

INSPECTION REPORT

**BLESSED ROBERT JOHNSON CATHOLIC
COLLEGE**

Wellington, Telford

LEA area: Telford and Wrekin

Unique reference number: 123598

Headteacher: Mr John Martin

Reporting inspector: Ross Maden

2793

Dates of inspection: 18th – 22nd February 2002

Inspection number: 221458

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of students: 11 to 18

Gender of students: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs J. Beyer

Date of previous inspection: 31st January 2000

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Blessed Robert Johnson is a voluntary aided comprehensive college educating boys and girls in the age range of 11 to 18. There are 838 students in the college, which is in line with the national average for secondary schools. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 14 per cent, which is broadly in line with the national average. The number of students for whom English is an additional language is close to the national average. The percentage of students on the college's special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of these students with statements of special educational need is above the national average. The attainment on entry to the college is in line with national averages. The college attracts students with a wide range of prior attainment, although the proportion of higher-attaining students is lower than average as a result of students attending local selective schools. The college serves Roman Catholic children from across the County and students from other Christian denominations and from other world faiths. There are significantly more girls than boys in Years 7, 9 and 11. The social class of the households served by the college reflects the national average. The inspection of religious education was not included in this inspection as the college is a voluntary aided school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The overall effectiveness of the college and the sixth form is very good. The college achieves very high standards in A-level results in the sixth form with improving standards in examination and test results in Years 7 to 11. Students are keen to learn with very few problems of behaviour in or out of lessons. Attendance is good. Teaching is consistently good and very good for older students. There is a very high quality of leadership and management within the college and the college has made very good progress since its last inspection. The college provides good value for money and the sixth form is cost effective.

What the school does well

- Students achieve very high standards in the sixth form.
- Teaching is consistently good.
- Students' attitudes towards learning are good and behaviour and attendance are very good positively influencing standards.
- Arrangements for students' spiritual and moral developments are very good.
- There is a high quality of pastoral care within the college and it has effective strategies to reduce the need to exclude students.
- The quality of leadership and management at all levels in the college is very good and there is a commitment by all staff to continuous college improvement.
- The quality of identifying targets for students to improve their work is a strength of the college.

What could be improved

- Raising the standards of music.
- Extending the opportunities for all teachers to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support their teaching, particularly in science, art and design and music.
- Continue to expand the resources within the learning resources centre to enable students to develop their independent learning skills across all subjects.
- Extending the range of extra-curricular opportunities for students especially in music and drama.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in February 2000 and at that time was judged to be underachieving. The college has made very good progress since the time of the last inspection. The results in National Curriculum tests for students in Year 9 show significant improvement on those results achieved at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of students gaining five GCSE grades A*-C has improved since the last inspection and is close to the national average. In tackling the key issues identified in the last inspection report the college has made very good progress. Standards have improved in the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9. Achievements in mathematics and ICT have improved. Sufficient time is now provided for music. Arrangements for assessment are now consistent across the college. The monitoring of the college's work is now rigorous and there is the capacity for further improvement.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

Students' results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in the year 2001 were in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students reaching the higher levels of Level 6 and above was above average for science, in line with national average for English and below average for mathematics. When compared to schools with pupils of a similar background in 2001, students in this college achieve results at Level 5 and above which are well above average for mathematics and science and above average for English. Results for English, mathematics and science in 2001 show significant improvements on the 2000 results which in turn showed significant improvements on the 1999 results. Over the last three years, boys' performance in English, mathematics and science was relatively better than that of girls when compared to the national performance of boys and girls.

In the 2001 GCSE examinations and for the period of 1999 –2001 the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades was close to the national average. The proportion of students gaining five or more A*-G grades was above and for one or more A*-G grades was well above the national average. Based on the average points score at GCSE the school is in line with similar schools. However, the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades was above average and well above average for five or more A*-G and one or more A*-G when compared with similar schools. Although girls performed better than boys, based on the last three years boys' results were close to the national average for boys and girls' results were below the national average for girls. Analysis of the results for individual subjects in 2001 indicates that there were relatively better results in art and design, English literature and religious education. There were relatively poorer results in English language, French and double award science.

By the end of Year 9 students have reached standards which are above national averages for art and design, and design and technology. In all other subjects standards are close to the national averages, except for music where they are below average. This pattern is repeated in the attainment achieved by students by the end of Year 11 except for art and design where standards are well above the national average and in ICT where standards are below. In the work seen by the end of Year 9 students' achievements are often higher than those reflected by test results. This is because the effects of the improvements in the quality of teaching have yet to be fully realised by improved results. Students are achieving levels, which are above average for all subjects except for music where students are underachieving. Students' achievements by the end of Year 11 are very good for art and design, good for most other subjects, except for science, physical education and modern foreign languages where achievement is satisfactory and music where achievement is unsatisfactory.

Results at A-level have been above average for the last three years. There was a considerable improvement in the overall results for 2001.

The college achieved its published targets for the proportion of students gaining one or more A*-G, exceeded its target for the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C but fell below its target for the average points score in 2001. In the light of the prior attainment of students in Year 11 the targets set for 2002 are ambitious and challenging.

Standards of literacy are satisfactory overall. Students are competent readers. Writing skills are satisfactory and students have good speaking and listening skills. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory. Standards in ICT are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 but are below average by the end of Year 11. Standards in ICT are improving and in Year 10 standards are close to the national average.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Most students have positive attitudes towards their learning. Students come to college to work hard knowing that they are well-supported.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Around the college students are respectful towards each other and towards visitors. In lessons the very rare incident of poor behaviour is well managed by teachers.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between students and students are very good. Relationships between staff and students are based on genuine mutual respect. There are many opportunities provided within the college for students to take responsibility, not least in the considerable efforts made by students to raise funds for charity.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is above the national average. Students are punctual in arriving for the start of lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 11, and has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection. It is very good in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 11 the quality of teaching and learning is very good in history and art and design. In all other subjects the quality of teaching is good except for music where teaching is satisfactory. Only two lessons out of 158 were judged to be less than satisfactory.

A particular strength of teaching is the very good quality of marking which indicates clearly to students what they need to do to improve their work. The management of students' behaviour is very good and allied to good quality of planning for lessons ensures that the work set matches the needs of all students. Students' pace of working in lessons is good. Most students show a keen interest in learning and concentrate well in lessons. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods to involve students' in their learning. Occasionally, too many students are passive in lessons and are over-reliant on their teachers. Teachers' expectations are good in Years 7 to 11 and the level of challenge meets the needs of students and results in students making good gains in their learning. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good as is the teaching for those students with English as an additional language.

The college's strategies for teaching literacy are good. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory. Numeracy skills are taught well in the mathematics department but not consolidated in a consistent way across other departments. This issue is recognised by the college.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets the legal requirements of the National Curriculum and is broad and balanced. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities are satisfactory but opportunities in music and drama are unsatisfactory.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Provision for special educational needs is good. Students are well integrated and supported. The provision is socially and educationally inclusive.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Arrangements are good for this group of students. The few students who are not already bi-lingual are well-supported and make good gains in their learning. The college also caters well for a number of overseas students who join some sixth form courses and the provision for these students is good.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall provision for students' personal development is very good and is a strength of the college. Opportunities are effectively threaded through the curriculum and the day-to-day life of the college. Provision for spiritual development and moral development are both very good.
How well the school cares for its students	The arrangements for students' welfare are good and the quality of pastoral care is high. The procedures for monitoring and supporting attendance are good and those for behaviour are very good. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good.
How well does the school work in partnership with parents	There is a good partnership between parents and the college.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides calm and authoritative leadership. In this task he is very well supported by his senior staff. Overall the quality of leadership and management by other staff with posts of responsibility is very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. The governing body is knowledgeable, hardworking and committed to raising standards within the college. Governors meet their statutory duties and play a vital role in shaping the direction of the college.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Since the last inspection, the college has made impressive progress in developing rigorous systems for monitoring teaching and learning and other aspects of the work of the college.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The college is skilful in applying the principles of best value and in ensuring that resources are targeted effectively to meet the needs of the college's priorities. The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and resources is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good teaching in the college• The college has high expectations for its students• Their children are making good progress• Their children like college• The college is well led and managed• They feel comfortable about approaching the college if they have problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The college working more closely with parents• To be better informed of their child's progress• The range of extra-curricular activities• The amount of homework set

Most parents are very appreciative of the quality of education the college provides for students. Inspectors agree with parents on the issues, which please them most. Inspectors judge that there are sufficient opportunities for the college to work closely with parents. Similarly, inspectors judge that parents are kept well informed of their children's progress. The amount of homework set is judged by inspectors to be appropriate. However, inspectors agree with some parents who believe that there is a limited range of extra-curricular activities for students.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form in this 11 to 18 comprehensive Catholic college is smaller than other sixth forms. Currently there are 88 students compared with the national average of 166. There is a range of academic courses available, and a small number of vocational courses. Whilst admission to courses is guided by the requirement for students to have five higher passes at GCSE, the college is flexible in individual circumstances. Overall, students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is average. The few students who leave the college during Year 12 or Year 13 do so to take up subjects which are not part of the college curriculum. There is relatively little movement between AS courses in Year 12. Many of those leaving the college at the end of Year 13 go on to further or higher education. Senior managers and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. Planning for future sixth form provision is well advanced.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The results at GCE A-level have been above average for the last three years. Results have exceeded national averages. Results in art and design and religious studies were well above average, and in history results were very high in comparison with the national average. Contrary to the national trend, boys outperformed girls in 2001. Students' achievements are very good. The range of courses available results in some small teaching groups especially in Year 13. There are limited opportunities for enrichment outside lessons. Teaching is very good with particular strengths in teachers' subject knowledge, planning and classroom management. Relationships are very good and characterised by mutual respect and support. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The college has a cost effective sixth form.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good
- Results have exceeded national averages over the last three years
- Students are well supported in their personal development. They appreciate the support of teachers, and support the college well in return.
- Students are positive in their views of the college and their experiences in the sixth form

What could be improved

- The range of activities to enrich the curriculum by improving the teaching of key skills

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Standards are above average in A-level and average in AS. Teaching and learning are good. Leadership and management are good.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. Standards are average. Teaching is good, but individual needs are not always adequately met and students' progress is not consistently tracked systematically.
Art	Very good. A-level results have risen in the last two years and in 2001 were well above national averages. In the 2001 AS-level examinations, nearly 50 per cent of students gained the top grades of A and B. The quality of teaching, learning, leadership and management are all very good.
History	Very good. Standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good. Students respond positively to stimulating and challenging lessons. Leadership and management are very good.
English	Very good. Although A-level results were below average in 2001, Year 12 AS-level results in 2001 indicated that students made very good gains compared with their GCSE performance. Currently standards are above average and reflect the very good teaching and learning observed. Leadership and management are very good.

In other subjects, work was sampled. Results have varied usually in accordance with the levels gained by students at GCSE. Overall, students make good gains compared with their GCSE performance.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Teachers provide good guidance and support for students' personal development. Procedures for assessing their academic attainment, monitoring progress and setting targets for the improvement of standards are systematic and rigorous in most subjects.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. There is a strong commitment to the improvement of standards and the quality of provision. Planning is based on a clear view of the relationship between the sixth form and the main school. Senior managers and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. Resources are effectively deployed so that there is no detrimental effect on other parts of the college.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers are accessible for help.• The quality of teaching and the level of challenge are very good.• Curriculum choice suits talents and aspirations.• They are given good advice about future options in further and higher education.• They were helped well to settle into the sixth form.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular, formal information about their progress.• The range of activities and enrichment available.

Inspection evidence confirms students' views on the support of teachers, curriculum choice and the pastoral help received. Inspectors agree that there is a need to broaden the range of activities to enrich students' experience. They judge that students are well advised about the further and higher education options available to them when they leave college. This was confirmed in particular by discussions with students during the inspection.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Students' attainment on entry is in line with the national average. There are significant differences from year to year in both the gender balance and in the prior attainment of students on entry.

2. Students' results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in the year 2001 were in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students reaching the higher levels of Level 6 and above was above average for science, in line with national averages for English and below average for mathematics. When compared to schools with pupils of a similar background in 2001, students in this college achieve results at Level 5 and above which are well above average for mathematics and science and above average for English. The proportion of students reaching the higher levels of Level 6 and above, when compared to schools with pupils of a similar background, was well above average for science, above average for mathematics and in line for English. Results for English, mathematics and science in 2001 show significant improvements on the 2000 results which in turn showed significant improvements on the 1999 results. The trend in the college's average National Curriculum points score based on the last three years is above the national trend. Over the last three years, boys' performances for English, mathematics and science were relatively better than girls when compared to the national performance of boys and girls.

3. In the 2001 GCSE examinations and for the period of 1999 –2001 the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades was close to the national average. The proportion of students gaining five or more A*-G grades was above and for one or more A*-G grades was well above the national average.

4. When compared to similar schools, the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C was above average and well above average for five or more GCSE grades A*-G and one or more A*-G. Although girls performed better than boys, based on the last three years, boys' results were close to the national average for boys, and girls' results were below the national average for girls. When compared to similar schools results for the college are in line with the average. The trend in the college's results was below the national trend, in part because of the limited number of GCSE subjects that students are entered for. Recent changes in the structure of the college day now enable higher attaining students to be entered for an increased number of GCSE examinations.

5. Analysis of the results for individual subjects in 2001, compared to national averages, indicates that there were relatively better results in art and design, English literature and religious education. There were relatively poorer results in English language, French and double award science.

6. By the end of Year 9 students have reached standards that are above national averages for art and design and design and technology. In all other subjects, standards are close to the national average, except for music where standards are below. In the work seen by the end of Year 9, students' achievements are often higher than those reflected by test results. Improvements in the quality of teaching have led to students achieving well in all subjects except for music where students are underachieving. Improving standards of teaching have yet to have the full impact on improvements in examination results.

7. Students' achievements by the end of Year 11 are very good for art and design, good for most other subjects except for science and modern foreign languages where attainment is satisfactory. However, students are underachieving in music.

8. The college achieved its published targets for one or more A*-G, exceeded its target for the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C but fell below its target for the average points score in 2001. In the light of the prior attainment of students in Year 11, the targets set for 2002 are ambitious and challenging.

9. The needs of the higher attaining students are well met. Provision is made for gifted students to take GCSE psychology as an additional subject. There is an effective and varied programme of extra-curricular activities to meet the needs of gifted students. However, not all departments have a clear identification of the provision they make for fully challenging higher attaining students.

10. The progress made by students with special educational needs by the ages of 14 and 16 is good. Their achievements are reflected in the percentage of students gaining level 5 and above in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9, which was above national averages in all three subjects. The number of students achieving five GCSE passes at A* to G and one GCSE pass at A* to G has exceeded national averages in recent years. Few students leave college with no qualifications. This represents good achievement on the part of students who arrive at college with lower levels of prior attainment, with particular reference to literacy, and often with reading ages well below their chronological age. The college is aware that boys have performed less well than girls in GCSE examinations and is implementing effective strategies to challenge underachievement. The success of these strategies is reflected in that for the last three years boys' results were close to the national average for boys.

11. Students with special educational needs are well integrated into mainstream classrooms. They participate well in lessons and gain much from their contact with subject teachers. Overall, they behave well and show positive attitudes to their work.

12. Students' standards of literacy are average overall, and enable the vast majority of students to access the full curriculum. Students are competent readers and the college's approach to supporting the lowest attaining students is ensuring that they are equipped with skills that enable them to understand most of the texts that they meet in lessons. They are taught to be active readers, understanding how to ask questions of texts. Writing skills are satisfactory. The highest attaining students write with good control and sophistication, while lower attaining students communicate their ideas and opinions clearly, and spell and punctuate with a reasonable level of accuracy. These reading and writing skills are underpinned by good speaking and listening skills. Almost all students are confident and articulate speakers, able to express an opinion and to explain it. The good work that has been undertaken across the curriculum in using group talk in the classroom has improved the way in which students use exploratory talk to learn, building on each others' ideas to develop and enrich their own.

13. Standards in numeracy are average overall. The National Numeracy Strategy is rightly emphasised and in particular, mental starters to lessons usually ensure mental skills improve. Students throughout are numerate. Number facts are learned and used well. In one Year 7 class, when a visitor came into the lesson to talk to the teacher, the students knew they had to carry on learning their seven times table independently. Students know how to construct a wide range of tables, charts and graphs and can answer simple questions, but the middle and higher ability students need more opportunities to interpret what they mean. Students throughout are good at spotting number patterns because of the investigative work

they do throughout Years 7 to 9. Across the curriculum there is satisfactory use of number by other subjects, especially in science and geography.

14. There are some fifty students in the college who speak English as an additional language although the vast majority of these are effectively bilingual and need no extra support. The very few students at earlier stages of language acquisition are well supported and are making good progress. In addition the college takes into the sixth form a number of overseas students through an agency which arranges one-year programmes for students from countries as far away as Brazil, Japan, Thailand and China. Although Telford College of Further Education provides their English lessons, they attend lessons in their specialist subjects in the Blessed Robert Johnson College. They are well supported and although they are not usually entered for examinations they make good progress and achieve well. The standard of their English is also supported through the wide range of social contacts they make with other students in the college.

