

INSPECTION REPORT

RNIB New College

Worcester

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique reference number: 117064

Principal: Mr. N. Ratcliffe

Reporting inspector: Dr. Eric Peagam
14943

Dates of inspection: 16th – 20th October 2000

Inspection number: 223644

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Residential Special (Visual Impairment)

School category: Non-maintained

Age range of students: 11-19

Gender of students: Mixed

College address: Whittington Road
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr. I. Fell

Date of previous inspection: November 1996

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Daphne Johnston 9130	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the College care for its students? How well does the College work in partnership with parents
Keith Tottman 2807	Team inspector	English	How well is the College led and managed?
Mary Last 17171	Team inspector	Art Expressive arts Equal opportunities English as an additional language (EAL)	
Jennifer Hall 14691	Team inspector	Science Physical education Post 16 provision	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
Brian Fletcher 20457	Team inspector	Mathematics Music	How well are students taught?
Michael McDowell 1405	Team Inspector	History Geography Religious education	Residential provision
Haydn Webb 19983	Team Inspector	Design and technology ICT (Information and communication technology)	
John Dixon 13155	Team Inspector	Modern foreign languages	
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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

New College is a secondary, selective, non-maintained, residential school for up to 120 boys and girls aged from 11 to 19, who have severe visual impairment, including blindness. It draws from the whole of the UK and residence is largely a function of the distance from students' homes rather than the provision of specialist support for special educational needs. There are two students who are non-resident. The College operates under the auspices of the RNIB who appoint a majority of the governors. Currently there are 99 students (50 boys, 49 girls). The great majority of the students have white UK backgrounds; about one in ten has a minority ethnic background, and there are five students for whom English is an additional language. All but one of the students have statements identifying visual impairment and few have additional physical or sensory disabilities.

The College was awarded 'Beacon' status in 1998, having been declared a highly effective school by the DfEE, following a very favourable report from the previous inspection. Selection is by academic ability, with the stated objective of preparing students for further and higher education. However, there is no formal selection test, and students admitted in Year 7 are attaining in line with national standards. Some students are admitted each year who have high ability in a limited range of subjects, and are attaining below average levels in core subjects. Sixth form provision is mainly for students who have achieved good GCSE results. Almost half the students on roll at the College are in the Sixth Form. They mainly enter the Sixth Form to study to GCE Advanced level and to prepare for entry to higher education. A number of students join the Sixth Form from other schools, and these have generally attained at above average levels in GCSE.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

New College is a highly effective school, which provides very good academic support for students with a range of visual impairment. As a result of the very high quality of teaching offered, supported by a very effective curriculum, students, who arrive with average attainments in Year 7, are attaining at levels well above average by the end of Year 11, and this progress continues into the Sixth Form. Much achievement is due to the highly effective deployment of well-qualified and skilled teachers to small groups of students with high levels of individual support. The current fee level does not meet the full cost of the provision; this is subsidised by RNIB Education & Employment Division, which also underwrites capital costs such as building extensions. While there are aspects of management that need to be improved, the College provides good value for the fees it receives.

What the College does well

- Very good teaching, by well-qualified and highly-committed teachers promotes very good progress so that students who arrive with average levels of attainment achieve well above average levels at GCSE and above average 'A' level results in a good range of subjects
- The very good curriculum provides a broad and balanced education, which is very effectively adapted to meet the individual special needs of students.
- Learning is very well supported by the very good attitudes to work that students display; the College builds very effectively on students' commitment to achievement.
- Very good facilities for ICT are very effectively used across the College to support access to the curriculum and underpin the very good learning that takes place in lessons in the subject.
- The quality of teaching and adaptation of equipment to give students access to science practical work in all years is exceptionally high.
- Homework is very effectively used to extend learning; students take it very seriously and show a very good awareness of the need for private study to support examination success.

What could be improved

- Without a delegated budget and with uncertainty about income from year to year the College cannot undertake effective strategic planning, and the governors are not able to take sufficient responsibility.
- Management systems are insufficiently established to ensure that necessary changes can be effectively implemented and their effects monitored.
- Communication with parents does not sufficiently enable them to know what is happening in the College, which leads to a loss of confidence in the College by some parents.
- Residential practice is insufficiently monitored to ensure that it is consistent from house to house, and there are shortcomings in staffing and provision.
- The College is insufficiently integrated into the local community to enable students to participate in a good range of activities along with sighted people.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

At the last inspection in November 1996, the Key Issues for action related to shortcomings in the financial structure, the co-ordination and management of the curriculum, library facilities and the teaching and assessment of Braille and mobility training. The report also identified inadequacies in the provision, training and management of residential staff and accommodation for boarding. The College has made good progress in addressing the shortcomings in the curriculum and support provision, and a new library is being built. There has been further improvement in the already high quality of teaching and a number of initiatives have enhanced the quality of education offered. However, the continuing difficulties arising from the failure to address the identified shortcomings in the governing and financial framework and the continuing frailties in the residential provision mean that, on balance, improvement is satisfactory. The newly appointed senior management team has made a good start on identifying and addressing areas for improvement, but strategic planning, and thus the potential for devising longer-term improvement strategies is limited by the absence of a properly delegated system for budget management.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well students achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the College.

