observed. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. The teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject. The lessons were well planned and students are well managed. Student - staff relationships are good. Expectations are mainly satisfactory but higher attaining students are not always challenged by differentiated tasks.

The curriculum does not fully meet statutory requirements at Key Stage 3 in respect of monitoring physical data and displaying the results. The college scheme of work has two complementary parts: a discrete part for Years 7 and 9 and a cross-curricular part for all Year 7, 8 and 9 students. There is a good scheme of work being successfully implemented for Years 7 and 9. This covers work in communicating information through the use of 'Word' and 'Publisher 98'. Some modelling is covered in Year 9. There is evidence that data handling is being covered by the 'Information Technology Across the Curriculum' (ITAC) scheme, for example, searches of 'Encarta' for data to support a geography project on Antarctica. Some control is covered in a project in Year 8 by design and technology. There is a need to improve resources for monitoring, measurement and control. However, the monitoring of data, which is supposed to be covered within the science ITAC scheme is not currently being taught. This is the aspect not meeting National Curriculum requirements.

At Key Stage 4 there is good coverage of all aspects of IT for those students taking an accredited IT course. There is evidence of IT being planned in other subject areas. However, the college does not have an effective monitoring procedure in place to ensure that all students in both key stages receive their IT entitlement.

There is good leadership of information technology. There is a good development plan and schemes of work are being developed. Assessment and recording is planned into the scheme of work and monitored in Years 7, 9 and 11. However, the overall impact of this good planning is reduced by a weakness in provision in science. There is a planned approach to ITAC, with a staff training program to support its implementation, but the

monitoring of the ITAC program is unsatisfactory. Only some assessments of students are returned to the IT co-ordinator from subjects for the last half term, which means that the co-ordinator does not have a clear picture of IT teaching or attainment. There is no monitoring of the use of the rooms set aside for the ITAC program. Where IT is being taught as a discrete subject, staffing and learning resources are satisfactory. Where IT is being taught across the curriculum, lack of resources affect the quality of education. For example, the lack of good data logging equipment and software in science leads to the monitoring aspect of the IT curriculum not being taught at Key Stage 3. Limited numbers and the type of control interfaces in technology restrict the number of groups doing control in year 8. Provision of rooms available for 'ITAC' is not being taken up by staff, therefore entitlement to IT for Year 8 and those students in Years 10 and 11 not doing discrete IT is limited. Resources have been purchased and made available for the teaching of IT. In order to improve standards further the college should meet statutory orders by providing suitable opportunities in science, design and technology and geography for students to develop and apply IT skills and extend the existing good practice being established for cross-curricular information technology into other subjects.

Religious education

Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with that expected at the age of 14 as outlined in the North Tyneside Local Authority Agreed Syllabus for religious education, which the college uses. Recall of the basic facts of the various religions studied is sound by most students, who understand the main beliefs of Christianity and other major world religions, such as Islam and Buddhism. Students are able to explore the link between belief and practice as seen in the home altar of Buddhist believers and a number are beginning to form their own balanced views on spiritual issues.

At the end of Key Stage 4 the standard of attainment of students following the GCSE short course was well below the national average in 1999. This was the first year in which the college had entered students for this examination and 24% achieved grades A* to C in comparison to the national average 45%. The standard of attainment seen in lessons is higher than this and suggests that the results in future examinations will rise. At Key Stage 4 the students have a good knowledge and understanding of moral dilemmas and can efficiently discuss the implications caused by different decisions. They are also able to consider other students' points of view and recognise the ten commandments as an example of how religious belief influences decisions.

Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Progress in lessons is at least satisfactory and progress in a third of lessons seen was good. There is an increase in the knowledge learnt and in the understanding of religious issues. Progress over time can be seen in the improvement in the way students answer questions - both in the content of the answers and in the expression of ideas. Students also increase in confidence in handling discussion. Progress in lessons at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory or good, with students consolidating previous knowledge, learning new information and applying principals to new situations. However, at this stage the shortage of time allocated to the subject inhibits progress over time. Students with special educational needs progress at the same rate as other students.

Students' response in lessons is sound and often good or very good. The large majority of students are pleasant, polite and well behaved and respect the feelings of others. Students are able to work well individually, in pairs and in small groups. Most students show a lively interest in the lessons but their concentration slackens when the pace of the lesson drops and the lesson is too teacher-dominated. Students handle material confidently and are willing to talk freely about a range of religious and moral issues. There are pleasant relationships between students and between students and staff and these relationships enhance the learning process.

The teaching of religious education is good; all teaching seen was at least satisfactory with two thirds being good and occasionally very good. In the better lessons the momentum of the lesson is good, students are involved in a variety of activities and all the students are fully involved in the tasks. When examples of the points under consideration are given from the personal knowledge and experience of the teacher they add a lively dimension to the lesson. In some lessons the teacher controls the time allocated to the task and this limits the provision of work suitable for every student's needs. In a few weaker lessons there is a heavy control of students causing a more strained relationship. The marking policy in use by the department is that used by the whole humanities faculty and at times a lack of specific comments means that students do not know exactly

how to improve their work.

This year, however, although there are staff teaching the subject who are not primarily from the department there is very good support provided so that the learning of the students is good. Resources in the department are sound while the displays within the department give a good ethos for positive learning, although there is little display of students' work. The shortage of curriculum time allocated, 3.3% as opposed to the 5% recommended by the Agreed Syllabus, means that over the five year course a substantial amount of time is lost.