Sixth form

15. The results at A-level were broadly in line with national averages in 1999, fell to below national averages in 2000, and recovered strongly in 2001. In 1999 the students entered for two or more A-levels averaged 17.1 points in comparison with a national average of 17.2. In 2000 the average points score fell to 15.1 against a national average of 18.2. In 2001 the average points score rose to 19.9. This places the college in the top 25 per cent of schools nationally in terms of A-level results. Results in history were very high, including one grade 1 pass at S-level, and one student succeeded in gaining a place at an Oxford college. Results in religious studies and art and design were well above national averages. Contrary to the national trend, boys performed better than girls in 2001. Standards in key skills are satisfactory. There are no timetabled lessons for key skills but form tutors monitor students' progress effectively.

16. Students were entered for GCE AS-level for the first time in 2001. Comparison with national averages is not possible as the national data is not available. The pass rate for the college at grades A to E was 89 per cent. The pass rate at A to C was 65 per cent, and at the highest grades of A and B it was 29 per cent. Just over 10 per cent of entries were ungraded.

17. Students enter the sixth form with broadly average results at GCSE. The above average results at A-level and the low percentage of low and ungraded AS-level results indicate very good achievement when compared with students' GCSE results. The most able students achieve as well as expected in the light of their GCSE results. Students who enter the sixth form with relatively low attainment achieve well.

18. The majority of students proceed to destinations in further and higher education. Those who leave during Year 12 do so to take up subjects which are not part of the college curriculum. There is relatively little movement between AS-level courses in Year 12.

19. Overall students' standards are well above average. The work seen during the inspection reflected the very good standards achieved in history, art and design and English, while the standard of work in mathematics was good. Standards in chemistry were satisfactory, but the needs of individual students in this subject were not adequately met and their progress not tracked sufficiently systematically.

20. Students acknowledge the change in teaching and learning styles brought about by the college since the last inspection. They are now more involved in their own learning, for example through debate and discussion. They are encouraged to be independent in research but there is no internet link in the sixth form centre. Retention rates on courses are good.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

21. Students' attitudes towards the college are good and their attendance is very good. Their values, behaviour and personal development are very good. Standards have improved since the previous inspection. Parents are pleased with students' behaviour and personal development.

22. Students are pleased with almost all of their experiences in the college. They regard it as a friendly, all-inclusive community where they receive sincere help and support and are encouraged to make their best effort. Older students say that teaching styles have changed and improved since the previous inspection. Students have positive attitudes towards their studies. They are conscientious, keen to do well and take pride in their work. They participate well in the various activities of the college. They say they would like a wider choice of extra curricular activities. Behaviour is very good in and out of lessons. During the inspection week scarcely any unsatisfactory behaviour was observed. Students' conduct is orderly and contributes very much to the atmosphere of calm that prevails and better learning.

23. One student was permanently excluded last year and whilst the number of temporary exclusions was similar to the average for secondary schools nationally, it was lower in comparison with nearby schools and has sharply declined this year. Most students who have difficulty in exercising self-discipline and attend the college's own special centre, demonstrate improved behaviour and effort afterwards.

24. The college, parents and students confirm that very few incidents of bullying occur and are always dealt with promptly and effectively. Relationships between students are very good. They work and play together very well, are tolerant and listen with interest to the contributions of their peers.

25. Students make very good progress with their personal development. They accept well responsibility when given the opportunity. They represent others as members of the college council. They take on roles as prefects and raise funds for charities. They have too few opportunities for involvement in community particularly via community service experiences. Students are expected to arrange their own work experience placements. They become more mature and responsible by learning decision making skills, how to manage their time, how to work constructively with others and evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses. Trips to outward-bound centre and residential experiences including retreats and trips abroad also contribute to students' personal development.

26. An element of the provision, which reflects the college's inclusive philosophy, is the Emmaus Centre. This facility opened in September 2001. It is housed in the former site manager's bungalow and provides a self-contained and safe environment for a small group of students identified as being at risk of exclusion. There are strict admission criteria, and students undergo an intensive six-week course aimed at developing social skills, raising self-

esteem and managing emotions as well as maintaining contact with the mainstream curriculum. Re-admission to mainstream lessons is negotiated and depends on students reaching behavioural and academic targets set for them by centre staff. Centre staff manage their re-integration by accompanying students back to lessons and settling them in. Early indications are that the provision is proving effective in the large majority of cases, and is instrumental in keeping the rate of exclusion down. There are some issues of continuity in some subjects, for example French and physical education.

27. Attendance is very good because it is above the average for secondary schools. Almost all students want to come to the college because they enjoy and value it. Absence owing to family holidays is not high overall but the college wishes it to be less so that the students concerned are not disadvantaged by falling behind their peers and having the continuity of their education interrupted. Students arrive punctually for the start of the day.

Sixth form

28. Students' attitudes towards the college are good and their personal development and attendance are very good. Students have elected to continue their studies into the sixth form at the college, rather than attend other educational institutions, because they have enjoyed their experiences there, have established friendships and prefer the smaller classes that the college offers.

29. Most students are positive about their studies and many are very enthusiastic. They adopt a conscientious attitude towards their work. For example, in English they often do several drafts of their work because they are keen to produce the best result. Some students have a less mature attitude and are reluctant workers, for example in design and technology and this has an impact on standards.

30. Relationships between students are very good and a sense of community prevails. Students work together harmoniously and are mutually supportive. In mathematics, a student was unsure about the application of formulae and, in private study, asked another student for assistance. This was readily given, enabling her to immediately continue with her work without having to wait for the next lesson.

31. Students become competent in managing their time and are effective in research. They accept responsibility well when given the opportunity. Some help to run a community club; others help students in Year 7 with reading; those involved in the sports leadership award scheme organise sports for a primary school.

32. Students are very pleased with the quality of teaching and the level of challenge of the work undertaken. They say that their teachers are easily accessible for help, guidance and support. However, they would like more frequent formal feedback about their progress toward their targeted results although they do receive good informal feedback about particular coursework and how to improve. They also acknowledge the sympathetic response that they receive when they consult members of staff about personal concerns.

33. Students have identified the introduction of changes in learning styles since the previous inspection. Students are now more involved in their own learning for example through debate and discussion.

34. Students say that they are consulted by the college for example about the refurbishment of their centre. They are involved in the college council and some other activities in the college and with primary schools. They believe, and inspectors agree with

them, that they and the college would benefit from their involvement in a wider range of enrichment experiences.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

35. Teaching and learning are good overall. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good and very good in the sixth form. Improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection are very good. At the time of the last inspection 91 per cent of lessons were judged to be satisfactory or better and this has now improved to 98 per cent in Years 7 to 11 and 100 per cent in the sixth form. Of the 123 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 during the inspection three quarters were judged to be good or better, compared with only half of lessons at the time of the last inspection. Only two lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory or poor.

36. The good teaching is having a clear impact on the quality of learning throughout the college and overall students are making good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. When students are taught well they work at a good pace. When teaching is good and the level of challenge is high students' response is good

37. In Years 7 to 9 the quality of teaching is very good in history and art and design. Teaching is good in all other subjects except for music where teaching is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 the quality of teaching is very good in art and design and history. It is good in all other subjects except for music where it is satisfactory. The quality of teaching is good for English, mathematics and science.

38. A particular strength of teaching is the very good quality of marking which indicates clearly to students what they need to do to improve their work. Students have a very clear understanding of the standards they achieve in relation to national standards and are aware of what gains they need to make in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding in order to raise their performance.

39. Planning for lessons is good and this ensures a good pace and that students work hard during lessons. Teachers share the aims of the lessons with students and, at the end of lessons, many teachers test students' understanding to judge whether the lesson's aims have been met. The management of students' behaviour in lessons is very good and teachers are consistent in applying the college's behaviour policy. Teachers' expectations are good in Years 7 to 11. The characteristics of those lessons, which were judged unsatisfactory or poor were that the level of challenge for students was low.

40. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods in Years 7 to 11. The variety of teaching methods sustains students' interest and concentration in lessons. In the occasional satisfactory lesson there are too few opportunities for students to independently learn. In these lessons, teachers work hard but students are passive.

41. A feature of most lessons is the constructive and purposeful relationship between teachers and their students. The good use of praise by teachers enables students to feel secure and confident enough to answer and ask questions. Many subjects, but not all, identify extension activities for the higher attaining students.

42. Some parents raised concerns about the homework set. However, the inspectors' judgement is that the setting of homework is good. During the inspection week, appropriate homework tasks were set. Students felt that the amount of homework set was appropriate.

43. The quality of support teaching available to students with special educational needs is good. Special support assistants work with specialist subject teachers in mainstream classrooms to ensure that all students have access to the full range of curricular opportunities. The special support assistant know the students and their needs well. In the best-supported lessons, special support assistant and subject teachers interchange their roles which means that students with special educational needs have the same access to specialist teaching as other students in the same class. The effect of this is that students with special educational needs make gains in their learning at the same rate as other students. The special support assistant are not attached to particular departments, but they know the requirements of schemes of work. They are able to advise subject teachers about appropriate approaches, and they participate in lessons in order to improve their knowledge. For example, in a Year 7 French lesson the special support assistant modelled a short dialogue in French with the subject teacher. This gave students a good model to imitate and a better understanding of the task they were about to undertake. Material is well adapted so that students can learn effectively. Subject teachers and special support assistant are able to plan jointly, but pressures of time mean that this is not always done as well as they would like. There is training for special support assistant as they work towards national qualifications. Students are also withdrawn from subject teaching for extra intensive work on literacy. This is proving effective in raising reading ages. Staff take care to avoid withdrawing students from the same lessons repeatedly. Work in supporting students' numeracy is at an early stage and is not yet fully developed.

44. The quality of teaching matches the needs of all pupils well. The teaching is good for higher attaining pupils, pupils of average attainment and for lower attaining pupils.

45. The quality of teaching to support pupils with English as an additional language is good. Most of these pupils are bilingual and have a good command of the English language. None is at the early stages of learning English.

46. The college's strategies for teaching literacy are good and there is good awareness across the staff of the need to emphasise the importance of communication skills. Subject areas are building into their schemes of work the structured teaching of key words and specific technical terms. Teachers of science, design and technology and history teach students the specific styles of writing needed in their subjects. Teachers of modern foreign languages stress correct grammar through their marking and, in art and design, students are expected to learn and use some very sophisticated and technical terms. Underpinning all these strategies is the wider use of structured group talk to help students develop and clarify their ideas and extend their vocabulary.

47. Overall, the teaching of numeracy is satisfactory. The mathematics department teaches numeracy skills well but this good work is not consolidated in a consistent way across other departments, largely because of the lack of a whole college policy relating to the teaching of numeracy. The college is aware of this and plans are in hand to produce a policy in the near future. However, students' number skills are enhanced in geography where they construct tables, charts and graphs and interpret what they mean. In art and design, a plotting devise is used well to draw still life by simplifying the shape. In mathematics, students use calculators appropriately and this includes the good use of graphical calculators by Year 8 pupils to aid them in drawing graphs.

48. Some subjects make a considerable contribution to students' ICT learning. In geography, students use a presentation package in Year 9 when working on natural hazards. They use a spreadsheet to analyse weather data in Year 7 and search databases for information on the developing world in Years 10 and 11. Every student is required to use ICT for at least two pieces of work every year in English. One develops research skills and the

other presentational skills. However, ICT is not used in music and insufficient usage is made in subjects such as mathematics. Some subjects cannot use packages they would wish because of the local education authority's policy. The college experienced difficulties with some of the provision under the New Opportunities Funding to develop the ICT skills of teachers. Consequently, not all teachers have benefited from this training. Not all teachers are using ICT to support teaching and learning and there are some restrictions in teachers being allowed to use appropriate software which would enhance their teaching.

Sixth form

49. The quality of teaching in the sixth form and the learning it promotes are very good. In almost all lessons teaching and learning were good or better. In over a third of the thirty-five lessons seen teaching was very good and in two lessons it was excellent. Only one lesson was classed as satisfactory and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen.

50. A wide range of sixth form subjects was sampled and five subjects were inspected in greater depth. In those 'focus' subjects, there were examples of excellent teaching and learning in art and design and history and overall the teaching and learning in these subjects and in English were very good: they were good in chemistry and mathematics. In the sampled subjects, they were very good in business education and religious studies, good in ICT, design and technology, geography, modern languages, music, general studies and physical education and satisfactory in politics.

51. Teachers are hardworking, knowledgeable, imaginative and enthusiastic. Sixth-form students show a clear appreciation of these qualities when talking about the quality of teaching they experience in the college. There is an intensity of endeavour in the best lessons characterised by the desire of students to do well; this motivation is usually generated by the enthusiasm of teachers.

52. For example, the teaching of history is supportive and geared to the needs of the group. It is well focused, structured and moves at a demanding pace due to a high degree of challenge set by the teachers. Clear objectives are known by the students and their success in achieving them is discussed and checked. Well-directed questions ensure that all students participate fully. Good relationships are a feature of this teaching and most other teaching in the sixth form. For example, in art and design, very good relationships, mutual respect, the high level of challenge and use of good resources are features of teaching that lead to effective learning and very good examination results. In Year 13 the teaching of English is very effective and stimulating. Sensitive, probing questioning by teachers encourages independent thought in dealing with complicated and conflicting ideas. All students are skilfully drawn into discussions and encouraged to probe deeply into their reactions and responses to the subject matter.

53. Teachers know well how their students are performing at key stages of courses. In mathematics, for example, the teaching identifies individual strengths and weaknesses of students, encouraging them to progress by use of activities based on progress made in previous lessons. In chemistry, where the students are responsive but not finding the work easy the teacher's expectations are high, encouraging students to think for themselves and thoughtfully going through explanations clearly on the board, listening well and keeping students 'on task'.

54. Good planning was evident in music lessons, with various choices of scores and musical extracts all to hand. In general studies a very well planned lesson on the ethics of good and evil allowed for a good level of debate in a relaxed but focused atmosphere, that challenged students to join in.

55. Good use of resources is a feature of much of the teaching, especially in modern languages, where photographs were used to stimulate hypotheses on stereotyping and music to illustrate cultural differences. Their selection shows teachers' good insight into students' learning needs. In business studies the teacher had prepared a power point presentation to steer the lesson and give students effective information on organisational structures. Independent learning in a GNVQ ICT lesson was well supported by appropriate worksheets.

56. In all teaching, the activities are designed to meet the lesson objectives or demands of the examination; in the best lessons resources are carefully selected to support such learning and teaching. Some teaching is outstanding in the imaginative approaches it brings to learning through the use of a variety of teaching methods; for example in art and design and history where students are challenged to think beyond the obvious and stretch their creative intellectuality. Clear learning targets with effective demonstrations in physical education gave students the support and confidence to tackle new situations. In some very small teaching groups the quality of discussion by students is limited. They do not have the opportunity to seek wider views and this has an impact on the quality of learning.

57. A very high level of teachers' knowledge and expertise was evident in nearly all subjects and plays a major role in raising standards. For example in geography the teacher was well prepared to ask further questions on contemporary urbanisation which rapidly increased the students' understanding of wider issues. In the small number of classes where there were weaknesses in teaching and learning, lessons were too teacher led and restricted the independent learning of students. There is no specific teaching of key skills.

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

58. The curriculum is sufficiently broad and balanced and fulfils statutory requirements. The curriculum is educationally and socially inclusive in that all students have equal access to all areas of the curriculum. This is underpinned by sound planning. The length of the teaching week at 25 hours complies with national recommendations.

59. Students in Years 7 to 9 follow all National Curriculum subjects plus religious education, which is taught as theology. Drama is not taught as separate subject but as part of the English curriculum. Similarly, dance forms part of the physical education curriculum. Provision for music has been improved since the last inspection with increased teaching time being provided but is still unsatisfactory. In design and technology, the split between resistant and compliant materials is not ideal and the college have detailed plans to tackle this issue. The coverage of the programme of study with regard to systems and control is thin at the moment. In geography, opportunities for fieldwork are limited. Although overall time

allocations for subjects are satisfactory, there are some concerns over the distribution of lessons in some subjects across the fortnightly timetable cycle. In French, for example, some groups have two lessons on the same day, with considerable gaps between those lessons and the next in the cycle. This creates problems of continuity and retention, particularly for students with special educational needs. Similar problems exist as a result of students being placed in the Emmaus Centre, where they have little or no contact with some subjects such as French and physical education for the duration of the placement. This can make re-integration into these subjects more difficult, as it impacts adversely on students' learning.

60. For students in Years 10 and 11 all statutory subjects are taught, plus religious education (theology), personal, social and health education and careers education. Since the last inspection, provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11 has been improved.

61. The provision for students with special educational needs is good. A small number of students is correctly disapplied from studying a modern language to follow a work-related course which consists of a college link. Students attend a local college for half a day per week, choosing from a range of courses, including performing arts and manufacturing. They work towards qualifications through the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) scheme. This arrangement has proved popular and successful for those students involved. Effective curriculum strategies are in place for students attending the Emmaus Centre to provide them with skills to prevent possible future exclusions.

62. Provision for personal, social and health education is good overall. In Years 7 to 9 it is good and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Personal, social and health education is taught in a weekly period to students in Years 7 to 9 and in a fortnightly period in Years 10 and 11. There is effective provision for drugs education and sex and relationships education which are taught in accordance with appropriate college policies.