Progress in:	by age 16	by age 19
speaking and listening	A	A
reading	A	A
writing	A	A
mathematics	A	A
personal, social and health education	B	A
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A

Key	
very good	A
good	B
satisfactory	C
unsatisfactory	D
poor	E

Students arrive in the College with attainments that are generally in line with those of sighted students of similar age. They make good progress in Key Stage 3 and very good progress in Key Stage 4, so that GCSE results are well above those obtained by Year 11 students nationally. They continue to progress well in the Sixth Form and attain average points scores that are above the national average, which represents a remarkable achievement in light of their disability. There are no whole-school targets, although subject departments set and meet appropriate targets for attainment, and progress towards the individual targets set in students' IEPs is very good.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the College	Attitudes to learning and living in residential accommodation are very good. Students are committed to their studies and keen to make the most of what the College has to offer.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students behave very well in lessons and around the campus. They help each other willingly, particularly during meal times and around the site.
Personal development and relationships	Students respond very well to opportunities to develop their independence, both in mobility and in their learning. Relationships are very good throughout the community.
Attendance	The attendance rate is very good, with no unauthorised absence. Most authorised absences are explained by medical appointments and treatment.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-16	aged over 16
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very good

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

Teaching is very good overall. It is at least good in more than nine out of ten lessons and very good in six out of ten lessons. It is excellent in one-tenth of all lessons seen. The skills of communication, including literacy and numeracy, are taught well throughout. This quality of teaching is found in all subjects and is reflected in the high quality of the students' learning. Teaching in Science is especially strong because all students are able independently to access practical science and ways of recording results. The teaching of drama is excellent. In all subjects there are particular strengths in subject knowledge, planning and teaching method. The use of Braille texts is very well established and consistently applied and makes a major impact upon learning. The individual needs of students are clearly identified and very well met through work that is well matched to their abilities, providing stimulation and challenge.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There is a very good curriculum that enables students to make very good gains in learning. It includes arrangements for mobility and Braille training and a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Students with EAL make very good progress because they work towards progressive targets in their IEPs and receive regular additional support.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Arrangements for spiritual and moral development are very good. Provision to support students' cultural development is good, but opportunities for understanding the values of other cultures are underdeveloped. There is very good support for social development within the College but opportunities for mixing with sighted people in the community are limited.
How well the College cares for its students	Students are well known to staff who understand their particular needs. There are satisfactory procedures for ensuring students' health and safety, although there are shortcomings in the residential provision. Students' academic performance and personal development are monitored closely and they have

	good access to counselling and support.
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The College works hard to overcome the difficulties arising from the wide geographical spread of students' homes and the majority of parents believe it does so successfully. However, a significant minority of parents feels that there is insufficient communication, especially about their children's work and progress.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory overall: good and improving at many levels within the College. However, the recent requirement to resolve longstanding, previously unaddressed anomalies very quickly, has led to some unsatisfactory outcomes.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governors and RNIB Education & Employment Division fulfil their statutory responsibilities, but the governors' ability to fulfil many of the normal functions of governance are impeded by having insufficient delegated responsibility for, particularly, the budget.
The College's evaluation of its performance	Insufficient overall, but improving. Some aspects of schooling and boarding are monitored, and good 'value added' analyses are used to monitor academic results but performance management in general and observation of practice in particular, although planned, are not established.
The strategic use of resources	Longer-term strategic planning is made impossible by the absence of a delegated budget which results in a short-term focus for the budget process, and there is an absence of coherent strategic planning for the site as a whole.

The College is generously staffed by teachers with a very good range of qualifications. However, there are insufficient care staff to meet present boarding needs. The College is well supported by administrative staff. Accommodation is generous and provides very well for the academic and other needs of students. For science, music and information technology, accommodation is particularly good. The College could admit more students on both a day and boarding basis, as the accommodation is not currently fully utilised. Resources are good overall and in many respects very good. Both the College and the RNIB Education & Employment Division are very well aware of best value considerations in their spending but the College has little opportunity to practise best value having limited responsibility for significant parts of the budget.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of teaching • High expectations of teachers. • Help and guidance with skills for independence. • Approachability of staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication about their concerns. • Information about College developments. • Information about their children's progress. • Activities at weekends. • Mobility lessons.

While the great majority of parents express a high level of satisfaction with the College, a significant minority expresses anxiety about the quality of leadership and management and, in particular, the way change has been managed. They express concern about whether the College can continue to offer a high quality of education given the currently reduced numbers of students. Much communication has been concerned with budget issues, which has skewed the information received. The team agreed that there are insufficient weekend activities of other than a sporting nature, and the long-term absence of the mobility officer has had an effect on mobility training, which is, in any case, inconsistently supported in the residential setting. The inspectors judged that leadership and management had some weaknesses, as identified in the report, but these were partly structural and the new senior management team had been required to deal with a range of longstanding anomalies in a very short time, partly in response to budget demands. Some decisions have been unpopular, and unavoidable delays in implementing alternative arrangements tended to heighten concern. The most

significant shortcoming in this area arises from the inability to plan strategically for the future of the College, especially in the face of a potential fall in numbers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The College's results and achievements