The effect of this is seen in particular at Key Stage 4. Visits are arranged for students to a local church but no recent visits have been made to other places of worship. When visits do take place they enhance the learning process.

Since the last inspection the Agreed Syllabus has been revised and the college now follows a short course at GCSE and so a direct comparison is not possible. The teaching in the department is still good and progress has been made in several areas. There is an increase in the element of learning from religion, so that the students apply facts to different situations. The introduction of the GCSE short course gives a higher status to the subject and the assessment scheme being developed will give more precise information on students' attainment. The department is soundly led and has a good basis from which to move forward.

Art

At National Curriculum Key Stage 4 attainment is above average. In recent years students have consistently gained above average grades in GCSE examinations. In the most recent year 69 per cent grades A - C were gained by students, slightly higher than the national average of 66 per cent, boys and girls achieving very similar results. In class there is evidence of very strong composition based upon art historical studies of major figures and movements in art. Work based upon research into 'Cubism', for example, shows advanced understanding and control of colour together with an appreciation of the work of artists such as Picasso. Good work in textiles is also evident and there is strong three dimensional work in modelling using ceramic materials. Drawing from observation is searching and confident in technique. There is little evidence of the use of information technology in relation to creative work in art at this stage, though some limited use is made of computers in design.*

In Years 12 and 13 students display creative maturity and are able to identify personal interests and to follow them confidently. In A-level examinations results over recent years have been near the national norm but in the most recent year exceeded it, students gaining an average points score of eight against a national average of 6.1.

At Key Stage 3 students' attainment is around the national norm but with variations between activities. Three dimensional work in ceramics is strong and well executed. There is also good composition exploring the relationship between colour and spatial recession. This work is complemented by very expressive drawing and painting based upon visits to a local industrial complex and revealing personal responses to the environment. Students incorporate art historical material in their project work and are able to understand the way in which approaches to art have changed over time. There is some evidence of the use of computers in art but attainment is patchy in comparison with work exploring other basic skills.

Progress through Key Stage 4 is good. Students build upon their experiences in Key Stage 3 and develop basic skills further in a continuous way. The rate of progress is good and is sustained by interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Students with special educational needs make good progress at their own rate aided by the nature of work in art, which provides for success in varied ways and at a wide range of levels. Progress through Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Students gain skill and understanding quickly in response to the clear and successive targets set. Projects are designed to develop basic skill and knowledge in a step by step and logical way, in the study of colour, for example, and the different ways in which it functions in art. Art history is taught as a distinct area of study as well as an adjunct to students' creative work. Students with special educational needs are able to make good progress as project work and related targets are fully differentiated by outcome. Progress through the sixth form is good; students develop strongly as independent learners able to research

ideas and to express them with technical skill. Notebooks and sketchbooks play an important role in sustaining the rate of progress.

Students respond well at all stages. There is strong commitment and a high level of interest in almost all classes together with an evident enjoyment of the subject. Students co-operate well when required to do so and relationships between students and between teachers and students are good. An atmosphere of purposeful involvement prevails in studios and there is good evidence of the ability to develop ideas independently. This becomes more pronounced as students move up through the college. Behaviour also is good generally but becomes even better as students mature, reaching a very good level in Years 12 and 13.

The quality of teaching in the department is good in the vast majority of lessons. Of nine lessons seen, none were unsatisfactory and eight were good or very good. All work in class was very thoroughly prepared and was supported by good illustrations and demonstrations where appropriate. Ongoing supervision of individual work was a strong feature in all the teaching. Teachers showed good subject expertise and wide versatility in meeting the varied needs of students engaged in differing tasks. The good pace and high level of expectation evident in almost all lessons underpinned the rate of student progress at all stages. A singular feature of one outstanding Year 10 lesson was the use of collective critique of student homework. This involved students in the discussion and evaluation of the work of others and in submitting their own work for scrutiny. A student volunteer recorded agreed grades in the mark book. This lesson constituted a very good example of the enlightened use of assessment to develop a sense of moral responsibility in students together with an awareness of assessment criteria. Homework was routinely set during or at the end of lessons and was carefully monitored. In almost all instances, homework was used effectively to reinforce work in class and to maintain a good rate of progress.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and varied, covering work in two and three dimensions and theoretical work alongside individual creative work. There is provision for work in information technology but this aspect is not as fully developed as other areas of the curriculum. There has, however, been some improvement in provision since the last inspection when the absence of information technology was noted. At Key Stage 4 the GCSE options offered include the general art 'Unendorsed' syllabus and the Drawing and Painting syllabuses of the Northern Examining and Assessment Board. These allow for continuous progress from the general nature of the course at Key Stage 3. The A-level art syllabus also allows a wide choice and meets a criticism made at the time of the last inspection when sixth form work was described as narrow. There is provision for extra curricular work in studios outside timetabled time and visits to outside activities such as the visit to a local industrial complex.

There is a well planned faculty assessment policy based at Key Stage 3 upon the end of key stage National Curriculum Statement. Learning outcomes are specified in departmental schemes of work and apply the national expectations as illustrated in the 'Exemplification of Standards'. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the assessment criteria of the respective GCSE and A-level syllabuses are used as the basis of assessment. Project work at all levels is graded for attainment and effort and parents are reported to at least annually in accordance with legal requirements.