63. Provision for careers education is good. It forms a six-week module as part of the personal, social and health education programme in each year. There is a well-planned programme of careers education for Years 10 and 11 and appropriate provision in Year 9. The focus in Year 9 is on self-awareness and making informed decisions. In Year 10, students concentrate on preparing for their work experience placement, and in Year 11 they focus on moving into employment, with emphasis on job applications, the curriculum vitae and the interview. A small number of students are identified through the careers service "at risk" list, for example those with poor attendance, or those at risk of exclusion. These students receive directed help to ensure that they have access to the same quality of information as all other students. The good links that the college has with other local colleges, together with good quality guidance results in students being well prepared for their post 16 destinations. The careers library is too small, and as it is situated in a classroom, where there are problems of open access.

64. The college is outward looking and has strong links with other local educational establishments. There are good links with feeder primary schools in the local cluster. Teachers from the college visit to teach and offer specialist advice. This provides some continuity between Year 6 and Year 7. The head teacher is very active in local educational groups and in the local community. The college's links with local colleges are good and students are encouraged to visit a wide range of providers.

65. The college provides a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. Older students are involved in the Monday Night Club, a long-standing activity which brings together college students and other young people from the area with physical handicaps or learning difficulties. Some departments, such as English, French and design and technology, run

booster classes for revision or grade improvement, and there is access to ICT after college finishes for personal research. The modern languages department provide a visit to France for Years 7 and 8, and there are theatre visits and poetry conferences, events run for National Poetry Day and School Book Week, and visits by theatre companies to college. Students have visited Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau as a part of their work on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. There are a good number of opportunities for students to become involved in sporting activities through the various teams and clubs run by the physical education department. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities in music and drama are unsatisfactory.

66. Provision for students' spiritual development is very good. The college fully meets the requirements for collective worship. Assemblies, which are carefully planned, focus well on spiritual issues and values. They give time for reflection based upon students' experiences, collective prayer and well focused content. They also involve students in their preparation and presentation. Spiritual development is positively fostered in all subjects and a wide range of activities. The college has created an ethos within which imagination, inspiration and contemplation are valued. Students are provided with very good opportunities to reflect on matters beyond the material and the routine. This is evident, for example, in Year 9 history lessons when they are asked to reflect on events such as the Holocaust. There is a full programme of liturgy, worship and religious retreats throughout the year for the whole college. Responsibility for inspecting this does not fall within the remit of this inspection. However, it is clear that the Catholic ethos of the college is embedded within all aspects of its work. All staff are expected to make a positive contribution to the promotion of the Christian ethos of the college: in this, they are successful.

67. The provision for moral development is also very good. The great majority of students follow well-understood codes of conduct. Members of staff are effective role models. Through occasions such as form time and assemblies, students develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. The positive culture of self-discipline and reliability are evident in behaviour in corridors, the dining area and the college grounds. The respect with which students treat the college buildings and amenities is evidenced in the lack of graffiti around the college. Achievements in all areas of college life are encouraged, rewarded and celebrated. This is evident, for example, in the Emmaus Centre: during the week of the inspection, students graduated from here in a moving and clearly appreciated ceremony. Moral concerns are dealt with in most subjects within a clear ethical framework and an emphasis on rights and responsibilities.

68. Provision for students' social development is good. Students are provided with many opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and to show initiative. These opportunities feature regularly in lessons. Less able students in a Year 7 history lesson, for example, visibly grew in confidence because of the teacher's skilful questioning technique. Students are offered numerous opportunities for social development through activities such as the active Monday Night Club and the organisation of charitable and social events. The college recently received a Princess Diana Memorial Award for its work with disabled young people. There are active Year Councils and a College Council so that students in all years have a real voice in college matters. There is an effective prefect system involving students in Year 11 who have to submit a CV and are interviewed for the job.

69. The provision for cultural development is good. Students widen their horizons and experiences, celebrate their own culture, and explore new ones. Literature, drama, art and design, history and geography all explore issues relating to British, western and other world cultures. In design and technology students investigate food choice related to religion in a task to provide food in a school cafeteria. There are regular visits to places such as the Birmingham Central Mosque and to the local Sikh Temple. In history, students visit the sites

of the Nazi concentration camps and their lessons directly confront issues of racism and genocide. The library has improved its stock of multicultural materials since the last inspection.

Sixth form

70. The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory and broadly meets the needs of students in the sixth form. The balance of subjects on offer has traditionally tended towards the academic, and the college offers seventeen courses at AS-level and thirteen at A-level. There is also some non-academic provision through GNVQ and the Community Sports Leader Award. The college has also recently made provision for business education, politics, product design, textiles and psychology via distance learning. A Young Enterprise group operates through the business education provision. The curriculum provision in some subject areas is narrow, for example the college offers only one course in the English department, that is English literature. The options structure aims for breadth, but does in fact preclude some choices, for example the study of two modern foreign languages to A-level. The opportunities for enriching the curriculum are satisfactory. The college has attempted to enrich the curriculum in the form of the Human Rights Certificate, but it acknowledges that the quality of this provision could be improved. Students also help younger students with a reading scheme, but this is not acknowledged by students as being part of an enrichment programme. The desire to offer students such a variety of courses results in some small teaching groups, especially in Year 13. This has the further consequence of impoverishing the quality of some learning experiences especially in terms of opportunities for group debate. Students who wish to follow courses not provided at the college are given information about provision in other colleges, so that courses can be tailored to fit the needs of individuals.

71. Students are provided with clear information about the range of courses offered by the college and are well guided in making choices. There are no formal arrangements for induction into Year 12. Rather each subject inducts its own students so that the teaching of AS courses can begin as soon as possible. The college arranges taster sessions for subjects new to students so that they can make an informed choice in the light of experience. The college also gives helpful guidance to students about the effective use of non-contact time.

72. There is no timetabled provision for the teaching of key skills and this is a relative weakness. The head of sixth form and the tutor team monitor this aspect of students' work through the subject departments and their examination specifications, and make good any shortfall that might arise with specific input.

73. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall and largely mirrors what is found in the rest of the college. Statutory requirements for collective worship and general religious education are fully met. Assemblies allow for reflection on a range of spiritual and moral concerns, although during the week of the inspection not all assemblies provided students with the opportunity to participate in the assembly themselves. There is a strong sense of community in the sixth form and students express pride in their college. The building, recently renamed the Oscar Romero Centre in honour of a strong contemporary moral example, is shown a high level of respect by students and staff. Opportunities for students to reflect on their own and on other people's lives continue to be extensive and frequent. This was evident in a Year 13 general studies lesson where students discussed moral relativism and current ethical issues such as genetic engineering and euthanasia. In English, students examined the moral issues of murder and deception in Macbeth, while students in an art project considered earthly remains and their regeneration in eternal life. In theology, students engage in sophisticated discussions on what philosophers have said about the proof of God's existence. Sixth form students participate in

a paired reading scheme and also help with, for example, the Monday Night Club and with some physical education lessons.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

74. The arrangements for students' welfare are good. The quality of pastoral care is high. The procedures for monitoring and supporting attendance and personal development are good and for behaviour are very good. They have significantly improved since the previous inspection. Parents say that they are impressed with the pastoral care and support that the college provides and confirm that they have improved.

75. The procedures for child protection are in place and are well managed. The arrangements for health and safety are good and all relevant members of staff are trained to carry out risk assessments. First aid provision is satisfactory. Specialist health and education agencies provide services that effectively augment the college's support for students' welfare.

76. The college's aim, to support students with strategies based on love, justice and forgiveness, is very well achieved. It is underpinned by relationships between adults and students that are constructive, mutually respectful and trusting and that create an environment in which students feel safe and valued. Students are confident to consult their teachers about personal matters and to ask for help and guidance. The fortnightly tutorials are occasions when students benefit considerably from the opportunity for confidential discussion about their progress and personal concerns. Teachers often take the opportunity, for example when passing in a corridor, to enquire how a student is managing, give encouragement or offer to meet later if further help is desired. The quality of the relationships and teachers' genuine concern for and interest in the students are amongst the main factors that contribute to the atmosphere of calm, orderliness and sense of community in the college and the academic and personal progress that students make.

77. Good behaviour is very effectively promoted. Teachers consistently apply the college's discipline policy and the system for monitoring and supporting those students who have difficulty in exercising self-discipline. Teachers are less inclined to reprimand students but rather to help them understand what they have done and the effects, and to require them to consider how to avoid repetition. Students who have particular behavioural difficulties are given extra help in the Emmaus Centre, which opened at the start of this year, and is an excellent example of social inclusion. Groups of up to seven students attend for a four-week period that is followed by re-integration over two weeks. The attitudes and behaviour of the majority of students who have attended have improved and have had a positive effect on their progress thereafter. Personal, social and health education, retreats and assemblies also contribute to improving and maintaining standards of behaviour.

78. The college successfully minimises bullying, chiefly because of the quality of relationships that have been developed, respect for social values that students learn to adopt and the confidence that students have about reporting it. Students say that when incidents occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively.

79. Attendance is well monitored. The college contacts many parents on the first day of students' absence but, although this has led to improved co-operation, there are still instances of unexplained absence. Despite the college's various efforts, including writing to individual parents, absence owing to family holidays is still higher than the college would wish. Overall, the college successfully promotes good attendance mainly by making learning and other experiences interesting and stimulating so that students enjoy college and want to attend.

80. Students are given opportunities for responsibility through the college council, as librarians and on reception duties. Extra curricular activities, although these could be extended further and particularly so in music and drama, offer students competitive and team play experiences. In Year 10 students are encouraged to make their own arrangements for work experience. Personal skills such as decision-making, time management and self-evaluation are taught and students are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, their own work and others. There are limited opportunities for students to be involved in the community for example in connection with a community club but there are not facilities for all students to undertake community service. Young Enterprise is available for students in the sixth form.

81. For students with special educational needs, there are effective relationships with all agencies involved in supporting them. Individual education plans reinforce the college's inclusive approach, in that all teachers are aware of the needs of all students and can cater for them accordingly. They are updated regularly to sustain momentum in learning. There is systematic testing and recording of progress, and students are set targets for improvement. The paired reading project is a good example of the thoughtful nature of the provision. It gives a good opportunity for older students to become involved in the community life of the college and exercise a degree of responsibility. At the same time, it is directed towards providing targeted help to students with low literacy levels with a view to raising standards in reading. The students involved give a wholehearted commitment to the project, and are good at identifying weaker areas of performance in the students they are assisting.

82. The information on students on the Code of Practice register is thorough, detailed and makes it easy to track the progress of individual students through the college. Annual reviews of statements of special educational need are carried out in accordance with statutory requirements, and parents or carers are kept fully informed. They are given every opportunity to be involved in the process.

83. The college has recently drafted and adopted a new policy on assessment. The aims of this policy are to give information on what has been learnt and the effectiveness of the teaching. All subjects have identified a range of key tasks to be assessed each term for each student. In Years 7 to 9, these tasks are assessed against levels of the National Curriculum. In Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form assessment is against examination grades. This assessment also provides students with details of what is required to reach the next level. Students and parents receive written notification of these grades, along with targets for each subject. The college council has been consulted on the effectiveness of the new system. The use of assessment for curriculum planning is satisfactory. On the basis of assessment several pupils are disapplied from some of the requirements of the National Curriculum to follow courses which more closely match students' needs.

84. A strong feature of assessment practice is the dissemination of exemplars of effective assessment to all staff on a regular basis. This not only aids teacher efficiency but also contributes to achieving consistency. Training has been delivered to ensure all staff can operate these assessments effectively. Managers ensure consistency and relate assessment data to the scrutiny of samples of students' work.

85. Assessment is particularly effective in geography giving students detailed information of the next steps for improvement. In ICT, assessment is very well used so that students gain regular, detailed information on the progress they are making. In history, levels of achievement are regularly referred to in classroom teaching. However, in music, National Curriculum levels are not used when work is marked in Years 7 to 9 and assessment does not provide a basis for setting targets for students.

86. This system has only been in operation since last October and as such it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness but early indications are that it is contributing to raising standards. As data is accumulated, the college will have a very powerful tool. It will be able to examine performance for individual students and also assist in the evaluation of teaching.

87. Students receive a report of these assessments once a term and a full report once a year. The format of the full reports is currently being revised to provide parents with fuller information. These new developments show that the college has made good progress to address the assessment issues identified at the time of the previous inspection.

Sixth form

Assessment

88. The procedures in the sixth form are identical to those in the main school. Procedures for assessing students' academic attainment, monitoring progress and setting targets for the improvement of standards are systematic and rigorous in most subjects. Assessment procedures are a weakness in chemistry. Annual and interim reports for sixth form students are effective in reporting students' progress.

Advice, support and guidance

89. Students are well supported personally by their teachers. Advice and guidance, especially with regard to further and higher education, are well structured to provide continuing support to students, and they receive good and timely advice on higher education applications. Students are well advised before taking up courses in Year 12, and are encouraged to look at other providers if the college does not provide the course in which they are interested. There was some dissatisfaction expressed by students about the quality of careers advice in the past, but the college has tackled the issue and there have been improvements. Attendance is monitored and there is effective liaison with parents if problems arise. Students feel that there could be more regular formal reporting of progress.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

90. Parents express considerable confidence in the college. The partnership between the college and parents is good. These are similar findings to the previous report.

91. Parents are pleased with the quality of education and personal support that the college provides for their children and the standards and values that are promoted. They acknowledge that significant improvements have taken place since the previous inspection. A minority of parents considers that the college could improve further the quality of its communications with them, the range of extra curricular activities that it offers students and the amount of homework set. Inspectors agree with parents on the issues, which please them most. Inspectors judge that there are sufficient opportunities for the college to work closely with parents. Similarly, inspectors judge that parents are kept well informed of their children's progress. The amount of homework set is judged by inspectors to be appropriate. However, inspectors agree with some parents who believe that there is a unsatisfactory range of extra-curricular activities.

92. The college keeps parents well informed. Annual and interim reports relate students' attainment and progress to national standards. The good marking of students' work and entries in planners provide further helpful indicators. Monthly newsletters and the college newspaper keep parents informed about the life and work of the college. Parents are encouraged to contact the college, and teachers and other members of staff frequently contact parents about academic, personal and welfare matters.

93. Parents' involvement in the work of the college and their children's learning is mostly good. Their attendance at parents' evenings and other events such as Cathedral Day is good. They participate in the social and fund raising events of the parents' and teachers' association. Some join students on trips out of college including abroad. Others help with transport to sporting events and, for example, will collect their children if they have missed a bus owing to attendance at an extra tuition class or club activity. Most parents co-operate with the college's strategies for behaviour support, they check and sign planners and ensure their children achieve the highest possible attendance. Some parents continue to arrange family holidays during term time and the students involved find it harder to make the same progress as others because, by missing many lessons, they have not covered the same ground. Parents are only occasionally involved in a curricular subject. The college would like parents to be more involved but recognises the difficulty that many have particularly those who live some distance from the college.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

94. Overall the quality of leadership and management is very good. The quality of leadership and management provided by the headteacher is very good. He provides calm and authoritative leadership and is perceptive in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the college. He has clear a vision, set in deeply held Christian beliefs, with appropriate and effective strategies on how to raise standards within the college. He is very well supported by his leadership team. Members of the leadership team have appropriate responsibilities, which reflect their individual skills and talents. The high quality of leadership in the college has contributed to high staff morale. There is a confidence and skill amongst those with posts of responsibility to ensure that standards will improve even further in the coming years.

95. Overall, the quality of middle management is very good. Since the last inspections, there have been several new appointments as heads of department, including English, mathematics and science and standards have improved in each of these three subjects since their appointments. Heads of year provide good quality leadership for their pastoral teams. There is a weakness in the management of music as a result of the absence of the head of department through illness.

96. The governing body is well informed about the work of the college and uses this information to contribute effectively to the leadership of the college. Governors are very knowledgeable of the strengths and weaknesses of the college. Individual governors are linked to departments and write very comprehensive reports following their visits to the college. In all respects the college fulfils its statutory duties.

97. The college development plan is very good and has an appropriate number of priorities for raising standards. The issues identified by the college reflect the priorities identified in the previous report. For each of these priorities, there are clearly identified strategies and timescales. The identification of measurable targets to determine whether priorities have been met is not always evident. Very good quality department plans reflect the priorities from whole college planning.

98. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are good. This was a key issue at the time of the last inspection and in this respect the college have made very good progress. There are very good policies to promote more effective teaching and there has been a substantial and rigorous programme of monitoring teaching and learning by senior and middle managers. The college has benefited from recent appointments (to the college) who have made a significant contribution to raising the standards of teaching and learning from those seen at the time of the last inspection. Other areas of the work of the college are very well evaluated and appropriate action taken to remedy weaknesses.

99. The special educational needs team is well led by an experienced practitioner who has a clear vision for the development of the department. Documentation is of a high order, and is beginning to reflect the changes to the Code of Practice, which came into force in January 2002. The special needs policy still lacks reference to the complaints procedure. The handbook is comprehensive and gives a good picture of the department's work. There is a special needs working group made up of representatives of all departments. This acts as a forum for the dissemination of information on students, and also as a means of sharing good practice. The recent award of the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark is further evidence of the commitment of the staff to the development of the provision.