1. The severe visual impairment of the students, for which this college caters, is a significant impediment to learning. For these young people, access to information is slower and significantly more restricted than for their sighted peers. For many students, all material has to be re-presented in a form accessible to them, and much information that other students acquire incidentally has to be carefully learned. Inevitably this has an effect on the pace of their learning, so that, in assessing achievement, it is inappropriate to rely on direct comparison with sighted students' attainments. Nevertheless, as a result of the extent to which their difficulties are addressed, students' attainments compare very favourably with national levels of attainment. It is not possible to make comparisons with achievements in similar establishments, as no comparable data is available.
2. The achievements of students at New College are very good and in many respects they are excellent. Students arrive in Year 7 with attainments in Year 6 tests in line with the national average. While at the College, they make very good progress so that attainment at age 14 is above average and, by the age of 16, they attain at levels in GCSE which are well above the national average.
3. In the national tests for 14 year-olds in English, mathematics and science held in 2000, the proportion of students attaining both the nationally expected standard, and those attaining higher levels was significantly better in English, where it was well above average, than in mathematics or science, reflecting the greater difficulties students experience in these subjects. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels in these subjects was significantly above average. In the previous year, attainment was significantly above average in all three core subjects. While there are fluctuations from year to year arising from the small cohort size and the differences in prior attainment, the pattern of achievement has remained consistent over time. There are no significant differences in the performance of girls and boys.
4. Average points scores in GCSE examinations this year, together with the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at the higher grades A* to C, were well above national averages. All students achieved at least 5 passes in the range A* to G. Again there were no significant differences between boys' and girls' achievements. When 'value added' data is taken into consideration, the improvement in attainment between 14 and 16, is significantly greater than the national average. It is particularly good in English and French, where all students make average or better progress, while overall, about half of students make better progress than three-quarters of those of similar age nationally. Again, while there are fluctuations from year to year, as last year when some exceptionally able students achieved very high grades, there is a consistent pattern of well-above average attainment. with around 70% or more passes at A* to C grades.
5. In the Sixth Form, good and very good progress is sustained and, in spite of the more selective nature of A-level students nationally, students at New College still obtain results in AS and A-level that are above the national average in a wide range of subjects, many of which they study for the first time in the Sixth Form. Progress continues to be good as is demonstrated by the analysis of performance compared with the same students' achievements at GCSE. This shows that in 2000 students recorded the highest rate of progress since the school began using this form of analysis. The percentage of students achieving grades A to E has improved over the last three years. The proportion of students attaining at the highest grades in 2000 was higher than in 1999, but lower than in 1998. Standards are well above the national average at AS level. Students achieve very well in the Sixth Form, not only in their academic studies, but also in their capacity for independent study, and in their personal and social development. Achievements in A level sciences are especially creditable given the level of accuracy and independence needed for practical work.
6. Last year, the highly successful Sixth Form provision enabled twelve out of seventeen Year 13 students to transfer to higher education courses. Some students join the Sixth Form from other schools, in some cases having had one-to-one support for many years. An aim of the Sixth Form provision is to support these students towards greater independence, and the College is highly successful in achieving this goal.
7. In lessons during the inspection, students demonstrated achievements in line with the College's previous results. In Key stages 3 and 4, students were achieving at very high levels in the majority of lessons, and attaining well above national expectations in a significant minority. This is particularly noticeable in Years 9 and 11 as students approach the end of each key stage. Achievement in literacy and numeracy is good. Students have individual targets for progress and these are substantially achieved They are numerate and have a good command of essential mathematical skills. They are able to apply them to problem solving. They are also highly articulate and well practised in presenting their ideas fluently and coherently. Many

are confident in their computer skills and are eager to use them to support their learning. Attainment is below average in lessons in physical education, although, in light of their disability students achieve well and they swim well. In some lessons in science, where a small group of Year 9 students who find practical work difficult, are engaged in experiments, their attainment is not on a par with others.

8. Nearly all students have a statement of special educational need relating to visual impairment and a number have additional difficulties. The individual targets drawn from their IEPs are appropriate and students make good progress towards these. There are currently five students who have been identified as having English as an additional language. They all achieve very well, including one who attained a Grade A GCSE last year.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