The department is housed in good quality accommodation with adjoining studios and specialist accommodation for ceramics. Storage is adequate and equipment and furniture are serviceable. There is only sparse provision of resources for learning and stringent economies are necessary in order to meet syllabus requirements. Some books are retained in the department but library provision is relatively thin.

There are two full-time appropriately qualified specialist teachers. The contribution of the full time staff is supplemented by part-time teaching provided by two members of the senior management team who have relevant subject expertise and experience.

The work of the department is effectively led by a head of faculty who plays a full role in the specialist teaching. Planning is sound and strategies introduced into the teaching are innovatory. Displays of work mounted in the college are of good quality and provide a valuable enrichment of the college environment.

Design and technology

At National Curriculum Key Stage 4 attainment is below average. In GCSE examinations students gained well below average results overall in the most recent year with 25 per cent grades A* - C against a national average of 51 per cent. There is, however, significant variation across options. In the Graphics and Information Technology short courses, which are taken jointly by students, results were well above average with 72 per cent A* - C and 82 per cent A* - C respectively.

In resistant materials and in 'food' courses, students produce sound well-finished and well-presented products but results gained at GCSE level are lower than those reported at the time of the last inspection. In most cases, making is better than designing and good presentation sheets are marred by poorly constructed lettering.

Progress through the key stage is uneven, with unsatisfactory progress overall but good progress in graphics and information technology. The level of success at GCSE represents poor progress from the levels gained in teacher assessments at Key Stage 3. There has been a marked decline in progress in the last two years, during which GCSE results have fallen from near the national norm to well below the norm.

Attainment at Key Stage 3 is around the national expectation. Teacher assessments show 38 per cent of students attaining level 6 with 3 per cent attaining level 7 and there is sound work in the area of both the designing and making attainment targets of the National Curriculum. Students show skills in designing structures, lifting devices for example, and in cutting and shaping resistant materials. They are also able to apply measuring techniques to the design of 'Nets' for the production of containers for different purposes. Attainment in food technology is in line with the national expectation, with well produced menus requiring methodical preparation and careful processing. Written work accompanying practical work is well organised and neatly presented but the quality of presentation sheets is, as at Key Stage 4, diminished by relatively poor lettering.

Progress through the key stage is satisfactory but is affected by a lack of knowledge of work done in primary schools. Two additional constraints to progress arise from the limited provision of resources for learning and the large numbers in several classes. This latter factor also creates difficulties for safe working in the proximity of machinery and food processing appliances, particularly cookers. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in response to differentiated tasks.

Students respond with interest to the departmental curriculum at all key stages. Conduct in workshops is responsible and considerate of the needs of others. The level of concentration in lessons is good and is sustained well throughout lessons. Students enjoy good relationships when working in the department and are polite in response to questions. Behaviour is good at all levels and students show very good attitudes to their work.

The quality of teaching in the department is mainly good with some lessons very good and only a minority of lessons were satisfactory. In the best lessons expectations were very high with very clear objectives shared with students and with good pace. In all lessons preparation was very careful and work well related to student need. There is a good spread of subject expertise within the department that is evident in the quality of individual help and encouragement across the wide range of activities undertaken. Homework is regularly set and is carefully monitored and assessed. Display is well used to illustrate techniques and working practices in an appropriately informative way. A wide range of teaching strategies are employed, including discussion and explanation, encouragement and individual tuition and, where appropriate, demonstration. The degree of help provided is sensitively modified according to students' need.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 comprises work in the two main areas, design and technology and food technology. Time allocation is low particularly in Year 7, at 6.6 per cent of taught time. This reduction has been made to accommodate the information technology element of Key Stage 3 design and technology. At Key Stage 4, GCSE options are taken in resistant materials, graphics, information technology and food studies. In Years 12 and 13 City and Guilds Intermediate GNVQ courses are offered in Engineering and Health and Social Care. The uptake on these courses is satisfactory.

Assessment at Key Stage 3 is based upon whole-college policy and is based on National Curriculum levels. Tests are analysed annually to inform planning and parents are reported in compliance with legal requirements. At Key Stage 4 the college assessment policy continues to be applied to work in projects and the assessment objectives of the Northern Examination and Assessment Board are used to assess course work. The City and Guilds GNVQ courses taken by students have built-in assessment patterns which are used by the department. These incorporate self-assessment.

The department has five appropriately qualified and experienced teachers. These are supplemented by five teachers from other areas whose experience and qualifications are related to the work of the department and who contribute some 6.5 hrs per week collectively. The staffing pattern is now relatively stable after a period of fluctuation. Both design and technology and food technology have the support of their own technician.

Accommodation in both areas is satisfactory and workrooms are efficiently grouped in suites. A shortcoming in specialist accommodation was noted at the last inspection in relation to the catering course. As this course is no longer to be offered, the problem is now solved. There is some dilapidation in the food area relating to loose tiling, which constitutes a hygiene risk.

The department is well managed with very efficient use of resources. Staff are appropriately deployed and accommodation well used. Equipment and materials are carefully stored and maintained and the working environment is kept in a very clean and tidy state appropriate to the disciplined nature of the activities undertaken. Documentation and records are very good and informative and very good use is made of display space.

Resources for learning are unsatisfactory. These shortages affect progress in certain courses, resistant materials for example, affect progress in certain courses - resistant materials, for example. There are also problems stemming from the condition of some lathes which are worn and in need of repair or replacement parts. The condition of these machines poses a potential risk to health and safety and merits the attention of a specialist health and safety assessor.