100. There are strong links between the governing body and the special educational needs department. The governor with responsibility for special needs visits the department at least twice a year and monitors the activities of the staff and students. In addition, one of the members of staff is a teacher governor. The full governing body receives feedback from these monitoring visits, and this ensures that consideration of special needs issues retains a high profile in governing body meetings. The special needs section of the Annual Report to parents from the governing body fulfils statutory requirements.

101. The department is housed in a good-sized classroom, which provides a stimulating environment for learning. There is a separate office where records are kept, and which affords staff a degree of privacy for confidential consultations. The provision of reading material is only adequate, and should be reviewed with a view to introducing a wider range of more up-to-date and stimulating texts. The provision of ICT is also limited, both in terms of equipment and software. The department lacks other basic items such as an overhead projector, video recorder and a language master machine.

102. Across the college there is a good match between teachers' qualifications and their deployment to meet the needs of the college curriculum. However, the English department contains too few full-time teachers and the college has experienced difficulties in recruiting physics, music and modern foreign language teachers. The support provided for both newly qualified teachers and students undertaking initial teacher training is good and valued by participants, as are the induction arrangements for all new members of staff. Professional

development days and other staff training are well planned and have a focus that relates to the priorities identified in the college development plan and from performance management.

103. The college is well supported by non-teaching staff. Clerical and administrative staff have a strong sense of loyalty to the college and provide a warm welcome to visitors and students in the reception area. The amount of technical support is adequate for a school of this size. Lunchtime supervisors are effective in carrying out their duties. They are respected by students who respond well to their guidance. The caretaking and cleaning staff do an outstanding job in ensuring high standards of cleanliness.

104. The appearance of the college is good and this reflected by the respect that students show towards the building. Litter is minimal around the college and there is an absence of graffiti.

105. Accommodation is satisfactory in the college. Most subject areas have appropriate accommodation but there are inadequacies for music, drama and indoor facilities for physical education. These weaknesses will be resolved with the completion of the sports hall and the implementation of the college's building plan. The college has good vision and plans strategically for the college's accommodation. There is good expertise and understanding of the needs of the college's accommodation and health and safety issues that follow.

106. Resources are satisfactory. Most departments have sufficient resources to meet the demands of the curriculum. Resources for music are inadequate. There have been improvements in the level of resources in the learning resources centre since the last inspection. The area is still too small for a school of this size. It is well used by students after school at break times and lunchtimes. On specific days, priority use is reserved for students in particular years, such as Year 9 and Year 11, who are revising for tests and examinations. They make good use of revision exercises available on the Internet. Some departments, but not all, work closely with the learning resource centre to ensure that appropriate resources are available in the learning resource centre to support the teaching and learning in lessons. The college makes effective use of the loans service available from the local libraries service.

107. The expenditure per student is in line with the national average. Finances are managed effectively. The balance brought forward from the previous financial year is high at over 10 per cent of the income. However, the figure is misleading in that it includes the amount of money which the college, as a voluntary aided school, is required to contribute towards the costs of the new sports hall. Once this amount is accounted for the realistic balance carried forward is appropriate for a school of this size. The most recent auditor's report in November 2001 was satisfactory and the governing body has accepted and implemented the recommendations. Opportunities are taken to ensure that the principles of 'best value' are followed when making decisions on the purchases of goods and services. This particularly applied to the building of the new dining hall and in determining the contract for providing meals. The principles of best value are also evident in the removal of many administrative tasks, which were historically undertaken by members of the teaching staff, which are now undertaken more cost effectively by administrative staff. Financial planning is good and the college has been successful in obtaining additional funds for the benefit of students by the skilful use of match funding. Specific grants, including those for special educational needs, Standards Fund, and New Opportunities Funding are spent effectively on the purposes for which they were intended and in line with the priorities identified in the college's development plan.

108. In relation to the level of funding the college receives and the quality of education students receive the college is providing good value for money. Since the time of the last inspection the leadership and management of the college has improved. All of the issues

identified for improving the leadership and management of the college have been effectively undertaken. The monitoring of the college's work is no longer a weakness and the current systems in place are rigorous. Development planning includes sufficiently detailed targets. There are now detailed plans for the disposal of the college's financial reserve.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

109. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head teacher provides a clear direction and a strong commitment to the development and improvement of the quality of provision in the sixth form. The senior management team and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. Planning is based on a clear view of the relationship between the sixth form and the main school. The head of sixth form works hard in the day-to-day management and administration of the sixth form and leads the team of tutors well.

Resources

110. Financial planning is careful, and the unit costs of this small sixth form are slightly above the national average, in part because of some small teaching groups. Resources are allocated carefully to the sixth form so that there is no detrimental effect on other parts of the college. Comparison of income and expenditure with the above average standards achieved by students indicates that the sixth form is cost effective.

111. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory, and learning resources are also satisfactory, with the exception of access to ICT. The sixth form accommodation has been substantially improved, and provides a pleasant and adult environment.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

112. In order to raise standards further and improve the quality of education provided, the college should:

- (1) Raise standards in music by:
 - providing more opportunities for students to improve their playing, singing and composition skills;
 - providing schemes of work which translate National Curriculum Programmes of Study into musical tasks;
 - providing an assessment policy based on National Curriculum levels in music.(Paragraphs: 188-194)
- (2) Extend the range of extra-curricular opportunities for students, especially in music and drama.
(Paragraphs: 65, 122, 191)
- (3) Extend the opportunities for all teachers to use ICT to support teaching, particularly in science, art and design and music, by:
 - increasing the number of teachers who have the skills and confidence to use ICT;
 - improving the access to computers;
 - ensuring that teachers have access to appropriate software.(Paragraphs: 48, 101, 111, 180)
- (4) Continue to expand the resources within the learning resources centre to enable students to develop their independent learning skills across all subjects by:
 - ensuring all departments identify opportunities to use the learning resource centre to promote independent learning skills;
 - working more closely with departments to identify further resources to be housed in the learning resource centre;
 - seeking to increase the size of the learning resource centre in line with the college's development plan for accommodation.(Paragraph: 106)

Sixth form

In order to maintain high standards in the sixth form, the head teacher, governors and staff should:

- (1) Extend the range of courses available for students which are cost effective, for example, within English only one course is offered.
(Paragraph: 70)
- (2) Broaden the range of activities to enrich the curriculum by developing the provision for the teaching of key skills.
(Paragraph: 72)

In addition, the governing body may wish to include the following less important issues within the action plan:

- Drama.
- Developing a numeracy policy.
- Timetabling of lessons for French.
- Monitoring progress of sixth form students in chemistry.
- Resources for special educational needs.
- Indoor accommodation for physical education.

(Paragraphs: 47, 59, 101, 105, 122)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	123
	Sixth form	35
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		58

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 - 11

Number	5	33	53	30	1	1	0
Percentage	4.1	26.8	43.1	24.4	0.8	0.8	0

Sixth form

Number	2	10	22	1	0	0	0
Percentage	5.4	28.6	62.9	2.9	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form here as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	752	86
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	99	3

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	23	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	134	0

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	50

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	59

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.8
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	85	69	154

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	60	65	64
	Girls	47	43	44
	Total	107	108	108
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (60)	70 (62)	70 (57)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (15)	36 (36)	35 (24)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	63	49
	Girls	51	48	41
	Total	103	111	90
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (69)	74 (66)	60 (62)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (25)	39 (36)	25 (20)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	77	74	151

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	33	72	76
	Girls	37	70	72
	Total	70	142	148
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	46 (45)	94 (96)	98 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	35.7 (31.5)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	77	74	151

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	15	22	37
	Average point score per candidate	21.5 (15.0)	18.8 (15.2)	19.9 (15.1)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	17.9 (18.6)	17.4 (18.2)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	15	22	37	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	21.5	18.8	19.9	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	8
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	3
Indian	28
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	768
Any other minority ethnic group	17

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	43	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	48.2
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.2

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	316

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.1
Key Stage 4	22.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2 338 176
Total expenditure	2 384 283
Expenditure per student	2 887
Balance brought forward from previous year	252 764
Balance carried forward to next year	206 657

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	28
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0.5
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.0

Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	829
Number of questionnaires returned	141

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	45	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	47	4	3	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	54	9	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	54	12	6	1
The teaching is good.	36	55	2	4	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	36	12	8	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	28	5	4	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	27	4	2	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	40	15	5	1
The school is well led and managed.	46	42	4	5	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	44	5	4	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	48	14	4	5

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- The department is very well led and managed.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 have improved since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- In a few lessons teachers do too much of the work rather than encouraging students to be independent learners.

113. Standards of attainment in English at the end of Year 9 are average and have improved since the last inspection. In 2001, the results in the national tests for students aged 14 were close to the national average and above those gained by students in similar schools. This is an improvement on the 1999 results, which were below average and below those of similar schools. Although girls performed better than boys the difference between them was less than the difference nationally. Students performed better in English than in mathematics but not as well as they did in science.

114. By the end of Year 11, standards of attainment remain close to the national average. These standards are reflected in the GCSE examination results. In 2001, the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grades in English was broadly similar to the national proportions and above those in similar schools, although fewer pupils achieved the highest A* to B grades. At the end of Year 9, these same pupils had gained below average standards in the national tests for 14 year old pupils, so these results represent good achievement for them. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in English Literature was similar to the national average entry rate so these figures represent better than average attainment. It is a real strength of the department's work that almost all pupils leave Year 11 with two GCSE grades in English. This represents good achievement for all pupils and particularly for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs.

115. Pupils currently in the school, including pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs, are making good achievement because of the improvements to the curriculum and the improved quality of teaching. When the current head of department was appointed after the last inspection, she focused on the major issues raised in the report and responded rigorously and rapidly. New schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 are based firmly on the national Framework for Teaching English and there are better links with primary schools. These links include the joint provision of a literacy summer school and meetings where teachers from both phases mark and grade pupils' work together to agree on standards. This has led to better continuity in the curriculum from Year 6 to Year 7.

116. Standards in speaking have shown particularly good improvement since the last inspection when opportunities for developing extended speaking were judged to be limited. Students now are articulate and confident speakers in a range of formal and informal situations. Teachers encourage them not only to answer questions and express views but also to explain these ideas or opinions and to explore their thoughts through talking. For

instance, in a very good Year 7 lesson, students discussed the difference between fact and opinion. They were able to describe how context affects the truth and how advertisers are able to manipulate their target audiences.

117. Students' reading skills are satisfactory and the department is taking a more active approach to promoting reading for pleasure. Reading records are kept and the department is looking at ways in which the library can be more central to students' reading experience. In lessons, students are introduced to a range of high quality texts such as *Skellig* and *The King of Shadows*, both of which encourage an imaginative response and lead students to consider matters beyond the everyday and familiar. Students are taught how to interact with texts, looking closely at how texts are put together. By studying the process of writing they learn how to write well themselves. The exemplary standard of marking is instrumental in improving students' writing. Students are all given information on how their work is assessed and all sustained pieces of writing are marked so that students know what level they are working at and how they can achieve higher standards.

118. These improving standards of literacy are being further developed through work undertaken in other subjects. There has been a concentrated effort to use group talk more widely in the classroom and most subject areas teach the importance of key words, technical vocabulary and appropriate styles of writing. Teachers of science, design and technology and history teach pupils the specific styles of writing needed in their subjects. Teachers of modern foreign languages stress correct grammar through their marking and in art and design pupils are expected to learn and use some very sophisticated and technical terms.

119. The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. There is an emphasis on encouraging students to become independent learners and equal partners in the classroom. Objectives for learning are shared with students and revisited at the end of the lesson so students can recognise the progress they have made. Teachers have high expectations and these are conveyed through brisk pace, use of technical vocabulary, challenging texts and varied and interesting tasks. This leads to students who make good intellectual and creative effort, learning from each other, being able to ask as well as answer questions, to contribute to discussion and to build on what they know. In a Year 7 lesson, a small group of students with low standards of literacy were guided step by step through the questions they needed to ask of photographs and text to gain a full understanding of the information. This active involvement with text continues into Years 10 and 11. In one lesson, a group of average attaining Year 10 students were beginning to study *The Crucible*, a difficult text for them. They read the introduction in pairs and gained a very good understanding of the historical and social background to the play, discussing what theocracy means and exploring the role of religion in politics. As they read the first scene they were able to identify how certain pressures affected the characters' behaviour and relationships and the teacher's skilful questions drew out an understanding of many aspects of the sub-plot. This focus on independence is very occasionally lost in lessons preparing for GCSE examinations when teachers take too much control over students' learning, telling them what poets mean rather than allowing students to develop their own ideas first.

120. The English department is very well led and managed which has a positive impact on learning. There are a number of part-time teachers, which makes communication more time consuming, but through printed handouts and a flexible approach to meetings, the head of department has developed good teamwork and a joint approach to planning and teaching the curriculum. Good improvement overall has been made since the previous inspection, most importantly in the quality of teaching and learning. This has been achieved through rigorous monitoring of the department's work and clear analysis of assessment data and examination results. The department recognises that the curriculum for GCSE courses is the next area where revision of schemes of work is required.

121. Students' standards of literacy are average overall, and enable the vast majority of students to access the full curriculum. Students are competent readers and the college's approach to supporting the lowest attaining students is ensuring that they are equipped with skills that enable them to understand most of the texts that they meet in lessons. They are taught to be active readers, understanding how to ask questions of texts. Writing skills are satisfactory. The highest attaining students write with good control and sophistication, while lower attaining students communicate their ideas and opinions clearly, and spell and punctuate with a reasonable level of accuracy. These reading and writing skills are underpinned by good speaking and listening skills. Almost all students are confident and articulate speakers, able to express an opinion and to explain it. The good work that has been undertaken across the curriculum in using group talk in the classroom has improved the way in which students use exploratory talk to learn, building on each others' ideas to develop and enrich their own.

122. The provision for drama is currently under review. After losing the specialist teacher, the college decided to discontinue the separate drama lesson in Years 7 to 9 and it is now being built into the English schemes of work. The subject is also offered as a GCSE option. Provision here is unsatisfactory because it is being taught by non-specialists and there is no-one who has overall responsibility for the subject. Attainment is below average because of this lack of expertise in the college.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management of the department.
- Commitment to improve.
- Use of resources.
- Behaviour in class.
- National tests results at the end of Year 9 have increased significantly.

Areas for improvement

- Provide further opportunities for problem solving.
- Greater use of computers to support students' learning.
- Day-to-day use of assessment information.

123. Students enter the college in Year 7 with standards in mathematics that are just below average. Results from the end of Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations in 2001 are average. Compared to similar schools results in tests are above average and at GCSE they are average. Since the last inspection, national test results have improved significantly and GCSE results have slightly improved. At the higher levels in both national tests and GCSE, students' attainment is below average but this is not reflected in lessons. There are no significant variations between the test results of boys and girls or between students from different minority ethnic groups.

124. Overall standards of attainment of work seen across all aspects of mathematics are average. In upper ability groups, standards are very high in aspects of shape, space and measures, handling data and investigative work. These high standards occur because the lessons are well structured, a variety of resources is used well and students are encouraged to find things out for themselves. For example, in one lesson students used geo-boards to help them investigate different shapes. In the follow up discussion, students demonstrated

that they have a very good knowledge of polygons and can provide definitions of each shape. In middle and lower attaining groups, particularly in Years 10 and 11, students use algebra skills very well because they are given sufficient practice and good methods are used. For example, one lesson in Year 9 began with five students standing at the front of the class and holding an algebraic expression on paper in front of them. With the values of the unknown letters given, the rest of the class had to mentally substitute the values into the different expressions and order the students from highest value to lowest value. This activity was fun and ensured students mental skills improved.

125. Standards in numeracy are average overall. The National Numeracy Strategy is rightly emphasised and in particular mental starters to lessons usually ensure mental skills improve. Students throughout are numerate. Number facts are learned and used well. In a Year 7 class, when a visitor came into the lesson to talk to the teacher, the students knew they had to carry on learning their seven times table independently. Students know how to construct a wide range of tables, charts and graphs and can answer simple questions but middle and higher ability students need more opportunities to interpret what they mean. Students throughout are good at spotting number patterns because of the investigative work they do throughout Years 7 to 9

126. Overall, taking account of students' attainment on entry and the standards of work seen in lessons and in national tests and GCSE, students' achievements by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are good. By the end of Year 9 lower attaining students in particular make good progress in using number skills. Very good progress in aspects of shape and space and algebra is inhibited because there are too few opportunities provided to answer questions in the context of problem solving. By the end of Year 11, upper ability students make good progress in improving their algebra skills but they could be better if more opportunities for problem solving were provided. Students' investigative skills improve as they get older. Middle and upper ability groups are able to generalise findings, often using algebra, although there are fewer examples of higher ability students offering explanations and reasons for what they have discovered. The progress made by students with special educational needs is good because the quality of support is good.

127. Students' attitudes towards mathematics are good. They are keen and interested in their work and most are well motivated. This is because teaching methods used are varied and in the best lessons work set is challenging. For example in one Year 11 lesson where the mean, median, mode and range of a set of numbers were given, the class had to find the numbers. Behaviour in and around classrooms is very good and there are plenty of examples of students working well together. Students are courteous and know right from wrong. Relationships throughout are good. These positive qualities ensure there is a good atmosphere for learning and good progress is made.