9. Standards of behaviour and the level of students' commitment to their studies are very high. Students are very positive about the College's provision and are keen to make the most of all it has to offer.
10. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons are very good, and often excellent. Students have a mature approach to their learning, prepare well for lessons and use time productively. They are highly motivated, self-disciplined and work hard to achieve their objectives. Students participate fully in activities and show considerable enthusiasm and enjoyment. On many occasions during the inspection, students generated their own questions to clarify a point or to seek more information. Their responses are often quick, perceptive and lively. Students respond well to challenge and express themselves thoughtfully and confidently. They talk to inspectors about their work willingly and with interest. When two police liaison officers visited students in Year 11 to discuss aspects of their work and young people's attitudes to the police, the students asked searching questions and were most forthcoming in their views. Students have a responsible attitude and a good capacity for independent work, needing minimal supervision. In practical lessons students prefer to do as much as they can without assistance. Relationships in the classroom are very good; students help each other as a matter of course. An orderly working atmosphere pervades the College.
11. Students behave very well throughout the day. Meal times are pleasant social occasions when students look after one another and enjoy each other's company. In residential accommodation groups of students co-operate amicably in their various duties and respond sensibly to opportunities to take responsibility and be independent. Responsibilities increase as students get older and tasks are undertaken in good spirit. Very good relationships enjoyed amongst students and with adults contribute to the friendly character of the houses, and enhance the quality of learning and life in the College. Parents say their children are happy in College.
12. Class representatives on the College council take their responsibilities seriously. They seek the views of their peers and represent them with confidence at meetings. Good collaboration was in evidence amongst year groups, competently led by the head girl and head boy. Students in Key Stage 3 behaved in an exemplary way and coped very well when they attended Johnny Ball's 'Maths and Legends' performance at Malvern Theatre.
13. The attendance rate last year was very good, with no unauthorised absence. Most authorised absences are explained by medical appointments and treatment associated with eye conditions. Students are punctual arriving in College, often arriving early, and little time is lost between lessons.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection when the teaching of braille and religious education was unsatisfactory. The high quality of teaching is consistent across all areas of the curriculum and for all age groups. At every stage of their college career students are very well taught and are given excellent opportunities to learn and to progress.
15. Teaching is good or better in over nine out of ten lessons and very good or better in six out of ten. It is excellent in one lesson in ten. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Excellent lessons take place across the whole curriculum. They are characterised by thorough planning that takes into account the individual needs of all students, expert subject knowledge and very good provision for students to work independently. Lessons move at a very good pace and students engage in dialogue with the teacher, which in turn produces high motivation and a strong commitment to learning. Expectations are very high.
16. The skills of numeracy, literacy and information technology are well taught throughout the College. Teachers address individual targets in literacy and numeracy well. Good encouragement is given to developing and using computer skills. Teachers expect students to be fully involved in their own learning and their contributions to lessons are valued and well used. The quality of dialogue between teachers and students is much better than that which is normally found at each age-level.

17. Very good quality teaching is found in all subjects. In English, for example, excellent knowledge of the text of a play led to the sharpening and shaping of students' insights. In mathematics, an impressively mature relationship between teacher and student supported Advanced level study of the properties of graphs. Teaching in science is especially notable because students are able independently to access practical science and ways of recording results. In modern foreign languages, teachers use the target language to maximum effect and only translate when absolutely necessary. In history and geography, inventive methods make a strong contribution to developing understanding as well as knowledge, while in religious education, moral discourse and ethical understanding is encouraged. In music, performance is an integral part of all lessons and, in art and design, students are assisted to make very good progress in a well-established, creative environment. Information technology is well taught and is successfully promoted as a common feature in all other subjects. Physical education provides a wide range of activities for all students and the opportunities to pursue them at the highest level. Braille and mobility are taught well by expert practitioners, which is a significant improvement since the last inspection.
18. Teachers plan and prepare their lessons very well. They make strenuous efforts to ensure that the lesson is equally accessible to all students. Indeed, they give a great deal of their own time to the preparation of materials in Braille. This is in addition to a high contact ratio, which means that teachers have little time to prepare lessons during the normal teaching day. Teachers are well aware of the special educational needs of their students and the nature of their visual impairment. The use of diagrams, in mathematics and science, for example, presents a particular problem and teachers spend many hours ensuring that the materials they present in the classroom support learning and reduce frustration to a minimum. Clear learning outcomes are identified for all lessons on the basis of the known prior learning of the students. The individual needs of students, including those with the greatest special needs are identified well and effectively met through work that is matched to their abilities, providing both stimulation and challenge.
19. Teachers use a good variety of teaching methods but rely, in particular, on cogent and coherent exposition. They think carefully about what they say and how they say it. They repeatedly ask the students if they understand and, if not, they patiently explain again. Wherever possible teachers demonstrate what they want students to do and provide a good range of practical activities to increase understanding. Dialogue is a key feature of all lessons and students are encouraged to ask questions and to express their views. Teachers are skilled in the use of open-ended questions and ensure that all students have a chance to contribute. They manage their classes very well. Relationships are mature and sensitive. Teachers are generous in praise and encouragement but, at the same time, firm and purposeful in ensuring that students work hard and progress. This approach engenders a very positive response from the students who respect their teachers and enjoy learning.
20. Homework is regularly set and marked. It contributes substantially to students' progress. Teachers discuss errors in a way that leads to a better understanding of what is required and to more secure subject knowledge. In general, teachers assess students' progress very well. Good records are kept and these build a substantial picture of what students know, understand and can do. Teachers identify individual strengths and weaknesses and plan accordingly. Students are very well prepared for public examinations.
21. The quality of teaching in the Sixth Form is very good overall and never less than good. A significant amount of Sixth Form teaching is excellent. The quality of learning in the Sixth Form is also very good. The combined effect of high quality of teaching and learning, and the students' own excellent attitudes to work, enable them to reach standards above average when compared with A and AS achievements in mainstream schools. Some very effective teaching of key skills, psychology, critical thinking, and personal, social and health education was observed. In theatre studies, students are very disciplined, highly motivated and self-critical in response to some excellent teaching. The quality of teaching on the law course has excellent features and students are highly committed to the challenge of, and are preparing very well for, the 'Bar National Mock Trial' competition. In the Sixth Form students mature into thoughtful, analytical, realistic and articulate young adults. Students are relaxed and at ease with their learning and they develop excellent work habits.