Geography

At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 attainment was above national standards for students aged 14. Overall, more than two thirds of the students achieved at or above the level expected. Girls achieved higher than boys. In lessons attainment is slightly below national expectations across the key stage but within the mixed ability classes there is a wide range of levels.

When students reach the end of Year 9, geography is offered as an optional subject in Key Stage 4. In the last 3 college years the number continuing with geography has usually been around two fifths of the age group. This is in line with national trends. Attainment in GCSE examinations at higher grades A*-C is below the national average but in line with the overall performance of the college. In 1999, from a smaller entry representing less than one third of the Year 11 age group, some 36% gained A* -C grades compared with 56% nationally. Boys at the college achieved better than the girls. The proportion of students gaining a pass grade between A*-G has been consistently at or above the national average and only very rarely do students fail to obtain a grade.

A small number continue into the sixth form to study for GCE Advanced Level. In 1999, 5 candidates were entered. Of these 4 gained pass grades with 2 students achieving grade A. While small numbers make comparison with national performance difficult, the trend within the college has seen steady improvement.

Progress in Key Stage 3 is generally satisfactory but the rate of progress varies. For example, in one Year 9 group studying volcanoes and using Mount Etna as a case study progress was very good. This is because the work is well matched to the range of students and the lesson activities are planned and managed so that all students know what is expected and how to achieve their individual targets. Students with special educational

needs receive additional help from well motivated sixth form volunteers and use computers with access to the internet to research the topic. Where progress is slower, as for example in Year 8 groups looking at environmental issues using a case study of Antarctica, less effective use is made of the full range of resources and methods and, while progress remains satisfactory, the work is not as closely matched to all students.

The GCSE groups in Key Stage 4 make good progress. Where occasionally the rate of progress is satisfactory rather than good to very good, the assessment information on the range of student abilities within the class is not used as effectively to plan the lesson to meet students' needs. In some of the lessons where progress is very good students show an increasing capacity to work in a variety of ways and are more confident when tackling new topics. In a Year 10 group beginning a case study on flooding in Bangladesh students consolidate a range of skills using a variety of maps and written sources. They work effectively in groups to identify the complex combination of factors that lead to the flooding and they show a mature understanding of the effects of the flooding on the people and the country.

In the Advanced Level small groups students make good progress and both in lessons and through their course assignments show their ability to take more initiative and greater personal responsibility for achieving their targets.

Behaviour in lessons is good. On very rare occasions when the high standards are not met this is dealt with effectively. Students work well with teachers and with each other. Relationships are good and students arrive at lessons on time, are well organised and settle quickly to work. In many lessons there are opportunities for paired work and small group work and students show high levels of co-operation and respect for each others viewpoint. They listen well to each other and can discuss issues and present their ideas in oral and written work. Books and equipment are carefully used. The subject makes a significant contribution to students' broader personal development.

Teaching is often of a high standard and in almost two thirds of the lessons it is good or very good. In several instances the teaching is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge, expectations are high and work is carefully planned. In the strongest lessons the very good arrangements for recording students' level of work and progress are used to inform the lesson plan. This leads to very clear lesson objectives which are shared with students and then broken down into well-organised and varied tasks. In these lessons students know what is expected of them, they are provided with materials and activities that enable them to participate and they know what to do to improve their work. Where teaching falls below this high standard it usually remains satisfactory but the pace and challenge are not as evident. Teachers manage students well with a strong emphasis on encouragement and praise. The very rare instances of ineffective teaching result from weaknesses in lesson planning.

Geography is part of the humanities faculty and the work benefits from strong leadership and very good management. The team of teachers is led with a sense of purpose and clear direction. There is detailed documentation with a well focused development plan that makes good use of resources. The curriculum has been developed into carefully structured schemes of work with very good procedures for marking and assessing students' work. A range of appropriate opportunities are provided for field work and educational visits and a recent link with a college in Kenya supports an initiative to develop students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures. There is good support for whole-college priorities to improve literacy and the subject makes a strong contribution to the work in information technology. Student attainment information is not yet fully used to analyse trends and review performance in order to set targets. This has been identified as a priority and the faculty is in a strong position to contribute to more effective whole-college improvement on this. Since the last inspection the progress of faculty has been very good.

History

At the end of Key Stage 3, standards of attainment meet the national expectations for this age. However, there is a wide range of individual attainment in classes. Students demonstrate a good understanding of some of the reasons for change in society. The standard of many students' oral work is good. The history department and

the humanities faculty as a whole have successfully developed a literacy policy, concentrating on Key Stage 3, developing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. At the end of KS4, attainment is above the expected level. GCSE examination results have been in line with national standards for some time. In 1999, 53% of students obtained grades A*-C and 100% at grades A*-G. Attainment at A level is in line with national expectations. Students in the sixth form have well-developed learning skills and can sustain cogent arguments to defend their views.

Most students are making good progress overall in the development of historical knowledge and skill across key stages and they are moving forward more consistently in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. The strategies used at Key Stage 3 for developing students' skills in using and communicating historical information raise students' achievements throughout the key stage. The events in Medieval Times, the Tudor period, and war time Europe are well understood by most students. Historical skills of interpretation and organisation of data are being fostered in Key Stage 4: the effective work observed on the use of source materials on American Indians is indicative of good progress. Students can find answers about the past, using sources, textbooks and worksheets, as well as being encouraged to use research in their studies on the history of medicine. Higher attaining students, particularly at Key Stage 4, demonstrate complex thinking and an ability to perceive subtle distinctions between minor causes and consequences. Debating by sixth form students on the causes of the Dutch Revolt demonstrated very good progress in their subject knowledge. Students with special educational needs are moving forward at least satisfactorily in both key stages.