128. The quality of teaching and students' learning overall is good. There are a few instances of very good and excellent teaching due mainly to very good planning and the use of a wide range of resources and methods. Good links with previous work helps students consolidate what they have learned and remember processes. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, the students made good use of a homework survey, recalling previous work on statistics so that information could be presented in a pie chart and further questions answered well. Teachers use a good range of methods and their questions in class are often thought provoking. In one Year 11 lesson on statistics, good explanations by the teacher and sensible use of mini whiteboards (students have their own small board to write down answers so the teacher can see the responses of all students, not just those who "put up their hands") enabled students to improve their understanding of the topic. Homework usually builds on work done in class and encourages independent learning. The provision for the highest attaining students is good.

129. There is appropriate emphasis on improving literacy skills in mathematics lessons is appropriately emphasised. Key technical terms are identified and students are encouraged to use and understand these terms. This improves students' vocabulary and is clearly demonstrated in their responses to teachers' questions. The numeracy strategy is in place in Years 7, 8 and 9 but implemented inconsistently. Most lessons begin with good quality mental mathematics, but not all. Objectives are always shared with students but not always referred to at the end of the lesson.

130. Overall, the teaching of numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. The mathematics department teaches numeracy skills well but this good work is not consolidated in a consistent way across other departments, largely because of the lack of a whole college policy relating to the teaching of numeracy. The college is aware of this and plans are in hand to produce a policy in the near future. However, students' number skills are enhanced in geography where they construct tables, charts and graphs and interpret what they mean. In art and design, a plotting device is used well to draw still life by simplifying the shape. In mathematics, students use calculators appropriately. This includes the good use of graphical calculators in Year 8 to aid them in drawing graphs.

131. There are areas for development within teaching. Computers are not used enough to support students' learning. There are too few opportunities for students to solve problems in all topics and this inhibits understanding of what they have learned. Day-to-day assessment information is not used as well as it might be. Students need more experience in answering unfamiliar questions so that they are more able to use and apply what they have learned previously.

132. The curriculum is well organised, broad and balanced with all aspects planned for; and statutory requirements are met. There is a wide range of learning opportunities for students, evident in a range of methods used by teachers, revision classes for students in Years 9 and 11 and learning support classes for lower attaining students. Overall the provision for lower attaining students is good. The department has good systems for monitoring the progress of students through the recording of results from tests set regularly. Information from these records helps the department to plan work.

133. Leadership and management overall are very good. There is a clear departmental plan with appropriate priorities identified. The department's aims are in line with college aims. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are very good and constructive feedback given. Teachers are managed well with duties delegated appropriately. Targets set for the department have been met. A relatively new team of staff, including a head of department appointed last year, work well as a team and there is a shared commitment from them to improve standards. They have the capacity to succeed further even though improvements since the last inspection are very good. At that time, the department was deemed to be underachieving; now the achievement of students is good. Standards have improved and are now average. At GCSE compared to similar schools standards were well below average and they are now average. Higher attaining students are now challenged. Teaching has significantly improved and is now good overall. Management was unsatisfactory and now it is very good. Resources are now used very well.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good across all aspects of the subject.

- The proportion of students reaching Level 6 and above by the end of Year 9.
- Students enjoy science; they have a positive attitude to the subject and want to do well.
- Very good leadership and management of the department.

Areas for improvement

- To raise standards in GCSE science.
- To develop strategies to improve students' independent learning skills.
- To further develop the use of ICT to enhance the teaching of science.

134. After a low point in 1999, the results in the national tests at age 14 have steadily improved to be in line with the national average for all schools and well above the national average for similar schools in 2001. The proportion of students reaching the higher levels of Level 6 and above was above average. This represents good achievement for students during their first three years at the college. Boys performed better than girls in relation to their respective national averages. The college results in science were similar to those in mathematics and English.

135. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, the percentage of A*-G grades in science was above the national average and the percentage of A*-C grades was below the national average. Overall, the percentage of A*-C grades was below that expected in relation to students' previous results in the national tests at 14. The percentage of A*-C grades in the dual award science examination has fallen in the last few years. In the single award examination the percentage of A*-C grades has improved since 1999. Girls performed better than boys in the single award and boys better than girls in the dual award examination.

136. The standard of work seen in Years 7 to 9 was average and is consistent with the national test results. Students' achievement is good. They have good practice in developing their experimental skills. They have sound planning skills and can apply the principle of a 'fair test'. Average and lower-attaining students are not sufficiently accurate in the collection of their experimental results. Students can predict what might happen and higher-attaining students can use their scientific knowledge to explain their results. However, further improvement is needed in their facility to know how to improve the quality of their investigations. Students in Year 9 have a good knowledge of the difference between physical and chemical changes. They know how to test for common gases and higher and average-attaining students can name the salts formed in simple reactions.

137. Work seen in Years 10 and 11 is of average standard. The improved results of these students in the national tests at 14 are reflected in the work seen, which is of a higher standard than the 2001 GCSE results. Students' achievement is sound. Investigative skills are being developed in a structured way. This was apparent in a Year 11 lesson with lower-attaining students, who were investigating the effect of temperature on the height of bounce of a squash ball. Students did a preliminary experiment to check they could measure the height of bounce accurately. A writing frame was provided as support. Overall, students' investigative skills are average. Their planning skills are strongest and evaluative skills are weakest. Students are co-operative and collaborate well in practical work, which is carried out safely and sensibly. Carefully structured teaching enables all students to develop their understanding of science concepts and of the contribution science makes to society. Year 11 students can understand and interpret food webs and construct pyramids of number. Higher-attaining students can explain the difference between the chemical reactions involved in photosynthesis and respiration. Lower-attaining students learn key scientific facts in lessons, but often their understanding is incomplete which hinders their long-term recall.

138. Literacy skills are sound for most students, although weak for lower-attainers. There is some planned development of literacy in science with an emphasis on the correct use and

spelling of science terminology. Key words are used to support lower-attainers and a wide range of writing styles is used. Strategies need to be developed to support the effective use of numeracy skills in science. Good attention is, however, given to developing students' graphical skills in a structured way. By age 16, higher-attaining students have a good understanding of the 'line of best fit'. Average-attaining students cannot always draw a 'best-fitting' line. Lower-attaining students have problems with choosing an appropriate scale when drawing line graphs. Students are competent in using ICT to research and analyse information but they do not have sufficient practice in using computers for modelling and to collect measurements due to a lack of resources. Students with special educational needs generally make the same progress as other students due to good support from teachers and support assistants. The developing use of writing frames is helping students to structure their work. More enrichment activities involving problem solving and the application of knowledge to new situations would make more demands of higher-attaining students.

139. Teaching and learning are good throughout the age range with about three-quarters of the lessons seen being good or better. Some outstanding teaching was seen and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. A key strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers manage their classes; they insist on high standards of work and behaviour, enabling students to learn without distraction. Teachers have good subject knowledge and explain scientific concepts clearly, relating them to the students' everyday experience. This motivates students to work hard because the teaching captures their interest. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on the carbon cycle, students watched two short video clips on respiration and photosynthesis. Students used question sheets to focus their learning during this part of the lesson. They then completed jigsaws depicting the carbon cycle. For homework, students were asked to draw a storyboard for a ten-year-old called 'The story of a carbon atom'. The teacher's imaginative approach motivated students to work hard resulting in very good learning. Because the teaching is structured in short steps, involving student participation, students sustain concentration well and stick to the task set. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson with lower-attaining students, who were learning about the main functions of the skeleton. Students were asked to build a tall figure out of plasticine. Having discussed the need for support, students used pipe-cleaners to remake their models. A student volunteer then demonstrated the need for joints in walking. Step by step, students built up an understanding of the purpose of the skeleton. The students enjoyed the active learning involved in this lesson. Learning was good because of focused teaching and the students' positive attitudes.

140. The very good relationship between teachers and students engenders a positive attitude and interest in science. Teachers are encouraging and supportive, making good use of praise to boost students' confidence. Lesson objectives are always made clear to the students, and reviewed at the end of the lesson. This focuses the students' learning. Written work is regularly marked but some comments are not specific enough to show students how to improve their work. The teaching methods seen during the inspection were often teacher dominated and students have insufficient opportunity to develop independent learning skills. Generally teachers' expectations are appropriately high, but in some lessons teachers do not match resources and activities well enough to meet the learning needs of the higher-attaining students in the group. Students generally enjoy science and good teaching motivates and captures the students' interest. When this happens students demonstrate good listening skills and come to lessons prepared to work. In some lessons teachers set deadlines for tasks, and these motivate students to work productively, but other lessons lack pace when these deadlines are not set. In spite of teacher encouragement, some students lack confidence in their own ability and do not readily volunteer answers to questions posed by the teacher, which has a negative impact on their progress.

141. Leadership and management of the science department are very good. There is a good development plan with appropriate targets for improving standards. Assessment is well used to inform curriculum planning and to monitor and support students' progress. There is a good system of monitoring and evaluating the teaching and students' work. The science curriculum is sound although the curriculum time allowed for the GCSE course is less than the national average. The accommodation is adequate. Resources are efficiently organised by the laboratory technicians and are adequate, apart from the urgent need for sensors to enable students to collect and analyse scientific data. The department has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. There has been a significant improvement in the results at age 14, particularly at the higher National Curriculum levels. Assessment and the quality of the teaching and learning have all improved, and are now good. Behaviour is much improved and is now very good. ICT is better used as an aid to learning, although further development is needed. The department has the capacity to improve further, because of the effective and thoughtful management together with a very hardworking, enthusiastic and committed team, who have already planned a range of strategies for raising standards in future years.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- High expectations of the department have led to the attainment of students at GCSE being well above the national average.
- Teachers' expertise, enthusiasm and commitment inspire and challenge students.
- The very good leadership and management of the subject and the strong shared commitment and vision to continue to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment systems in the Years 7- 9 need to be further refined to ensure that students understand fully what the grades given for work mean.
- The lack of resources for ICT within the department restricts the ability of students to extend and research their work.

142. Results have risen since the last inspection. The proportion of students gaining A*-C grades in the GCSE examinations has been well above the national average for the last two years. All students entered for the examination gained a grade and nearly thirty per cent

gained the top grades of A* and A. Achievement is very good. Girls performed better than boys although both boys and girls did significantly better in art and design than in their other subjects and better than boys and girls nationally. The department's results are amongst the best in the college.

143. Student's attainment in art and design in Year 9 according to teacher assessments is above the national average. This is consistent with standards of work analysed and observed within the college. They apply technical skills very competently and show good developing knowledge of art and design and artists. In Year 9, students demonstrate a good understanding of line and proportion when producing large pen and ink drawings of mackerel and effectively use a range of techniques to represent the texture of the fish's skin. They confidently discuss the work of the artist Samuel Palmer and his use of crosshatching, which they had studied the previous year. Higher attainers use tone very well to represent the luminosity of the skin. Achievement is good. Students arrive in Year 7 with attainment, overall in line with national standards. They learn quickly because the quality of teaching is very good. In Year 7 the structured course gives students a good understanding of formal elements such as the use of colour and introduces them to a range of techniques. In Year 8, students' increasing knowledge of artists and their styles helps them to relate these to their own work. For example, students studied the work of Leger and then simplified the items in the still life into geometric shapes. Lower-attaining students drew the bottles well when relating them to the shape of a cylinder and all learnt how to use ellipses competently. Students of all abilities including those with special educational needs achieve well. Boys and girls make progress at a similar rate.

144. Standards in Year 11 are well above the national average. Many students reach high standards when interpreting whole class themes and confidently use a range of materials and processes to express their creative ideas. For example, they demonstrate a very good ability to explore and investigate when researching the Expressionists as an influence in a project on pets. Students experiment successfully with methods used by artists such as Franz Marc to produce high quality work using unreal colour and dramatic shapes to represent animals as a symbol of a life force. In a project on 'Teatime', lower-attaining students and students with special educational needs produced work of a good standard after studying art-deco design and using the shapes of Claris Cliffs' ceramics as an influence for the style of their painting. Achievement is very good. Students are encouraged to take a more active part in their learning and study past and contemporary art whilst developing their own style. In Year 10, students gain a good understanding of the work of artists such as David Hockney and study his style and use of surface pattern in his compositions before producing their own interpretations. Higher attaining students make rapid gains in the understanding and application of multi-perspective views, which culminated in very good results.

145. The attitude and behaviour of students are very good. Students are well motivated and respond well to the challenges presented. They listen intently in lessons, work well together and show respect for the work and opinions of each other. This is demonstrated most prominently in lessons where the class evaluates work. Students support each other by offering helpful and constructive advice. These occasions improve the self-esteem of students and promote healthy personal development as well as deepening their knowledge and understanding. Praise not only from the teacher but also from their peers, provokes self-reflection and encourages self-appreciation. A high degree of pride is shown in the work of Years 10 and 11, with folders and sketchbooks reflecting a wide range of stimulus, which has been researched and recorded in their own time. They are increasingly confident in themselves as artists and of what they can achieve.

146. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and a major strength of the department. The teachers' expertise, enthusiasm and commitment inspire and challenge students. They have a very good relationship with students and the high expectations demanded of them create a positive learning ethos. Lessons include a range of enjoyable and challenging activities for all levels of attainment. During a very good demonstration of a printing technique in a Year 7 class, students were encouraged by searching and leading questions to think carefully about pertinent points and to make the decisions on what the teacher should do next. Lower attaining students are given the support and encouragement to respond confidently in discussion. Specialised vocabulary is built into projects and displayed in the rooms and its use is positively encouraged through annotation and in the written analysis of work. Very clear introductions are given which give students strong direction on what they have to do to achieve and exemplars of good practice are used to show how to achieve it. In one lesson the teacher not only illustrated how to use brushstrokes to create the effect of feathers but also had produced a finished painting of how the work could look.

147. The very good teaching results in very good learning for students of all abilities. Teachers channel students' strengths into areas of success and raise self esteem. In a portrait project, a student with special educational needs used the style of the graphic imagery of Mondrian to produce work of an equal standing to the rest of the class. Higher attainers made good progress in problem solving and independent research and learning. Learning is well supported by good diagnostic marking which tells the students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their standard. However students are not always clear of the level they are working at, as they muddle effort and attainment grades. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. Projects are well planned, using interesting resources linked to artists and cultures. Teachers have produced excellent schemes of work presented in the form of a sketchbook. These strongly support the delivery of the curriculum and are used to inspire both teachers and students. They also ensure that students experience a wide range of approaches and make good progress in developing their knowledge and technical skills.

148. This is a very good department that is very well led and managed. Teachers are very hard working and demand much of themselves. They have a strong-shared commitment and vision to continue to raise standards and do the very best by their students. Since the last inspection, the department has maintained the high standards and improved on the examination results. The department strongly promotes a caring ethos and puts a high emphasis on the students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development by building aspects into all projects. Accommodation is good and the department has good resources except in the area of ICT. The lack of access to computers or a scanner during lesson time restricts the students' facility to use it to extend and research work, particularly in the examination classes. The high quality of display in the classroom strongly supports learning and the ethos of the subject is promoted by the high profile of the department in the display of students' work around the college and in the local community.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management by the head of department ensure clear direction and rapid progress towards identified subject targets.
- Teaching is good resulting in all students achieving well.
- Students in Years 7-11 have a good attitude to the subject, which significantly contributes to their good progress.
- Students are encouraged to take a pride in their work and they present it well.
- Practical work is good and shows careful attention to accuracy and finish.

Areas for improvement

- The majority of students in Years 7-11 generate only a limited number of possible design ideas in response to design problems.
- Students, particularly in Years 7-11 often do not annotate their drawings sufficiently well to explain their thinking and to show design development.
- Students do not show the same skill in evaluating their work that they do in other aspects of the design process.
- There is a significant difference in the performance of girls and boys.

149. Students enter the college with average standards. By the end of Year 9 students are achieving above average standards by making good progress over time. The achievement of girls is significantly higher than that of boys confirmed by teacher assessment. Students acquire a good understanding of the design process by working with a range of tools and materials in a variety of situations. They improve their literacy skills by using technical vocabulary in classroom discussions and by writing for different purposes. Vocabulary is also increased when students carry out sensory evaluations of food products and use word banks to assist them. Spelling is an area of weakness and students do not always use the spellchecker facility when using a computer. Measuring, weighing, calculating and estimating when working with materials reinforce numeracy skills. Students present their work well, often using ICT to improve both the content and the appearance. Students develop good sketching and formal drawing skills making good use of colour to enhance their work. A group of more able Year 9 students made very rapid progress in acquiring computer aided design (CAD) skills to produce isometric drawings. Students produce quality outcomes in all the material areas and making skills are strength of the work. An example of this was observed in the Memphis Clock project where students in Year 9 use three different materials to produce innovative clock designs based on the theme. When designing however, students often hone in too early on a preferred solution before considering a number of possible alternatives. They do not annotate initial drawings sufficiently well to clarify their thinking and this limits achievement.

150. By the end of Year 11 standards are above the national average. Girls' achievement is significantly higher than that of boys. Students use the design process and ICT skills confidently to help them solve more complex design problems. They carry out detailed research to help them devise solutions but most students use an insufficiently wide range of sources of information. Students plan their written and investigative work well using techniques like flow charts and materials lists to assist them. Students write clear specifications but they rarely refer back to them in final evaluations. Coursework folios are of a good standard. Work is modified and adapted in the light of feedback from teachers and this leads to higher achievement. Students are creative and produce quality products in their chosen area because they acquire well-developed practical skills. Students display an

increasing awareness of how the work they do relates to industrial practices and understand how technology affects our lives.