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

22. The College has made significant progress in addressing the curriculum issues identified at the last inspection and the curriculum is now very good. It is very effective in meeting students' interests, abilities and particular needs with good arrangements for developing their skills in mobility and in the use of braille. Since the last inspection the College has reorganised and improved the way in which the timetables, the options available and students' selection of their areas of study are managed.
23. There are good arrangements for meeting the needs identified in students' statements of special

educational need. Appropriate targets are drawn up for each student in all subjects, reviewed termly, and assessments of students' progress are made twice a year. Where students have additional special needs or use English as an additional language they have a specific IEP that focuses upon providing extra support to meet these needs. Although these arrangements enable students to make very good progress, there is no consistent, college wide system, to ensure that the needs of all students with EAL are met through agreed strategies between faculties, so that they are not secure. Arrangements for meeting other special educational needs are very good and well organised. The curriculum provides good access to learning for all the students, but there are insufficient opportunities for students to study alongside their mainstream peers, either through attendance at other local establishments or by the College sharing its own facilities.

24. Since the last inspection the College has improved curriculum co-ordination well by appointing a director of studies with overall responsibility for the curriculum. The College has restructured the design of the core and optional subjects so that an effective balance between subjects is now in place. Groups remain small as a result of the wide range of subjects offered at both GCSE and A level, and the relatively small number of students. Most preferences for subject coverage are met, and during the week of the inspection, one student was receiving two hours individual tuition weekly to enable her to cover the art syllabus. This responsiveness to the student's needs is very good and demonstrates the strong commitment to students.
25. Although management maintains an overview of developments and their effectiveness, some tracking systems, such as the monitoring of classroom teaching, are not yet fully developed. However, there are relevant plans to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and the impact on the quality of students' learning.
26. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 offers a wide choice of subjects with good opportunities for students to achieve GCSE and, recently, the Certificate of Achievement for students who are studying a narrow range of GCSE subjects. Whilst these curricular opportunities offer good access to accreditation, the College does not provide sufficient opportunities for students in this age group to study vocational options. However, provision for careers education, delivered in conjunction with the local careers service, is satisfactory and particularly effective in providing advice to students on future opportunities in preparation for leaving the College. Year 11 and Sixth Form students also undertake work experience with local firms. Arrangements for PSHE are good and the subject now benefits from a strong scheme of work, which guides teachers in their planning and enables students to develop their personal and social skills. Sex and drugs education are appropriately taught as part of PSHE as well as in the science curriculum. The Design for Living course is particularly effective in equipping students with skills concerning food preparation and independence.
27. Good attention is paid to the skills of literacy and numeracy in all lessons, with teachers ensuring that they pay due attention to the specific vocabulary of the subject being taught. Similarly students are encouraged to use their numeracy skills in other subjects, for example, by drawing on their knowledge of calculation and their use of skills, such as weighing and measuring, in design technology.
28. The College has maintained the broad curriculum with a wide range of subjects found at the last inspection. A GCSE programme for expressive arts is proving valuable in promoting students' understanding of how their skills in various strands of the arts can be woven together in a project. The College has rationalised its approach to PSHE by identifying a clearer focus to the students' work. In the Sixth Form, students' work is accredited through the Diploma of Achievement. This is a popular option with the students and they produce detailed and well-compiled portfolios, which celebrate their independence skills.
29. A very effective Sixth Form curriculum, rich in its breadth of subjects, challenges and inspires students, most of whom go on to study in higher education institutions. As reported at the last inspection, the students are offered a very wide range of A level and AS courses to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding gained at GCSE. Individual aspirations for various subject combinations are largely met because timetabling arrangements are very effectively organised. In addition to continuing subjects started lower down the College, students can also opt to gain accreditation in psychology, sociology, theatre studies, government and politics, law, critical thinking and general studies. A very effective critical thinking course is also an option, in which students explore, for example, the credibility of different sources of evidence in their studies of other subjects. The quality of the new mandatory key skills accredited programme for literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology is very good. Most students have adapted very well to the more independent and problem-solving approach to learning that teachers have adopted for the key skills teaching.
30. In addition to the compulsory key skills course, all students follow a programme of personal, social and health education that includes a good quality programme to develop students' living skills, for example, learning to travel independently. Some physical education is compulsory; and in addition a small number

of students have opted to follow a new AS physical education syllabus, successfully introduced this September. A few students re-take GCSE examinations. A programme of careers and vocational education is in place; but there are no accredited vocational courses amongst the very wide range of subjects studied post-16. Recent staffing changes have created some uncertainty about the effective implementation of the previously well-planned careers education and guidance programme. Students value the emphasis placed on private study in the evenings and at weekends, to consolidate and extend their learning.