Students' attitudes to learning are generally good, especially in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They respond well to a variety of learning experiences. A small number of students at Key Stage 3 are unnecessarily noisy and slow to settle at times. Relationships between students are good and, except for a few occasions, when listening is poor and concentration is weak, they respond positively to their teachers and many recognise and appreciate the efforts their teachers put into teaching. History is a popular choice at Key Stage 4. Post-16 students show mature attitudes to independent research and investigations. Their initiative, responsibility and interest provide a good basis for increased emphasis on historical investigation and research skills. In the main students take a pride in the content and presentation of their work.

Teaching in the department is good overall. It is consistently good in Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 teaching is satisfactory to very good. Teachers know their subject well and employ an appropriate variety of teaching techniques which, in the best lessons seen, challenge and motivate students. There is good provision for the wide range of attainment in the classes. Students' literacy skills are improving through regular reading in class and discussion. In most lessons seen during the inspection reading aloud by students was an expected part of the lesson. Lesson planning is very good and highlights the skills, knowledge and levels of understanding which students are expected to learn. Day to day assessment is good and informs subsequent lesson planning. Written comments on students' work include specific points to help improvement and set targets.

This is a very well led department, with the head of department working very hard managing a department where some of the teaching staff are on short term contracts or have other responsibilities. The teachers work well together as a team. The monitoring of teaching is well developed within the department and the humanities faculty. The history curriculum is well organised with appropriately planned schemes of work. Resources are well managed and accommodation is adequate. The department make satisfactory use of local resources and local history. The use of information technology was evident in students' work and in display. The department and the humanities faculty demonstrate a commitment to the benefits and use of information technology.

Modern foreign languages

Compared to a national figures of 50%, 39% of candidates entered at GCSE for a modern foreign language achieved grades A*-C. All candidates achieved grades A*-G, compared to 98% nationally. Since the previous inspection, the trend in the percentage of GCSE candidates gaining grades A*-C has been uneven. However, since the implementation of a "languages for all" policy, there has been an increase in the number of modern foreign languages grades A*-C. Reflecting the national picture, girls perform better than boys. In Key Stage 4,

levels of attainment are mostly below national expectations. In Key Stage 3 lessons, levels of attainment are broadly in line with national expectations.

Progress made by students in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory among higher attaining students. They can use different tenses and have quite a broad range of vocabulary and expressions; a minority of them succeed in using the foreign language spontaneously. Progress, especially in listening and speaking skills across a range of well-rehearsed topics, is also good among students with special educational needs. However, many students make less than satisfactory progress over time and are able to operate only at a fairly low level, coping only with short responses to questions and making brief utterances. Retention of vocabulary is weak and they have difficulty in manipulating language. In Key Stage 3 lessons, progress is generally satisfactory or better. Students are learning to apply the basic rules of grammar. The higher attainers succeed in manipulating verbs in past and future tenses and a small number are developing the habit of using the foreign language to express themselves in "real" transactions in the classroom. As at Key Stage 4, students with special educational needs make good progress in understanding and speaking the foreign language. Students in the sixth form make good progress overall. They extend their speaking skills and are able to offer opinions on a range of topics in the foreign language. They develop a good understanding of the language patterns at a more complex level.

The behaviour of students is generally good. Attitudes towards the subject are generally positive, especially in Key Stage 3.

The quality of teaching is good or better in over half the lessons seen. In only one out of 21 lessons was teaching judged to be unsatisfactory. Teachers work hard. They manage students well and have positive relationships with them. Most lessons are conducted at a good, brisk pace. They contain a good variety of activities which retain the interest of the students. The use of resources is good and sometimes imaginative. Homework reinforces classwork and is regularly set and marked thoroughly. All teachers challenge their students by using the foreign language extensively in their lessons; sometimes, however, the challenge is diluted by the unnecessary use of English. Insufficient insistence that the students should take every opportunity to respond in the foreign language also reduces the level of challenge and has an adverse effect on the standards attained. Much of the teaching restricts the language used by students to short utterances in response to brief questions.

The distribution of lessons in Key Stage 4 is having a negative impact on the standards attained. Time allocated to the subject at A-level is less than adequate and has a negative impact on standards reached. Curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is good.

By now offering a modern foreign language to all students through Key Stages 3 and 4, the management of the faculty has enabled the subject to assume a higher profile than at the time of the previous inspection. In order to have a greater impact upon the raising of attainment, a priority for teachers is the need to examine their teaching styles and share examples of good practice with their faculty colleagues. They need to insist upon greater use of the foreign language by students and to make more demands upon students of average ability.

Music

Only a relatively small number of students opt each year for GCSE music and a very small number choose to take A level music. Consequently, detailed comparison of results with national averages is insignificant. However, the results of those students entered for GCSE music in 1999 were broadly in line with those of other subjects for which they were entered, even though they were below national averages. At Key Stage 4, overall attainment is average. By the end of Key Stage 4, students are able to sing and play a variety of instruments. They perform confidently and rhythmically, often displaying an understanding of the composer's intentions, and they sing with good intonation. Students listen to a variety of musical excerpts and several are able to use technical vocabulary to describe what they hear, although a few students find difficulty in answering specific questions in listening tests. Students compose for a variety of instrumental combinations. There was insufficient evidence to judge overall attainment in the sixth form.