151. GCSE results in 2001 are above national average overall. They are higher in food and textiles and much higher than predictions based on prior attainment than in graphics and resistant materials. Girls' attainment is higher than that of boys. A-level results in 2001 are lower than in previous years and dipped below the national average. They are very good when compared with students' prior attainment, which was low.

152. Students display good attitudes to the subject in the main school. Behaviour is good because students are well managed by teachers and good classroom relationships exist.

153. Teaching and learning are good. A third of the lessons seen were very good. Lessons are planned to focus on what students should know, understand and be able to do. Lesson aims are shared with students and expectations are high so that students understand what is required of them and good learning takes place. Learning is well structured and students are well supported by teachers and other adults. They are provided with learning materials appropriate for their ability. This enables all students including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language to make good progress. A strong feature of the teaching is the use of good demonstrations, which show students what they need to do to succeed. Teachers ask challenging questions; students are encouraged to participate fully in discussions and to listen to the views of others, all of which helps to extend their learning. Students receive, and take account of very good formal and informal feedback on their work. They understand how well they have done and what they need to do to improve and they remain focused and interested in their work. Marking however is inconsistent between teachers and because the department does not keep a record of appropriately marked work, teachers have no precise guide, which leads to standardised examples of levelled work. Students' work is displayed particularly well in food and textiles and this is used effectively to increase learning. Opportunities are provided for students to work in the department as an extra curricular activity. This is helpful for students who want to catch up but is also taken up by gifted and talented and other interested students who want to take the work further.

154. The department is very well led by an experienced head of department. There is a comprehensive scheme of work in place for Years 7 to 9 but this needs to be reviewed now that resources have increased to provide a more balanced coverage of the National Curriculum. Monitoring takes place through regular departmental meetings and observations. Teachers work well as a team to the benefit of students. Accommodation is satisfactory but there are weaknesses in the accommodation for sixth form students.

155. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Examination results have improved. Provision for ICT has developed significantly, but students in the main school do not always have easy access to equipment when they need to use it. Problems also exist with using software owing to local education authority policy. A new A-level course has been introduced to provide more breadth to the curriculum.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Recent GCSE examination results have improved significantly.
- Teaching is good and often very good and specialist staff form an impressive team.
- Teachers are committed, supportive and caring of their students.
- Students' attitude and behaviour are very good and contribute significantly to the standard of learning.
- Very good leadership and effective management ensure a well-planned course.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of work in A-level examinations are not high enough.
- More fieldwork is needed in Years 7 to 9.
- Materials and tasks provided for higher and lower attainers should be more appropriate to their needs.
- More visual consolidation of teaching, more re-enforcement of location and spatial patterns and greater use of atlases, local maps and examples would enhance learning.

156. Standards of work are close to the national average at the end of Year 9. Students' achievement in relation to their standards at entry in Year 7 is good for most students. By the end of Year 9 students have a good grounding in geographical skills. Most can use and interpret maps well and the presentation and analyses of statistical data graphically is sound. Their knowledge of location is satisfactory except for low-attainers where it is less secure. Students of all attainment levels have an inadequate understanding of spatial patterns. Higher attaining students do not have sufficient challenge in some classes in developing higher levels of skills in their work. Average attainers progress well but lower attaining students do not get enough simpler yet challenging tasks that can be completed in the time available. Students with special educational needs progress well. Boys and girls produce similar standards of work.

157. Standards of work at the end of Year 11 are broadly in line with the national average. Achievement of most students over Years 10 and 11 is good when related to standards of work for this group at the end of Year 9, which was below the national average. This is due to consistently good and very good teaching and the greater scope and challenge provided by more open-ended assignments. By the end of Year 11, higher attaining students produce very detailed, thorough work. They are able to describe and explain a range of physical and human processes well and show good understanding of quite complex input, process and output linkages. Average attaining students are able to describe the processes satisfactorily but do not always fully understand the linkages involved. Low attainers have a sound basic knowledge of some processes but understanding is often insecure. Best individual GCSE project work based on fieldwork is of high quality and most students produce work appropriate to their attainment levels.

158. Standards of work in the sixth form overall are satisfactory. Achievement on the AS-level course is good and on the A-level course satisfactory. Independent study skills are insufficiently developed and students rely far too much on their teachers in Year 13. Students develop geographical skills quite well but critical skills of evaluation and synthesis are rather weak.

159. Recent GCSE A*-C grades results have improved from being well below to being in line with the national average. The trend of improvement is significantly greater than the

national trend. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades is well below the national position most years. Boys normally perform as well as girls do, so that against national norms their performance is relatively better than that of girls. When compared with other GCSE subjects within the college, geography results have improved to be above the average in 2001. Recent GCSE A*-G grades results have also been at or above the national position. GCE A-level results A-E have been below the national position but numbers are small and this makes statistical comparisons unreliable most years.

160. Students' attitudes to learning are positive and many display a real interest in their work. Most are attentive, work conscientiously and many show real pride in the presentation of their work. Students' behaviour is usually very good and sometimes excellent. Students generally form very good relationships with their teachers and trust them and a real rapport is evident in classes. Students relate well to each other when working in groups and relationships across ethnic groups and gender are harmonious. Oral response to teachers' questioning is very good, with boys' particularly active contributors.

161. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. There is very good teaching throughout the school when lessons are taught by subject specialists. It is generally satisfactory when taught by non-specialists. Teachers are committed, caring and supportive of students within their charge. Classroom management and control are very good and built on very good and effective relationships with students. This provides a very good base for learning in lessons. Lessons are well planned and built on a secure knowledge foundation although learning would improve if more stress were placed on ensuring greater understanding. Considerable emphasis is placed within lessons on enquiry, with students encouraged to contribute to their own learning. Where there is good dialogue between the teacher and students that extends the students' knowledge, there is a greater understanding of the topic taught. When lessons are practical or applied in form students learning is far more secure. Similarly when visual aids such as video extracts, maps, diagrams, and graphs are used, especially when projected on to the master screen, learning is noticeably better. The presentation of specialist teachers is lively, enthusiastic and interesting. Lessons have brisk pace and normally high expectations.

162. Fieldwork undertaken greatly enriches the curriculum and results in most effective learning. It is inadequate, however, in Years 7 to 9 fieldwork in the local area needs expanding. There is also need for all students to study the physical and human geography of an area outside the local area. ICT has been well developed since the last inspection and a very good coherent course of ICT applications linked to curriculum themes exist over in Years 7 to 13. Standards of literacy and the application of number are good.

163. Learning in some lessons lacks a greater consolidation and re-enforcement of the main teaching points visually on the board or overhead projection. In Years 7 to 9 the use of local Ordnance Survey maps is a weakness. There is a lack of a regular use of atlases and permanent displays of world natural regions map in each specialist room. Tasks and materials do not match directly the learning needs of low attainers in Years 7 to 9 and for high and low attainers in mixed ability groups in Years 10 and 11.

164. Leadership of the subject is very good and the day-to-day management is effective. Curriculum planning is of good quality. The work of the department is competently monitored through classroom observation of teaching staff and students' work is regularly scrutinised. There is a need to formally evaluate the impact of teaching and training on learning. The assessment policy is good but does not involve students sufficiently in the evaluation of their own learning and in identifying agreed targets for improvement. Day-to-day marking of students work is very good. It is thorough, detailed and helpful and provides very good guidance to students on how they can further improve the standard of their work. Staff work

very well as a team and the suiting together of the specialist subject rooms provides important opportunities for professional dialogue. Teaching accommodation while satisfactory is very limited for independent resource based learning. Good quality wall displays, including students' work, provide a colourful and effective learning environment. Learning resources are good overall. However, there are important shortfalls such as the need for a fieldwork budget and more visual materials such as films.

165. There has been good progress since the last inspection in taking appropriate action on the previous report with the improvement in standards of work in GCSE examinations particularly significant. The staff, which are a real strength of the subject, have the capacity to improve standards further and implement the points raised in this report. Overall this is a good department with many very good features.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching is very good overall and enables students to make good progress in their knowledge and understanding.
- History makes a very strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Marking of students' work is very good and shows students what they have done well and what they need to do in order to improve.

Areas for improvement

- Occasionally teachers dominate lessons too much.
- Some older departmental policies need reviewing.

166. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average overall. Inspection evidence suggests that they are improving, and, in some areas, are now above average. Students' knowledge and understanding of historical events, people and concepts are sound, and they place these in chronological order accurately. They work well with sources of historical evidence to generate description and explanation. Above average students write well: by the end of Year 9 they write logically constructed essays confidently. The department has worked hard to improve average and below average students' writing so that they are now beginning to write with some confidence. Below average students, those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language have a sound understanding of key historical events and, when they find written expression difficult, can explain these events well orally. This was evident, for example, in a Year 7 lesson on Thomas Becket where students confidently worked on original historical sources in order to work out the sequence of events leading to his murder. Students make good progress from Year 7 to 9 and achieve well because teaching is so good.

167. The percentage of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C in 2001 was below average. However, the numbers choosing to take GCSE history have recently risen, reflecting its growing popularity. Inspection evidence suggests that standards in Years 10 and 11 are improving and are now average. Students are achieving well according to their potential, benefiting particularly from focused specialist teaching, the effective emphasis on developing examination skills and the improving attention paid to teaching average and below average students. Students with special educational needs or those for whom English is an additional language now make similar rates of progress as others. GCSE students both plan their written work and use specialist vocabulary well. They do this well because teaching is so

good. Students use their good understanding and knowledge of a range of historical facts, situations and characters to form sensible opinions and evaluations. They build effectively on interpretation skills covered in Years 7 to 9.

168. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall and occasionally excellent. Teachers use their enthusiasm and expertise to generate excitement and intellectual curiosity. They explain ideas clearly and ask careful questions to increase students' understanding. This was evident, for example, in a Year 7 lesson on Richard III. The teacher used skilful questions about a famous portrait of the king that enabled students to improve their observational skills. Just occasionally, teachers dominate lessons, either by talking too much so that students have insufficient opportunities to practise their skills, or by addressing questions primarily to the most able or the most confident students so that quieter children feel somewhat overwhelmed. Students behave very well and show very positive attitudes towards their history lessons because teachers work hard to establish clear expectations and good classroom relationships. Teachers plan and structure lessons well so that they develop at a very good pace and students have little chance not to work hard. Teachers promote and celebrate success by challenging students to always try their best. There have been significant improvements in the provision of tasks and resources for students with special educational needs, an issue during the last inspection. Marking of students' work shows students what they have done well and what they need to do in order to improve.

169. The recently appointed head of department has a very clear vision of the priorities for the subject, and a strong commitment to the continuous improvement of standards. The departmental documentation is effectively put together, and provides good guidance for teachers. A small number of older policies, however, need reviewing. All issues mentioned in the last inspection have been tackled. The subject makes a very strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Spiritual development is encouraged through the ways in which values and beliefs are explored while maintaining an insistence on respect. Moral issues are often the subjects of intense focus. This is evident, for example, in Year 9 lessons on the Holocaust. Teachers are not afraid to confront the ethical implications of difficult issues such as slavery or genocide. This is a very well managed department.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- Students are good independent learners.
- High quality assessment tells students exactly how to improve their attainment.
- The department has prepared very good materials to help students learn.
- Students have good attitudes towards the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Standards, although improving, are not yet high enough.
- Too few girls choose examination courses in ICT in Years 10 and 11.
- There are not enough computers for all students to work on their own in all classes.

170. No student has been entered for any public examinations in ICT in recent years. Standards of work by the end of Year 11 seen during the inspection were below the national average. However standards are higher in Year 10 and are close to the national average. Students in Years 10 and 11 take a course leading to GNVQ at foundation level. Higher attaining students can integrate several applications in a case study, such as merging information from a database into a mail-merge template, and have good evaluation skills. Lower achieving students can use the simpler features of a range of applications but cannot yet identify constructive ways in which their work could be improved. They are developing an understanding of the different types of storage devices and can identify appropriate situations when each might be used. Very few girls opt to take an examination course in ICT in Years 10 and 11. Students not taking the GNVQ course take a non-examined course. This meets the requirements of the National Curriculum.

171. In Years 7 to 9 standards of work seen during the inspection were at the national average. This reflects the assessments made by teachers of students from Year 9 in 2001. Higher attaining students have a good sense of the audience of their work and effectively refine their work. They understand the construction of an internet address and can design web pages with a wide range of features, including animation. They cannot yet create a relational database with linked tables. Lower attaining students can operate the simpler features of a range of packages including web-design tools and presentation packages. They are developing the skills of using spreadsheets to aid their calculations. Some do not yet use the spelling check features of word-processing packages without a reminder from their teacher.

172. No student in Year 13 is taking a course in ICT. In Year 12, students follow a GNVQ course at intermediate level. Standards of work seen on this course during the inspection were below the national average. Students are gaining competence at using the more advanced spreadsheet functions and can construct and interrogate a database.

173. Throughout the college, students make good progress. Standards are not yet as high as they should be because the college did not give enough time to the teaching of ICT until September 2000. Some sixth-form students taking ICT were not taught the subject when they were in Years 10 and 11. Students in Years 10 and 11 had less teaching than they should in previous years. In some classes progress would be better if all students could work at their own workstation. Students with special educational needs make progress equal to that of others as do students who speak English as an additional language. No special provision is

made for gifted or talented students. However, such pupils make appropriate progress because they have good research skills and use the internet extensively to develop their knowledge and understanding. Many of these pupils regularly use the computer facilities at times other than lessons.

174. Students display good attitudes towards ICT. They respond well to the many opportunities for independent learning and enjoy research activities, particularly using the internet. They listen attentively and work at a very good pace. Students in the sixth-form have very good attitudes to the subject. They enjoy the challenges presented and are very good independent learners, a skill which is very important to their GNVQ studies.

175. Overall, teaching and learning are good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. Teaching was judged to be good or better in slightly over half of all lessons and was very good in almost a quarter of lessons seen. Very good teaching features very clear explanation. It seizes every opportunity for students to learn independently and ensures that students use the features of computers to the full. The internet is used extensively for research and students develop the skill of note-taking. The best teaching makes students very clear of what they are to learn and makes very good use of assessment so that students can see very precisely the improvements they are making. Very good teaching sets students demanding but achievable time limits for tasks so that students learn a considerable amount. In lessons where teaching is less effective, teachers do not give appropriate amounts of time to each activity and some questioning is not as clear as it might be. Some of the content is too demanding for the attainment of the group.

176. In all classes, very good use is made of assessment. Regular, standardised tests measure exactly what has been achieved. All but the lowest attaining students use this data effectively to set themselves goals for improvement. Teachers also set target grades and levels for students. This high quality assessment ensures that students have a very good knowledge of their learning. They know exactly what they should do next to improve. Work is marked carefully and regularly tells the students what grade or level has been achieved.

177. Teachers of ICT have prepared an extensive range of materials to support students' learning. These resources are all available on the college's intranet. Students enjoy using these resources. Not only do they make learning more efficient but their usage constantly reinforces an application of computer technology. Researching controversial topics such as fox hunting and animal cruelty helps students to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.

178. The head of department has been in post for less than two years. He leads the department very well, ensuring that the college's aims are very well reflected in the work of the department. He has established a strong team spirit with the other teachers of the subject, all of whom entered the college since his appointment. He has introduced new courses in all years. Not only has he overseen an increase in the college's computing network, but also he has ensured that very good usage is made of the broadband connection and has developed the use of video-conferencing. One important example of the latter is the link with a college of further education so that students can take part in lectures on psychology. Management of ICT is also very good. The quality of teaching and marking is carefully monitored and good support has been provided to new entrants to teaching.

179. Very good improvement has been made since the previous inspection. All students in Years 10 and 11 now follow a course which meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The amount of time given to the subject in the first five years of the college has been increased. Assessment procedures have improved so that work is now assessed on a consistent basis. Students develop a wider range of skills, no longer focusing just on presentation. There has been an improvement in the resources available.

180. Some other subjects make a considerable contribution to students' ICT learning. In geography, students use a presentation package in Year 9 when working on natural hazards. They use a spreadsheet to analyse weather data in Year 7 and search databases for information on the developing world in Years 10 and 11. In physics, sixth-form students use spreadsheets to plot graphs of planetary motion. Every student is required to use ICT for at least two pieces of work every year in English. One develops research skills and the other presentational skills. Pupils use computer aided design packages to develop their skill at making isometric drawing in design and technology. However, ICT is not used in music and insufficient usage is made in subjects such as mathematics. In art and design, insufficient usage of ICT leads to pupils not developing their research skills as quickly as they should. Teachers report not always being able to gain access to rooms with computers when they wish. Some subjects cannot use packages they would wish because of the local education authority's policy. The college experienced difficulties with some of the provision under the New Opportunities Funding to develop the ICT skills of teachers. Consequently, not all teachers have benefited from this training. The college has adopted a very extensive policy for use of the internet and takes good precautions to ensure that students do not access undesirable materials.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management.
- Staff teamwork.
- Assessment and targeting procedures.

Areas for improvement

- To provide more opportunities for group and pair work to increase students' confidence.
- To increase the proportion of A* - C grades in French at GCSE level.