31. There is currently no regular joint working with other Sixth Forms, but attendance at residential courses, with students from other establishments, provides the peer group stimulation that can be lacking in some of the smaller teaching groups. Music and other tuition is available in the Sixth Form for interested students.
32. The College has very good provision for extra curricular activities, which support students' work in lessons and aid their understanding. The range includes residential visits to the continent or to a local outdoor pursuits centre, and occasional visits to art galleries, museums and theatres. During the inspection a large group of students visited a local theatre to see a presentation about the use and enjoyment of mathematics in everyday life. There are many other opportunities for students to take part in physical activities such as swimming, athletics, goalball and judo. An outdoor pursuits programme is being re-organised following recent staffing changes and, as reported at the last inspection, the Sixth Form programme is still not sufficiently planned to build on the outdoor pursuits followed by younger students. Musical activities include recorder groups, a blues group and singing in the choir, which regularly performs at local venues and has recently sung in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Parents and students alike appreciate this very comprehensive range of activities. However, at the time of the inspection, the full range was not available due to delay in a staff appointment.
33. The residential houses also provide a good range of activities for students during the evenings. At weekends, however, these are currently limited, mainly to sporting activities. Older students make good use of nearby facilities such as shops and leisure centres, which are particularly popular at weekends and help to promote independence skills. Residential staff also help students with their homework informally.
34. The College makes good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are regular opportunities for students to take part in assemblies and to reflect on their own beliefs and those of other students within the College. However, there are few opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of the religious beliefs of other cultures by, for example, consistently celebrating festivals of other faiths or bringing visitors from other ethnic groups into the College to talk to students about their beliefs and practices.
35. Provision for moral development is very good. Students develop a good sense of moral and world issues. For example in science, studies of pollution, recycling, genetic engineering and 'green issues' are used well to deepen students' understanding of current world affairs. In informal conversation they are able to argue their viewpoints with maturity and politeness. Expectations of behaviour within the College are made clear to students and all have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They show very good levels of respect for each other, frequently helping those with less sight than themselves to manoeuvre around classrooms or operate apparatus such as food mixers. Staff provide very good role models of language and interaction; they treat the students with dignity and respect and have very high expectations that they will use their residual vision to maximum benefit.
36. The College provides very good opportunities for students to develop social skills. At meal times students sit with friends and chat amicably, and, as at breakfast with the youngest students, the atmosphere is positive, with staff and students eating together. The wide range of residential and extra-curricular activities promote students' development very well, for some it is the first time they have been away from home. The skills students acquire in lessons are consolidated through regular use of local facilities. However, there is a need to increase the range of contexts for mixing with sighted members of the wider community.
37. Provision for students' cultural development is good and used well to promote and consolidate their skills and understanding in such subjects as art, music and English. Teachers make very good arrangements for students to understand the characteristics of the local community through studying the manufacture of porcelain and cooking traditional recipes, such as Worcestershire chicken. Opportunities for students to develop their understanding of other cultures is less well promoted with few visitors from ethnic groups coming to the College or visits to multicultural festival or events.
38. The College has made significant and very effective improvements in its provision since the last inspection when the balance of the curriculum was not satisfactory and there was no overall curriculum co-ordination. In the last two years new systems and areas of responsibility have been introduced and are already proving beneficial in meeting the needs of all the students. However, some systems have not yet been in

place long enough for sufficient information to be gathered to inform the College fully about the effectiveness of the curriculum overall.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

39. Overall, the arrangements for the welfare of students and for supporting their academic performance and personal development are good. Staff know individual students and their particular needs well, and always respond to them in a warm and encouraging way. Students have very good relationships with staff, making a significant impact on their quality of learning and life in the College. Staff successfully foster students' skills for independence, whilst providing appropriate support to ensure they develop self-confidence.
40. The College complies with the RNIB health and safety policy and procedures, and has efficient systems that are specific to New College. Students' safety is being protected well during building work on the new library and car park. Although there is little formal risk assessment within departments, teachers are mindful of health and safety in practice and students' use of equipment is tightly controlled. The issue of poor lighting around the site has been drawn to the attention of RNIB.
41. Arrangements for taking care of students' medical needs are comprehensive and well organised. There is a good number of staff fully qualified in first aid, both in College and in the residential accommodation. The College nurse oversees first aid provision and has appropriate safeguards for the administration of medication. She advises staff and gives clear guidance for dealing with specific medical conditions. Medical accommodation, including the sick bay and isolation room, is immaculately kept. Students' eye conditions are regularly checked and the College has the services of a doctor, physiotherapist and consultants.
42. Child protection procedures are in place and all staff are issued with appropriate guidelines. Students have access to a payphone in their houses with the Childline number clearly displayed, and they can see a College counsellor in confidence, but there is no well-publicised, formal procedure through which students can lodge a complaint, nor is there a completely independent person for them to contact. The programme for personal, social and health education is appropriately planned for all ages and includes sex education and drugs awareness. The College makes effective use of outside contributors, such as police liaison officers, to deliver the curriculum.
43. There are good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. These have been recently introduced after consideration by a working party of tutors and house parents. Students were consulted about the new code of conduct, which is based upon principles of respect and fairness, and reinforced by rewards. The new system deals with misbehaviour by monitoring it closely through a clear structure. Staff are reported to feel positive about its effectiveness. A new anti-bullying policy has been thoughtfully devised in consultation with teaching and care staff. Parents receive copies of the behaviour policy statement and the policy on bullying. The College keeps attendance registers and any absence is displayed on the notice board in the staff room.
44. Arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. Before entry they benefit from at least two days' residential experience when their levels of attainment and skills, particularly in mobility, and braille are assessed. The results of these assessments are used very effectively to help the teachers plan for the students' future learning outcomes.
45. All students benefit from 'basic individual educational plans.' Those with any other needs also have an additional educational plan, which identifies their strengths, weakness, targets for focussed support and methods by which these will be delivered. All students are assessed twice yearly and details of their achievements reported to parents. These assessment strategies, in conjunction with the annual review of students' statements, are effective in identifying progress, setting future work targets and informing parents of their children's gains and achievements.
46. Assessment strategies for GCSE, A level and other accredited qualifications are well matched to the awarding body's requirements. Good links with examining bodies enable the College to be very effective in ensuring that examination materials are presented in a form accessible to pupils. Teachers keep detailed notes both for formal records and informally as 'aides memoire'. The content and teaching of PSHE has recently been reorganised within the curriculum but the College has yet to introduce a system for assessment in Years 7 to 11. In Years 12 and 13 the students' work is assessed through the accredited Diploma of Achievement.
47. Staff monitor and support students' personal development well. All students have a form tutor with whom they enjoy close personal contact. Issues about students' personal progress are recorded by tutors and discussed at meetings with pastoral team leaders every three weeks. Form tutors and house parents have frequent and useful informal contact. Good practice of strategic meetings, already established to support students in Years 12 and 13, is being extended to improve liaison between tutors and care staff