The overall attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national averages. By the end of the

key stage, the majority of students are able to play simple melodies on electronic keyboards and some, using two hands, are able to add an accompaniment. Many play with a secure rhythm and show awareness of other performers by fitting their own part within the whole.

The progress made both in lessons and over time at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is generally satisfactory. Students develop their listening skills by listening to recorded excerpts of music several times and are able to focus on particular aspects of the music they hear. They improve and refine their performing skills by practising a range of pieces. When they are able to control the piece technically, several go on to add expression and interpretation of the mood and effect of the music.

The progress both in lessons and over time at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. When working in pairs or small groups, the majority of students are able to develop and refine their composing and performing skills. For example, using pitched percussion instruments, students in Year 8 were able to compose and play a simple melody based on a minuet by Haydn.

The majority of students have positive attitudes to music: a small but regular number of students opt to take music at Key Stage 4 and one or two go on to take music at A level each year. Students are well-behaved in lessons and relationships are good, especially when students work in pairs and groups. The majority are able to sustain concentration throughout lessons and there is little evidence of unsatisfactory behaviour. Students use electronic keyboards sensibly and respectfully. Students in years 10 and 11 are able to work independently, particularly when involved in performing activities.

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory with several good features. Lessons are satisfactorily planned and structured. Schemes of work are very detailed and lesson content is appropriate to the needs of students. Students are well managed with any disruption being quickly dealt with and the pace of lessons is good. All year 7 and 8 lessons commence with a singing activity but the piano accompaniment is often loud, which has an adverse effect on the quality of singing. A good assessment scheme is used whereby students' work is continually assessed in lessons and a written assessment is made at the end of a unit with students being given the opportunity to assess their own work. Homework was not set in most lessons observed. Relationships between teachers and students are invariably good.

Since the previous inspection there is still only 3.3% of curriculum time allocated to music at Key Stage 3, which is below the national average of 4%, but this does not have detrimental affect on students' progress. Resources for music are good. The department has a wide range of orchestral instruments, classroom instruments and electronic keyboards, most of which are of good quality. There is an Atari computer but it is only used by Key Stage 4 students. Resources and accommodation are both used effectively. Seventy students, representing about 9% of the college population, are in receipt of weekly instrumental lessons. Extra-curricular activities are a particular strength of the music department and ensembles reach high standards of performance. The orchestra comprises approximately 20 players and 100 students, along with a few members of staff, sing in the four part choir. Rehearsals are well directed and students are encouraged to give of their very best. A wide range of music is included in the repertoire and the choir gave a performance of 'Fauré's' Requiem.

Physical education

GCSE results in 1999 fell below the national average, after showing steady improvement in the preceding years. A-level results were just below national average, although two students gained A grades. Attainment for students currently in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, including GCSE students is at the level expected nationally and in Advanced Level it is above the expected standard.

In Key Stage 3 in Year 8 gymnastics, girls are able to perform individual skills of jumping rolling and balancing and combine these well when working in pairs. In Year 9 boys' basketball, students understand the rules of the game and they can dribble and shoot, with higher attainers being more effective. In Year 10 basketball both boys and girls and girls in Year 11 are working below the level expected for the age group. They have poor individual shooting skills and, although they have satisfactory dribbling technique, lose possession of the ball when in games. In GCSE basketball in year 10 there is a range of attainment levels; the

majority of students have a good knowledge of rules and tactics of the game, with higher attainers being more effective performers. In A Level physical education in Years 12 and 13, students have a good understanding of psychology in sport, anatomy and physiology and contemporary issues of sport and recreation.

Progress in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, including GCSE, is satisfactory; it is good in A level physical education. There are some instances, however, where progress is unsatisfactory either in a lesson or over a longer period, such as a unit of work or over a key stage. In Year 10 boys' basketball, students have not learned sufficient skills in Key Stage 3 to enable them to play at the higher level expected in Key Stage 4. Girls in Year 11 have made insufficient progress in basic shooting skills and team play over the key stage. Where there is satisfactory progress, boys in a Year 7 badminton class demonstrate new skills, such as the high serve, and in Year 10 they improve the quality of their strokes with better control and consistency. There is good progress in Year 7 and 8 gymnastics as students increase their range of movement, with higher attainers improving the quality of their work and the majority of students developing increasingly complex routines when working in pairs and in groups.