181. By the end of Year 9, students' attainment in teacher assessed tests in French was slightly below the national average, but showed a considerable improvement on previous years. In GCSE French, the proportion of students gaining A*- C grades has been well below national average for a number of years and showed a big drop in 2001. GCSE results in Spanish are good and the proportion of A* - C grades in 2001 was well above the national average. Higher attaining students tend to opt for Spanish rather than French, which contributes to the good results. Low numbers of students study French in the sixth form, so there are no national comparisons. Results are in line with the ability of the students. A contributory factor to the low GCSE French results is the fact that all students have to study a language and the lower attaining students can only take French. There have also been considerable staffing problems and changes over a number of years, which have had an impact on continuity and students' motivation. This is carried over into the current Years 10 and 11. A decision has been made to change from a modular to linear examination in Year 10. The change comes too late for Year 11, as several modules have been completed and marked. To be successful, the modular system requires teamwork and continuity throughout

the course. The certificate of achievement has been introduced as an alternative for students who are unable to meet the demands of GCSE.

182. By the end of Year 9, the 2001 teacher assessments show satisfactory progress in the light of student attainment on entry. In the current Years 7 to 9 achievement is good overall. Students enjoy language lessons. Higher attaining students have a sound grasp of basic grammar, which is taught in context. They are encouraged to work out basic rules for themselves and apply them. Listening and reading tasks are readily understood and students are taught techniques in answering skills, for example, the need to read questions carefully and pick out essential details. The new course book and student workbook provide challenge and introduce some unusual vocabulary from the start, which adds to the interest of the work covered. Many of the lower attaining students rise to the challenges and are spurred on by their own success. In a Year 7 French class on pets, the mimes of the teacher in explaining the meaning of the word "le serpent", meaning "the snake", resulted in shivers and laughter. Students were soon able to use adjectives such as "drole, feroce and rapide" to describe animals. Students with special educational needs are well supported and are working at levels commensurate with their ability. However two French lessons in one day restricts the progress made by these students and students withdrawn for a length of time need language support over that period. Students are being encouraged to use French or Spanish in classroom situations to ask for things. Some teachers, when taking the register, ask questions at random, which keeps everyone alert and reinforces vocabulary learning. Despite speaking practice, students are still lacking in confidence, More group and pair work would further enhance speaking skills. There were some very good examples of extended written work. Reasons for not attempting certain sports, for example, horse riding and mountaineering had made students think for themselves. The subject of bullying provided some thought provoking reading and was written from the heart.

183. In French in Years 10 and 11, achievement is only just satisfactory overall. This is as a result of very mixed learning experiences lower down the college, at times poor and lacking in continuity. There are many gaps in knowledge and a wide spread of ability in classes, with many students disaffected. In Year 10 students now work in files, which makes students more responsible for their own learning. The files are well ordered and user friendly. The change of examination should enable Year 10 students to benefit from the good teaching now taking place. In a higher attaining class, progress was hindered by gaps in learning. Pronunciation was poor and answers minimal in oral tasks. Throughout, the teacher tried numerous strategies to elicit answers with limited success. In contrast, students in a lower ability Year 11 class, listened intently to helpful examination techniques. There was a 'feel good' factor, with everyone participating.

184. In Spanish in Years 10 and 11, students make good progress. They become fully immersed in lessons and enjoy brainstorms and collaborative work. Students are able to link skills as a result of good teaching and sequencing of tasks. They are able to manipulate the language, with the higher attainers communicating fluently and writing accurately.

185. The Year 13 course is demanding, requiring maturity of discussion using sophisticated language. Materials are carefully chosen to develop critical faculties to enable the student to reach his potential.

186. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 9, all teaching was satisfactory, with over half the lessons good or better. All teaching was satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and two out of the five lessons seen were very good. Teaching in the sixth form is good. In the best lessons objectives were shared with the students at the start and learning checked at the end, so that students felt ownership of their learning and progress. Lessons were well structured and sequenced, using a variety of methods. Very good use

was made of the overhead projector in a Year 8 Spanish lesson, where pictures of famous people were slowly revealed. There was an element of suspense. Lessons are taught in French or Spanish throughout, which is commendable. Lesson preparation is thorough. Homework is regularly set and marking is consistent, so that students know their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve. Literacy skills are having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

187. Leadership and management are very good. There has been a departmental evaluation and the department development plan is linked with college priorities. Schemes of work have been up dated. The new course books are stimulating and interesting. Very good use is made of assessment data to enable targets to be set. Teaching and marking are monitored. Teachers have the opportunity to observe one another and they share ideas. New staff appointments now make up a good team. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. There is now no unsatisfactory teaching. There is a consistent approach to marking. Standards by the end of Year 9 have improved. Spanish results are well above national. Strategies are ongoing to improve GCSE standards in French, but it may take a number of years to see the improvement.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Students have good attitudes to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to perform.
- Students are underachieving in Years 7 to 11.
- The use of ICT.
- Planning and assessment.

188. Overall standards in music in Years 7-9 are below national averages, although teacher assessments in 2001 indicate a closer relationship between the college's attainment and national attainment at the end of Year 9.

189. At GCSE in 2001 the number of students gaining A* - C was below the national average but above the national average for students gaining A*-G. In the sixth form, overall standards are satisfactory with all students gaining A-G pass in 2001.

190. Students are underachieving in Years 7 to 11. Students enter the college with unsatisfactory musical skills. In Year 7, students are able to clap a steady beat and vocally perform rhythmic patterns successfully in three parts forming a 'human' drum kit. They are able to sing in tune, but lack confidence through lack of practice, use limited musical words such as tempo and pitch and perform basic rhythmic patterns consisting of minims, crotchets and quavers. In Year 8, students are able to perform rhythmic patterns using body sounds. When discussing a performance of 'Frere Jaques', their understanding of basic musical terms such as dynamics, timbre and texture and their knowledge of instruments is limited. Students do not distinguish between different brass instruments and recorded singing work on tape is underdeveloped. In Year 9, standards are below expectation in playing, singing and composing because pupils undertake written project work on pop music from the 1950s to the 1990s which has very little practical opportunities for students to develop musical skills. Students are not able to play from notation, a feature noted in the last inspection. Although keywords are displayed in classrooms, they are not linked to current work. In Year 11 most students are able to perform to a satisfactory standard with some very

good performances of the students' own compositions. They are able to discuss these performances with considerable maturity and confidence. In the sixth form, Year 12 students make good progress improvising over a chord sequence. Students in all years who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make similar rates of progress as the other students in their classes.

191. Students in the college have good attitudes to music. They enjoy their work and work well as classes, groups and pairs, listening attentively and working enthusiastically. A minority of students involve themselves in the small number of extra curricular opportunities offered by the department. Tuition is given on a range of instruments but there is little systematic monitoring of attendance or learning in these lessons. There are few opportunities for students to perform, for instance in assemblies or in concerts.

192. Teaching and learning in music throughout the college has been affected by staff changes and absence. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is satisfactory. Schemes of work, which translate National Curriculum Programmes of Study into meaningful and musical tasks for students, have not been mapped out. Planning does not promote challenge, progression, breadth, balance and variety in basic musical skills. Lessons observed during inspection included too much revisited work, unclear lesson focus and material which did not progress from one activity to another consolidating and developing students' depth and breadth of knowledge. The standards achieved by students have suffered accordingly. An assessment policy which is based on National Curriculum attainment levels is not in place. As a result students' skills are not built upon effectively. There is no target setting and little accurate assessment of overall standards.

193. Weaknesses in teaching are due to lack of planning and the absence of practical music making. Teaching in Year 11 is satisfactory but students both in Years 10 and 11 would benefit from a detailed programme of study drawn from the current examination syllabus, especially in view of shared classes. In the sixth form teaching by a visiting teacher was good.

194. Leadership and management in the subject are weak as a result of the absence of the head of department through illness. There is a lack of planning, assessment and record keeping within the department. Accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory, especially for practical group work. The resources for computers and keyboards together with tuned and untuned percussion particularly for use in Years 7 to 9 are poor. Progress since the last inspection has been limited due to staff changes. However, the time allocation for music in Years 7 to 9 is now adequate.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students' attitudes are positive.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Improvement since the last inspection is good

Areas for improvement

- The size and range of indoor teaching spaces.
- Make more use of information gathered in assessment processes to support and guide future planning in the subject.
- Establish a balance in staffing that will enable more flexibility in providing programmes that more closely meet the different needs of girls and boys.

195. GCSE classes have only recently begun in physical education and therefore there is currently no information against which to judge attainment. In dance, in 2001, in an all girls' group, results were amongst the highest in the college for A* - C grades and have been well above the national average over the last three years. Attainment on entry to the college is below average and students' learning experiences in the subject are variable. By the end of Year 9 standards have been raised to match national averages and this represents clear added value. Last year, 2001, assessments showed below average standards of attainment in physical education and thus there has been clear improvement since then. By the time students leave school, overall standards are sustained, in line with national expectations. Boys do better than girls in team games but there is no difference in the levels of personal fitness reached.

196. In Years 7 to 9 both boys and girls improve quickly on their standards of personal fitness and this comes as a result of the increased emphasis on this aspect of the subject. Boys are achieving very well in some games activities for example, in hockey, with clear improvement over time in passing, tackling and team play. Students in Years 10 to 11 are consolidating their learning and some, mainly boys, are reaching good standards in games playing. The improvement over time seen in a Year 10 soccer lesson is clearly good. Overall skills are well developed and some players showed very good individual ball control both in passing and in taking on and beating opponents. In a Year 11, aerobics session, girls showed clear improvement in their ability to follow a routine and establish the pace and rhythm to challenge for improvement in their standards of personal fitness. This lesson provided a telling example of how well girls are responding to newly introduced activities designed specifically to meet their needs. Students in the sixth form have made a sound start to their studies in the Community Sports Leader Award group. In a relatively short time many already have a clear understanding of the need for strong communication skills in leading groups engaged in sports and games. Teams from the college, especially boys, do well in local and regional competitions and there are a number of individual competitors who represent the college in local, regional and national events.

197. In all years most students display a positive approach to the subject both in lessons and in the popular extra-curricular programme provided by the department. Almost all behave well and have a clear understanding of what their teachers expect of them in terms of behaviour as well as performance. Older students demonstrate a most mature approach to their work and several sixth-form boys support the work of the department in lessons. In Year 10, the standards of discipline and self-control displayed in a soccer lesson were a tribute to

the work of the college and the department in developing improved personal skills amongst a group of boys with a variable behavioural and educational background.

198. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. The objectives for learning are clearly set at the beginning of most lessons and thus students know exactly what to do in order to be successful. Most work eagerly and are well engaged in their work. Most teachers work in an engaging and encouraging style providing positive feedback on progress. Classes are well managed and teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour as well as performance. In dance lessons demonstrations are particularly clear and teachers lead students expertly in learning and developing complex sequences of movement. Most students listen well or watch and concentrate. There are good working relationships amongst the students and between students and their teachers.

199. The programmes of study meet National Curriculum requirements though currently the timetable and staffing arrangements are not providing the most favourable framework for learning. The different needs of girls and boys including those in the newly introduced GCSE courses are not adequately met. Arrangements for assessment are now well in line with whole college procedures and recent developments are moving the department nearer to making full use of the National Curriculum attainment level descriptions. Currently the specialist accommodation is inadequate. The gymnasium is too small for the size of class expected to use it, as is the dance studio. The new head of department has already worked hard to make clear improvement to the assessment arrangements. She has good vision and recognises the need to make use of the information that an improved assessment policy will bring in order to plan for further developments in the subject.

200. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. Overall standards are more consistently in line with average levels especially in gymnastics in Years 7 to 9. The quality of teaching is now good with a much improved degree of challenge and clearer setting of objectives for learning ensuring that students know what to do in order to improve. As a result, students' attitudes are much more positive. Arrangements for assessment have improved though there is still much to be done. These improvements, achieved in a relatively short time, have coincided with the appointment of a new head of department. The department is now well placed to make further progress in raising standards.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	13	54	N/A	0	N/A	1.8	N/A
Biology	5	80	N/A	40	N/A	3.6	N/A
Chemistry	7	86	N/A	42	N/A	4	N/A
Physics	11	91	N/A	45	N/A	6.1	N/A
Design and technology	8	88	N/A	13	N/A	4.5	N/A
Art	11	90	N/A	45	N/A	6.1	N/A
Music	4	100	N/A	25	N/A	6	N/A
Geography	3	100	N/A	0	N/A	5.3	N/A
History	8	100	N/A	75	N/A	7.8	N/A
Theology	12	100	N/A	25	N/A	6.1	N/A
English	19	100	N/A	37	N/A	6.8	N/A
General Studies	14	93	N/A	14	N/A	4.4	N/A

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	7	100	89	42	47	5.7	5.8
Biology	3	100	88	0	37	3.3	5.9
Chemistry	4	100	91	0	48	3.0	5.9
Physics	4	100	89	25	44	4	5.7
Design and technology	8	88	91	25	30	3.8	5.4
Art	8	100	97	63	47	8	6.5
Music	4	100	95	0	41	5	5.7
Geography	5	60	93	20	41	2.8	5.7
History	8	100	89	87	37	8	5.5
Theology	11	100	93	64	40	7.3	5.8
English	14	93	94	28	36	4.7	5.9
General Studies	30	96	85	35	27	5.7	4.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and chemistry. Physics and biology were also sampled, with one lesson observed in each. Four students took A-level physics in 2001, all passed and one gained a B grade. In the AS-level examination at the end of Year 12, 45 per cent gained A-B grades and there was a 100 per cent pass rate. Eleven students took this examination and seven have continued on the A-level course. The teaching and learning in the lesson seen were good due to clear explanations by the teacher and the students' positive attitudes. Students were able to calculate the speed and period of orbits of planets and model this information using a spreadsheet. In biology, three students took the A-level examination in 2001; all passed but there were no A or B grades. In the AS-level examination in Year 12, 80 per cent passed and 40 per cent gained grades A and B. There was a hundred per cent retention onto the A-level course. The teaching and learning in the lesson seen were good. Students used a practical activity to investigate the possible crosses when two unlinked genes are inherited. The enthusiastic teaching motivated the students and they worked hard.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and in particular, teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject.
- Day-to-day assessment.
- Relationships.
- A good well balanced curriculum

Areas for improvement

- Organisation of students files.
- Students' grasp of basic algebra in AS-level classes.

201. The inspection covered A-level and AS-level mathematics in the areas of pure mathematics and mechanics. Teaching is good, based on the teachers' good knowledge and understanding of the subject. Results have been average, but there has been some improvement in 2001.

202. Overall the standard of work seen is above average. At A-level, examination results are average although there was some improvement in 2001 when all students attaining A-E grades. On average, students attain about half a grade higher in mathematics than in other subjects. There are no significant variations between the achievements of boys and girls or between different minority ethnic groups. At AS-level, examination results for 2001 were lower than the college expected with nearly half the students unclassified.

203. Students enter sixth form lessons with a range of attainment at GCSE including students previously entered for the intermediate and higher GCSE examinations. The standard of work seen in lessons and over time in A-level classes is above average. In pure mathematics students differentiate complex equations and describe their methods well. They use their algebraic skills sensibly in new situations. In AS-level classes, standards match the national expectation. In mechanics, students are able to calculate a range of unknowns from equations related to motion. They can decide which equation is more appropriate to use and, with help, apply the necessary algebra. However, students' algebraic skills overall need improving. There were examples of some students having difficulty remembering how to solve relatively straightforward equations.

204. The students' achievements are good overall because the quality of teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are able to explain concepts well. In one pure mathematics lesson, the teacher's clear explanation of the topic significantly aided the students' understanding. In the same lesson, good use of a computer enabled students to see the links between curves and gradients of curves. Teachers' questions often make students think carefully and they are encouraged to give comprehensive answers. Teachers know their students well. Marking is of good quality, ensuring that students know what they need to do in order to improve. The quality of support given to students is good. In one lesson on differentiation, the teacher skilfully assisted the student through the problem, ensuring good progress. In another lesson on graph work, a good mix of the teacher explanation, the provision of hints and clues, and students working independently resulted in them acquiring new skills and techniques. Weaknesses in teaching in the sixth form include teachers talking for long periods of time and students are over-reliant on their teachers.

205. Because of the good quality teaching they receive, students are highly motivated. There are good examples of students working well together, helping and supporting each

other or working independently when it is appropriate. Students have a very good attitude towards work and demonstrate a willingness to learn. Some files are untidy and this inhibits students from using their files effectively for revision.

206. Leadership and management of sixth form mathematics are very good. There is a clear sense of purpose and teachers are keen for the students to do well. The head of the sixth form works closely with the head of department ensuring a smooth transition from main school into the sixth form. Schemes of work have recently improved.

Chemistry

Overall the quality of provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good; lessons are well-structured and very good subject knowledge and understanding is shown in clear explanations of chemical concepts.
- Students enjoy chemistry; their positive attitude to work makes a significant contribution to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- There are too few opportunities for varied activities within lessons to meet the needs of students with different learning needs.
- Procedures for tracking students' progress and setting targets for improvement are not systematic enough.

207. Standards of work seen in the sixth form during the inspection are average. Present students' achievement relative to their prior performance at GCSE is satisfactory. Good teaching and students' positive attitudes to work contribute to a quality of learning that is good overall.