responsible for younger students. The vice-principal attends meetings and closely monitors the system.

48. Staff regard the year review meetings as being particularly effective for monitoring the overall progress of students. These are held during the week before the annual review meetings and provide a structured opportunity for teaching and care staff to exchange and analyse information. Annual review reports indicate that staff know students' strengths and weaknesses well. Students and parents are fully involved in the annual review meetings, when targets are reviewed and new ones set.
49. The College is successful in helping students become independent and more self-reliant. Good support is given to this by College commitment to, and involvement in, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. The Living Skills programme, taught partly in College and partly in the residential accommodation is generally tailored to meet individual needs based on continual assessment of the students' level of skill. Students begin to shop and cater for themselves occasionally in the evenings and at weekends, gradually taking responsibility. Students learn other practical living skills, such as clothes washing and ironing, with the house parents. However, the limited number of residential staff means that differentiated programmes cannot be followed and, for some students, the appropriate balance between support and independence is not provided. By the time they are in the Sixth Form accommodation they are expected to cope with reduced supervision. This they are largely able to do but for some students joining the College for the first time in the Sixth Form, parents feel that supervision is insufficient. Students in Years 12 and 13 enjoy going outside the campus in their leisure time but there is little opportunity for students to join their sighted counterparts in the local community for such activities as musical events.
50. The College values the contribution of the careers service in preparing students for the next stage in their lives. One week's work experience for all students in Years 11 and 12 is organised well and they have a wide choice of good quality placements. These are discussed with the mobility tutor and students are encouraged to travel independently. Students make a summary assessment of the placement, which is entered in their records of achievement. Careers education provision for Years 12 and 13 includes good guidance for students applying to colleges and universities. Arrangements are made for students to visit some of these establishments as part of the programme. Staff report that the Leavers' Conference, with guest speakers such as ex-students and university lecturers, makes an important contribution to advising and preparing students for the next step.
51. The SENCO has very good structures in place to support the provision for students with special educational needs. The files are extremely well maintained with good detail of interventions and achievements. Targets are regularly well defined but in some cases could be clearer in terms of what the students should know, understand and do. The College meets all requirements regarding the Annual Reviews of students' statements in the Code of Practice. Parents receive a report on progress before the Annual Review so that when they attend they are well informed.
52. Students do not now see an ophthalmologist in College but, where necessary, communication with the student's consultant is made through the College medical officer and nurse. Annual assessments of students' functional vision are made by the Partially Sighted Society. The College keeps up-to-date records of the students' visual function, requirement for glasses and need for low vision aids. These detailed records are made available to staff. Low vision aids are prescribed for students with useful vision. At present this constitutes nearly half the College. These magnifying aids become the students' property. In addition, students have their glasses checked regularly and visit a local optician for any checks to prescriptions and repairs. The College has a pool of low-vision aids which can be loaned for experimental use to students should the need arise. This is good practice. However, during the inspection little evidence was seen of the students using low vision aids and there is no training programme in their use. Many students state that they prefer large print but such practice will not assist independence in the outside world.
53. Students receive counselling relating to visual impairment if it is required. A significant minority of students receives help from trained counsellors to whom they have independent access or to whom they may be referred by house parents or teaching staff. Occasionally, this service will be identified in the student's statement. In addition to this work, the College has negotiated a very good service where the family support counsellor from Moorfields Eye Hospital provides advice for students. The College also provides good support in providing access to genetic counselling for all post-16 students on request.
54. A number of students have physical disabilities. The College provides physiotherapy to meet their needs. However, there are tensions between an extensive academic curriculum and time to ensure that students receive appropriate therapy.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. Most parents are pleased with what the College provides and appreciate the support that staff give their children to help them enjoy College life. A significant number, however, feel that communication is

unsatisfactory and that the College does not work in close partnership with them. The quality of written information for parents is good, particularly regarding progress in the annual review report, although some parents would like more frequent reports on progress.