Students are positive about the subject: they are usually quick to get changed and are enthusiastic about lessons. They respond well to teachers' instruction and work hard at tasks set. They show good levels of co-operation when working in pairs and small groups, particularly in gymnastics. When given the opportunity to work independently they are able to do so in warm up time at the start of lessons. There are good relationships between students and teachers in all lessons.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, although lessons seen during the inspection range from unsatisfactory to very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and give clear explanations and demonstrations. Classes are well managed and there is good behaviour and a positive working atmosphere in lessons. Planning is generally well done but occasionally poor planning leads to unsatisfactory lessons. In Year 7 orienteering no time was spent in route planning at the start of the lesson nor evaluation at the end. In satisfactory teaching in Year 7 badminton and Year 9 basketball, there are appropriate tasks with sufficient challenge to develop students' skills. In Year 8 girls' gymnastics, good teaching over the unit of work is evidenced by the good progress made by students of all attainment levels. There is good teaching in Year 10 GCSE theory with good planning and the use of practical tasks to help students learn about the skeletal system. The good teaching in A-level physical education is due to good planning and very good subject knowledge, with clear and concise explanations of difficult concepts, and many practical examples related to sport. In very good teaching in Year 10 soccer there is very good planning with challenging tasks matched to students' attainment levels and good intervention by the teacher to raise students' levels of performance. There are few opportunities for students to work independently in lessons. Warm-up at the start of lessons is often teacher led when much of this could be done by students working by themselves or in small groups. Apart from gymnastics where there are good opportunities for students to evaluate, there is little evaluation by students themselves.

The planned curriculum is broad and balanced in both key stages and there are good opportunities for students to take accredited courses in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In Key Stages 3 and 4 units of work are too short in many activities, netball - a major game - is not included in the curriculum and not all students are able to take dance in Key Stage 3. Assessment has been improved, although it is restricted to the end of units of work; there is little formative assessment. There is a limited range of extra-curricular activities for both boys and girls. Football is strong but there are fewer opportunities for higher attainers in other sports. Inter-form events provide opportunities for the majority of students to participate in competitive games.

The leadership of the department is unsatisfactory. Lessons do not follow the planned curriculum. Supply teachers are given insufficient information about day-to-day routines and the curriculum. Risk assessment is mentioned in the documentation but has not been carried out effectively. There are no regular departmental meetings and little evidence of monitoring the work of the department. There has been little progress since the last inspection. Students' attainment remains at nationally expected levels in both key stages. Teaching continues to be satisfactory and students remain positive and well motivated towards the subject. Opportunities for independent learning have not been created. The department has no clear policies for monitoring standards of teaching and learning and departmental development plans are vague.

Business education

In the GCSE examinations in 1999, students' performance was below the national average for grades A* -C; for grades A* -G their performance was in line with the national average. Boys performed better than girls and achieved above the national average in grades A* - C.

For students currently nearing the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is in line with national expectations. Some students in both Years 10 and 11 are attaining at well above average expectations. All students have a basic understanding of key terms. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on the growth of business, most students could distinguish between sources of internal and external growth. Higher attainers were able to give specific examples, such as growth in demand, perhaps resulting from a successful advertising campaign. Such students use with confidence terms like horizontal integration and conglomerate merger and identify examples such as Rolls Royce and BMW.

Attainment at A-level is variable but, as numbers entering for the final examination are small, comparison with national figures is not valid. An analysis of results suggests there is an improving trend in results. Judgements on the attainment of GNVQ advanced students are difficult because of small entries; however, those who complete the course frequently gain good grades: 50 per cent gained at least a merit in 1999 but completion rates are an issue. 30 per cent of the 1999 group failed to complete on time. For the current A-level and advanced GNVQ students, attainment is at least in line with national expectations, with a small group of students, who are mainly girls, attaining at well above average expectations. For example, in a lesson on business growth, students capably identified types of growth and could give examples; higher attainers offered very good reasons; for example, a girl spoke of one firm taking over another to capture market share and about consumer loyalty and brand names.

Progress at Key Stage 4 is good for all students with no variations based on gender or ethnicity being discernible. All students are making gains on their knowledge and understanding of business. This covers areas such as business growth and marketing as well as principles of accounting. Good progress was witnessed in a lesson on cash flow. Indeed, in this lesson students made progress in their understanding of accounts, in numeracy and in their use of spreadsheet programmes. Post-16 students' progress is very good. All students, in both A-level and GNVQ courses, are making progress in their knowledge and understanding of businesses and the prevailing economic environment. Progress is again being recorded in their use and application of information technology and their research and presentational skills are being enhanced. For example, a Year 12 GNVQ group were seen preparing for a debate on smoking and an A-level Year 12 group researched and presented good ideas on the privatisation of education. Through such activities students realise that data can be interpreted in many, often conflicting, ways.

The behaviour of all students is very good. Students attend business studies lessons expecting to work. In all classes visited, students acted responsibly and with maturity. They settled well to their tasks, were attentive and quietly enthusiastic and displayed a willingness to work both independently and collaboratively. When in groups they worked well without becoming too noisy or boisterous. For example, in a Year 10 lesson where a game was played, students were animated but still acted with good sense. In a Year 12 debate on privatisation, though feelings occasionally ran high, all students conducted themselves with maturity, showing respect for the views of others. There is also clear respect for the teaching staff. One criticism is that in many lessons students are reserved and seem reticent about becoming involved in discussions.

The quality of teaching at both Key Stage 4 and post-16 is good. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen. In two thirds of lessons it was at least good and in one third of lessons it was very good. The quality of teaching is making a significant contribution to the attainment and progress of all students, irrespective of their level of study, and the sound balance between teaching and facilitating on the GNVQ course is further aiding the students' attainment. Teachers prepare well, are enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge. Where lessons are particularly effective the pace is pitched correctly, staff have high expectations of their students and the level of the challenge provides stimulation with clear goals. In less effective lessons, the pace was slower, time was less well managed and there were fewer challenges. One facet of such lessons was that information was provided without the students being asked to think what the answers might be. Staff also employ a wide variety of strategies, with information technology being appropriately used. Staff are confident

about using information technology in lessons. Good emphasis is placed on numeracy and there are constant reminders of the need for students to use business terminology correctly and in context. Good use is also made of homework.