208. The A-level examination results steadily improved between 1998 and 2000, when they were in line with the national average. In 2001, there was a hundred per cent pass rate but no higher A or B grades and so the overall results were well below the national average. The entries are too few to make reliable comparisons with national data but there was significant underachievement in 2001, as many students did not attain the results expected from their prior attainment at GCSE. Male students performed better than females. In the AS examination in Year 12, 85 per cent passed, with 14 per cent attaining the higher grades A and B. Some students underachieved. Three out of the seven students have continued into the second year of the A-level course. The other students recognised that A-level chemistry was an inappropriate course for them.

209. The standard of work seen during the inspection is average and students are making satisfactory progress. Students in Year 12 are well supported in making the adjustment to the greater depth of work required in the AS course compared with GCSE. In a Year 12 lesson, students were learning about the mechanism of electrophilic addition to alkenes. The good relationship between the teacher and students and the encouraging supportive manner of the teacher meant that the students gained confidence in their own ability and experienced success in a carefully structured lesson. The teacher's clear stress on using chemical patterns and the students' positive attitude and interest in the work increased their learning. Students were able to use models to construct the different isomers of butene and to recognise that the carbon-carbon double bond is planar.

210. Carefully structured teaching builds on previous knowledge and enables students to develop their understanding of chemical concepts. In a Year 13 lesson on inorganic

chemistry, students were learning about the characteristics of transition metals. The teacher skilfully used questioning to build on students' answers in order to get them to clarify their thinking. This focused and enhanced their learning. Students knew that transition metals arise from an incompleting sub-shell and that these elements are used in catalysis. The teacher demonstrated the formation of coloured ions in different oxidation states. The students did a risk assessment working out the quantity of solution that the teacher should use, taking the toxicity into account. Some students had difficulties with this calculation. Students developed their experimental skills in a lesson investigating the properties of alkanes and alkenes. They adjusted well to the use of drops of reagents, compared with the larger volumes used at GCSE level. They worked safely and confidently. The teacher communicated his enthusiasm for chemistry, teaching practical techniques well and relating the chemical reactions involved to everyday life.

211. Students have a very positive attitude to work, are conscientious and attentive and sustain concentration well. This enhances their learning. They are co-operative and support each other well in group work. Students' work is generally well organised and presented. However, they do not make sufficient use of textbooks to augment their class work. Students are not very responsive when answering teachers' questions or in asking questions themselves. More opportunities for students to actively discuss and debate topics would increase their scientific curiosity and enhance their learning. Students appreciate the willingness of teachers to give them extra help when they perceive the need.

212. Two teachers share the teaching of chemistry in the sixth form. The teacher in charge of the subject was absent for the duration of the inspection and so only one teacher was observed. The teaching seen was consistently good, and this resulted in good learning. A key strength of the teaching is the teacher's very good knowledge and understanding of chemistry shown in clear exposition and skilful questioning. Teaching is encouraging and supportive, making good use of praise to boost students' confidence. Lessons are well planned with a variety of activities, involving the students in active learning. Written work, however, is not always marked in sufficient detail and students are not shown where there are inaccuracies and where their answers lack depth. This has a negative impact on their learning as they do not have a clear idea of how to improve. The teaching methods seen during the inspection involved whole-class teaching with insufficient opportunities for students to progress at different rates dependent on their learning needs.

213. Expectations are generally appropriately high, but sometimes tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels so that higher-attaining students are not sufficiently challenged and, in consequence, make less progress. A narrow range of teaching styles was seen, and the pace in some lessons lacked focus so that students were not working as productively as they might. Assessment data is not used systematically to track students' progress and to set targets for improvement. This lack of regular monitoring is a contributory factor in the underachievement of some students. Specific strategies to improve standards have not been identified.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

214. Design and technology was not one of the five focused subjects. Standards in the sixth form are good in both A-level product design and the newly introduced A-level textiles. Students identify their own problems to solve and produce quality folios to support their practical work. In the work seen, oral presentations delivered by Year 12 textile students were below expectation. Students lacked confidence and displayed weak communication skills. The practical work of a few of the students however, showed considerable originality and flair. Attitudes in the sixth form are satisfactory.

BUSINESS

215. Business was not one of the five focused subjects for the inspection. In the two lessons seen, teaching was good and standards were in line with demands of the courses being followed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

216. Students in Year 12 are following a GNVQ Intermediate course. They are making good progress even though many of the students did not follow an ICT course in Years 10 and 11. Students have very good attitudes to their work. The emphasis on independent learning, supported by good use of the college's intranet and the Internet help them learn and develop skills for use in other subjects.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

217. The focus of the inspection was on art and design. Music was sampled. Music is taught by a specialist supply teacher because of a long-term absence. Two lessons were sampled, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. This sampling plus scrutiny of work indicates that teaching is good, but there are gaps in students' knowledge and understanding. In the Year 12 lesson, students made good progress in composition, sequencing using chords.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Results at A-level are very good. Achievement is good. The high expectations of the department have led to the attainment of students being well above the average.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers have an excellent command of their subject and this is reflected in the high quality of individual advice, which plays an important role in raising standards.
- Attitudes of students are very good: they are well motivated and keen to take responsibility for their own independent learning.

Areas for improvement

- Improve ICT resources so that students' learning is enhanced.
- Formalise the recording of the high quality advice given to students into the assessment system.

218. A-level results have improved in the last two years, and in 2001 nearly half of the students entered gained the top grades of A and B. The quality of teaching, learning, leadership and management are all very good, with students developing originality of thought and approach and a good level of technical skills.

219. Since the last inspection the A-level results have risen to well above the national average. In 2001, over 60 per cent of the students gained the higher grades of A and B and all students who took the examination passed. The average point score of students exceeded national levels and the results were within the top quarter of all schools across the country. Achievement is very good with both males and females performing at a similar level. For the last two years, students have performed significantly better in art and design than in their other subjects. The department's results are amongst the best in the college. In the 2001 AS-level examination nearly half of the students gained the top grades of A and B and all but one reached their predicted grades and passed.

220. The standard of work of students in Year 13 is well above expectations, because their independent decision making skills and their knowledge and skills in art and design are very good. Much of the work is conceptually adventurous, and grounded in a very good understanding of how to undertake purposeful preparatory studies. Students work with a high degree of individuality and most show in-depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles. This results in work being of a high standard. For example, after the bombing of the world trade centre, a student used this as a stimulus for his work and researched the powerful figure painting of the artist Ana Maria Pacheco. This resulted in a large-scale acrylic painting, which reflected a high level of personal response. Technical skills are of a high standard, and students use a wide range of media very confidently and competently. Standards of literacy are good, and written work demonstrates a skilled critical analysis of images and texts.

221. Achievement in the sixth form is very good. In Year 12, students successfully move on from their GCSE work into new areas and rapidly build on the challenge of individual study and interpretation. This is a result of the well structured course that gives students of all abilities the skills and confidence to achieve their best. For example in their first year, students are taught a wide range of different research techniques that can be referred to throughout the course. Students successfully build on their understanding of periods of art and artists' styles, selectively using the knowledge gained to influence their own work. A higher attaining student's work on the theme of 'Earthly Remains', demonstrated a very good understanding of the historic use of sculptural form when researching the figures of classical art and relating them to the work of Henry Moore. This led to a highly innovative final piece of three-dimensional work where features were enhanced by unusual surface decoration. Students are encouraged to be inventive and work produced after departmental visits to exhibitions of contemporary artists shows a growing depth of understanding and sophistication in concepts and the handling of a wide range of media.

222. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. The impact of the high standards of teaching on students' work and attitudes is fully apparent in lessons. Students arrive for lessons enthusiastically, they are well motivated and most are appropriately self-reliant, pursuing work in their own time. For example, one student, when researching people's beliefs, had contacted an American disabled artist on the Internet and discussed the religious content of her work. The life skill drawings of students were improved when they attended classes in the evening. Portfolios and sketchbooks are very well kept and reflect a high degree of pride and commitment. The teacher's enthusiasm for the subject encourages students to be receptive to new ideas and fresh viewpoints and students positively consider views and beliefs other than their own. They support and help each other effectively, talking and listening to each other's ideas, and confidently contributing to discussions. Students are

confident in themselves as artists and what they can achieve. A significant number go on to study the subject at a higher level.

223. Teaching in the sixth form is a significant strength in the subject. Overall it is very good and in one lesson was excellent. Students learn very well as a result. Expectations are high and teaching methods well chosen. Consequently the students learn very well. A major strength is the emphasis given to independent thought and learning, and the high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice play an important role in developing and raising standards. It was suggested to a student researching the role of music in the work of Kandinsky that she should contact the artist Jane McKay who paints whilst attending concerts and uses colour in her work to represent sound. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and based on mutual respect. This is particularly evident when areas of improvement are negotiated individually. Support is well managed because individual needs are well identified. Good systems of assessment are in place with an emphasis on students taking personal responsibility for their learning. This should be further developed to record the targets arising from the high quality evaluative dialogue in lessons. Students expressed the opinion that they felt that the teacher's expertise and enthusiasm for the subject and the challenging tasks set, made them think beyond the easy and obvious routes to develop their own creativity. This was evident in a lesson observed where the teacher emphasised how to create a personal response. In a project on 'Under Wraps' students were given photographs of the contents of the pockets of homeless persons and asked to consider and write about the life of the person, before making their own decisions on what aspects of their own life were important to the their own work

224. The independent work students undertake is well prepared and tasks complement the content of the lessons. Students have access to a wide range of media and competently use these to extend work. Books and artefacts linked to themes being studied act as a stimulus and support to learning. Teachers' workbooks for schemes of work are excellent. They set very high standards for students to emulate and give very clear direction to the students on artists and areas of research that could be followed to extend projects. Accommodation is good. Sixth form students have their own room, which means that work can be set up and left and students can pursue their studies in any free time they have. However, the lack of direct access to resources for ICT limits the students' facility to use it to develop and extend work. For example there is only one computer, no scanner and a lack of relevant software in the department to design and manipulate imagery.

225. This is a very good department that is very well led and managed. Since the last inspection, the department has maintained the high standards reported and significantly improved on them. There is a strong-shared commitment to maintain this and planning establishes a strong link between improving provision and raising standards. The curriculum is strongly enriched by projects such as workshops with local artists and visits to city art galleries, which are a significant factor in raising achievement. The high quality of display in classrooms, in areas of the college and in venues in the local area, strongly contributes to the ethos of the subject and acts as an inspiration to students.

HUMANITIES

History was the focused subject for humanities. Geography, religious studies and government and politics were sampled. In geography, recent A-level results have been below the national average, although the numbers of students entered make statistical comparisons unreliable. Teaching in lessons sampled was good. However, A-level students have not developed independent learning techniques sufficiently to support the teaching and rely too heavily on their tutors. The result is that learning in some lessons is not as good as the teaching. In the theology lessons sampled, teaching was very good and enabled students to

make clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. Politics has recently been introduced as a sixth form subject. In the lesson sampled, teaching was satisfactory.

History

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

Strengths

- Examination results are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes; they are becoming confident historians.

Area for improvement

- Not all students are encouraged to take part in group work.

226. Standards in history for students aged 16-19 are well above average. Students' performances in the A-level examination in 2001 were well above the national average for both the percentage achieving A-B grades and for the proportion achieving a pass grade. AS results in 2001 also suggest that standards are well above average with all students achieving a pass grade and three-quarters achieving the higher grades.

227. Observation of lessons confirms that standards are again well above average and achievement is good. Standards are well above what might be expected at this stage in the Year 12 AS-level course with students progressing smoothly from GCSE. The performance of the current Year 13 A-level group is also well above average.

228. Students analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of evidence to produce well-balanced and convincing arguments. This was evident, for example, in a Year 13 lesson where they examined a series of paintings in order to judge them as historical sources. Students articulate their views with growing confidence and show a good command of the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis. Students' written work is carefully organised and structured to support coherent conclusions based on detailed historical evidence. There is provision for the most able students. The department runs a twilight session to prepare students for the Advanced Extension Award.

229. The quality of teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. There are many significant strengths in the teaching which have a positive impact both on students' attitudes and the quality of their learning. Teachers' confident and professional subject expertise, and high expectations of what students can achieve allow them to prepare students effectively for the demands of the higher order skills in the subject. The content of lessons is challenging and students are encouraged to develop their own historical viewpoints. Just occasionally, teachers need to ensure that quieter students are fully encouraged to participate actively in group tasks.

230. Students learn very effectively in their courses in sixth form history and they show good levels of progress in both thinking and writing. This results from both the well focused, experienced and enthusiastic teaching in the department and from the positive attitudes students have towards their work. Sixth form students are articulate, purposeful and confident. The relationships between teachers and students are positive and students show considerable levels of enthusiasm for their history lessons. This was evident, for example, in a Year 12 lesson where a student made interesting comparisons between Henry VIII's financial prudence and that of Gordon Brown.

231. The subject benefits from very good leadership, efficient management, effective planning and a clear sense of direction shared by both the head of department and by his very experienced colleague. History makes a strong contribution towards students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature, as the college does not offer English language, and French was sampled. Very low numbers take French in the sixth form. One lesson was sampled, and in this lesson the teacher's exclusive use of the target language and the high level of challenge in the material meant that teaching and learning were good.

English

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

Strengths

- The subject is led and managed very well and the head of department has clear priorities for further development.
- The quality of teaching is very good; teachers know their subject well and make it interesting to study.
- Teachers give very good support and guidance to students through exemplary marking and tutorials.
- Students are encouraged to develop their own critical responses.

Areas for improvement

- The only course offered is English literature and this means that some students leave the college to take alternative English courses elsewhere.
- The range of books in the library to support students' learning is unsatisfactory.

232. Although A-level results were below average in 2001, the Year 12 AS-level results indicate that students make good gains compared with their GCSE results because of very good teaching, a high standard of intellectual challenge and exemplary marking.

233. The provision in English literature caters for a growing number of students. Fourteen students sat the A-level examination in 2001, 16 students are studying the subject in Year 13 and 29 in Year 12. This reflects students' positive views of the subject.

234. Standards achieved in A-level examinations have fluctuated in recent years. Although the standards attained by students in the 2001 A-level examinations were below average, the achievements of students currently in the sixth form are close to the expected standards for AS-level students. The students now in Year 13 performed well in the AS examinations taken in Year 12. The average point score of these students on entry to the sixth form indicates that their prior attainment was low compared to standards of prior attainment in most other subjects. However, in the AS-level examinations at the end of their Year 12 courses the average point score was second only to history. This reflects the very good achievement observed both in lessons and in students' work during the inspection.

235. Students rapidly become confident in discussing a wide range of literature. They develop their own opinions and are able to argue a case, undertake research to support their findings and present seminars to their fellow students. Their debating skills are very good. They can explore issues and ideas in depth and they demonstrate a very good understanding of the links between texts and the way in which literature can shed light on the human

condition. They make full notes in lessons and write fluently, analysing texts and using critics' views to support or counterbalance their own. The most able can compare a range of critical views, while lower attaining students are more likely to rely on one line of argument. Most structure essays logically, use fluent and confident critical vocabulary and technical terminology, employing quotations and references to support and explain their views. They take great care over their writing, drafting and redrafting their coursework essays until they are satisfied that they have achieved as high a standard as possible.

236. The quality of teaching is very good and is a key factor in raising standards. The quality of students' learning is also very good because of the very high standard of intellectual challenge. Students are expected to think for themselves, to develop personal responses to literature and express their own opinions. They are required to test these ideas in discussion, listen carefully to others' views, question and judge. They are expected to be independent thinkers and learners, researching from the limited range of library books and the Internet, presenting their ideas to others, supporting them with resources, making links between different writers and even different art forms. For instance, in one Year 13 lesson, students had selected poems, pieces of prose or drawings of war which they found particularly moving. Students took control of the lesson, describing the effect on them of various writings or paintings. All gained from this exercise in their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of literature and the way in which literature can be used as propaganda. Their personal development was extended by this exercise which was part of the synoptic unit in A-level English, where they are expected to develop an overview of literature. There was a sense of these students being enriched as people, and growing in their understanding of how war affects people. Some of the comparative course work essays demonstrate that teachers encourage students to study a range of both traditional and less conventional texts. For instance, one student had written an interesting and lively comparison of Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

237. Because only two teachers in the department teach AS and A-level, the range of courses on offer is restricted to English literature. This means that at the end of Year 11 some students leave to study English language or a combined language and literature course elsewhere. However, the course that is offered is warmly received by students. They have very positive attitudes towards the subject and describe lessons as interesting and lively with lots of good discussion. They value the time that teachers give them and the quality of the feedback they receive. Marking of students' work is exemplary and always directed at helping them to improve. All drafts are thoroughly annotated, with comments and grades linked to the assessment criteria and marking grids used by AS and A-level examiners. Students are also given regular individual tutorials, which give them the opportunity to question, explain and explore their ideas and respond to and clarify the teachers' comments.

238. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department provides an excellent model through her own teaching. She regularly canvasses the opinions of sixth form students about the course and responds positively to any suggestions. For instance, feedback from students last year has led her to move course work deadlines, to introduce the poetry unit earlier in the course and to improve the quality of information given to students so they know exactly what the course will involve and what the expectations are. From her evaluation of the department, she has a clear view of the priorities for further development. These include the development of a wider range of teaching materials and methodologies to cater for the range of prior attainment at the beginning of the course. Priorities also include an improvement in the range of books in the library to support students' reading and research in the subject.