The department is very well managed with a clear ethos. The staff work well as a team and have established clear objectives. Assessment procedures are sound and are understood, appropriate emphasis is placed on literacy and numeracy and the personal development of students is improved by the care taken to explore some of the moral and ethical issues associated with modern day business. Such management helps enhance the attainment and progress of all students following business courses.

Vocational Education

The sixth form curriculum has been enhanced by the provision of a number of vocational courses at both intermediate and advanced level. This provision offers further opportunities for students to progress, either to the world of work, or to further and higher education. The planning for these courses is good. Staff working in vocational areas have received suitable training, the timetabling arrangements are appropriate and there is clear direction about how the courses should be delivered, with staff achieving a good balance between their roles as teachers and facilitators. During the inspection period, a number of lessons were observed and, in some of these lessons, the quality of teaching was very good. In all lessons good provision was made for key skills. In an advanced leisure and tourism class, students were making very good progress in their information technology skills. Data gained from a questionnaire had been entered on a spreadsheet and then presented in graphical form. Students were then integrating their graphs from their spreadsheet programme into their word-processed reports. All students were confident about undertaking such procedures. In an advanced business class students were concentrating on their research and communication skills, culminating in a thought-provoking debate on the ethics of tobacco advertising.

Students taking the engineering course make good progress in acquiring practical skills, for example in casting metal and metal finishing. They are also able to prescribe suitable methods of construction for cutting and assembling products in wood. Course notebooks are very well produced with neat layout and very good illustrations. These are an important factor in sustaining a good rate of progress. In the 'Health and Social Care' course, students make very methodical and well managed progress in analysing problems occurring in the community, such as malnutrition and safety in the home. In this course also, notebooks are very carefully kept and presented as evidence of study. Students have been successful in gaining pass grades in engineering and pass and merit grades in health and social care, with completion rates of 37.5 per cent and 77.7 per cent respectively.

An interesting approach has been adopted towards the intermediate students. All students following intermediate vocational courses are grouped together in the same tutor set and their weekly personal and social education tutorial is devoted to the teaching of key skills. This arrangement works well and a very good lesson was witnessed during the inspection period.

An analysis of the results gained by GNVQ students presents a variable picture. In both 1998 and 1999 course completion rates were below the national average. 65 per cent of students completed in 1998. This figure rose slightly in 1999 to 68 per cent. Though a completion rate of 100 percent was recorded last year in the advanced leisure and tourism course the completion rate in the intermediate engineering course was particularly low. There were no distinctions awarded last year, though 56 per cent of students following vocational courses gained merit grades. Present advanced level students in both business and leisure and tourism are attaining at levels that are at least in line with national expectations. They work with enthusiasm and interest and many are up to date with their assignments. Assessment procedures are also suitable.

The provision for vocational education is good and it offers a number of students an alternative academic route. Some students have successfully completed their advanced courses and progressed to higher education. However, to maximise fully the benefits of a vocational programme, especially at intermediate level, the college needs to refine its assessment and monitoring procedures further to ensure that completion rates are

significantly improved.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

Fourteen inspectors, who spent a combined total of 52 days in the college, undertook this inspection of Seaton Burn Community College. The evidence in the report is based upon a total of 202.02 hours observation from 200 lessons or part-lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form.

The evidence also includes:-

- inspection of a range of college activities, including assemblies and registration;
- scrutiny of registers;
- observation of lunchtimes and breaks and informal discussions with students at these times;
- inspection of schemes of work;
- inspection of development plans;
- inspection of books and other work of three students from each age group, selected by teachers to represent the full range of attainment;
- inspection of written reports to parents;
- discussions with the principal;
- discussions with the chair and vice-chair, special educational needs and parent governors;
- discussions with the chair of the finance committee;
- discussions with heads of faculty and subject;
- discussions with students in each age group about aspects of their work;
- discussions with members of teaching, learning support and non-teaching staff;
- discussions at a meeting with seven parents prior to the inspection;
- 294 responses to the parents' questionnaire.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of students on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of students with statements of SEN	Number of students on college's register of SEN	Number of full-time students eligible for free college meals
Y7 – Y13	856	25	164	189

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	53
Number of students per qualified teacher:	16.1

Education support staff (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of education support staff:	1
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	13.00

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	79
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	22
	KS4	20

Financial data

Financial year:	1998 / 99
	£
Total Income	1,954,731
Total Expenditure	1,961,405
Expenditure per pupil	2380.35
Balance brought forward from previous year	63,294
Balance carried forward to next year	56,620

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	827
Number of questionnaires returned:	294

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the college encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the college	16	68	12	3	1
I would find it easy to approach the college with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	32	55	10	2	1
The college handles complaints from parents well	16	58	20	4	2
The college gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	23	59	12	6	0
The college keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	29	54	12	4	1
The college enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	28	58	11	2	1
The college encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	20	57	17	5	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	20	67	8	4	1
The college's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	19	54	20	6	1
The college achieves high standards of good behaviour	20	52	22	5	1
My child(ren) like(s) college	29	53	11	6	1

Other issues raised by parents

Some parents raised the issue of girls' extra-curricular sport.

Inspectors found that the provision for extra-curricular sport for girls was not as good as that for boys.