56. Parents are positive about the standard of teaching, and the impact that the staff's high expectations have on their children's achievements. They think highly of the guidance from staff that enables their children to become more responsible and independent. Although parents say they are comfortable approaching the College with their concerns, some maintain that concerns are not always dealt with or satisfactorily resolved. A significant minority of parents does not feel sufficiently informed about what is happening in the College and this has led to a loss of confidence and uncertainty about the quality of provision. They are especially concerned about the effects of financial cuts, particularly as they affect supervision in the residential accommodation and extra-curricular activities. However, parents value the contact they have with tutors and house parents, who respond well to their concerns. The College seeks parents' views through regular meetings with parent governors.
57. Parents now receive a revised pack of information at the beginning of each academic year to keep them up to date with, for example, recent staff appointments and new policies. The first pack was sent this year and provides useful details that help parents stay in touch. Parents are invited to express their views on this fresh development. New parents receive a comprehensive set of booklets that give a good range of information, including a detailed home-college agreement. Later in the autumn term, these parents are invited to meet staff and discuss how well their children are adjusting.
58. Annual review reports provide good quality information about academic attainment and personal development. They include detailed reports from house parents on social development, extra-curricular achievement, attitude and behaviour, and statements from the College nurse and mobility tutor. Form tutors report on general progress and provide a summary of the whole review. Parents are expected to attend the review meetings and are fully involved in the review process, when their advice is sought and noted. Some parents would like more information about their children's progress between reports.
59. Parents give good support to concerts, plays, the Christmas party, sporting fixtures and Speech Day. Some parents help with Duke of Edinburgh expeditions and skiing trips. Staff make use of the opportunity to speak to parents when they bring their children back to College after the weekend or at the end of the holidays.
60. There is a strongly held view by some parents that the College and the RNIB do not work towards mutually agreed objectives and that confusion about levels of responsibility impedes parents' ability to be effective in playing a part in the life of the College.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

61. Leadership and management of the College are satisfactory overall, although made difficult by the division of responsibilities between RNIB Education & Employment Division, governors and senior management. The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities but is unable to determine a medium or longer-term strategy for the College and, whilst supportive and informed of matters through governors' meetings, does not have a view of the College's strengths and weaknesses based on links to subject departments or planned, regular visits to classrooms. Many individual governors are very supportive of the work of the College, new committees now concern themselves with pastoral and curriculum matters, and governors are positive about the further development of their role.
62. The College meets well its central aims to provide a high quality academic education within a supportive boarding environment in partnership with parents and other agencies. The priorities for development at this time, which include supporting the Board of Governors, introducing performance management initiatives and increasing the efficiency of the use of all resources, are appropriate. The present Improvement Plan, which lists these priorities, is an inadequate working document in that it lacks details of dates, responsibilities and the finance to be allocated. This is in part due to the uncertainty surrounding nearly all planning beyond a few months ahead, which is related to the lack of a delegated budget.
63. As a group, the SMT is new but there is already a clear definition emerging of the various responsibilities of each member. A significant amount of other change is occurring: for example, the College is changing the shape of its middle management, basically from seven small faculties to three broader curriculum teams; administrative and financial procedures are being made more systematic; new structures for pastoral support are being introduced. Delivering all this presents a major challenge to senior management, coming as it does at the same time as the requirement to effect rapid savings in response to a fall in student numbers and a reduction in the 'subsidy' from RNIB Education & Employment Division, and the introduction of AS level accreditation.
64. The management and administration of a number of these key activities has been adversely affected in

these circumstances, reductions have been made quickly and not always smoothly, and this has led to a drop in morale amongst many staff. The management of change, and particularly reducing staffing costs to meet the requirements of the 2000-2001 budget, albeit necessary, is widely, although inaccurately, viewed on site to have been piecemeal, poorly consulted on and lacking an overall, coherent strategy based on a thorough audit of the College's needs. The essential administration of paperwork underpinning this exercise is inconsistent. The management of these reductions in expenditure, and the introduction of a new curriculum team structure has not convinced some staff. Teaching of a high quality continues unabated, but there has been some loss of confidence in the communication from, and the genuine consultative intentions of, senior management.

65. Monitoring and evaluation of staff, teaching and learning are just satisfactory overall. A strength is monitoring and evaluation of work and plans at the subject department level; particularly, but not exclusively, in the core subjects. The evaluation of what is spent, how and why has been improved by the Chief Administrative Finance Officer (CAFO) who is building well on the work of his predecessor. The appraisal of teachers is inadequate and there is no system of observation of classroom teaching. The College plans to introduce in the future a performance management system similar to national initiatives. Similarly, there is an intention to improve the appraisal of non-teaching staff; currently there are regular supervisory meetings with senior houseparents, but it is recognised that these need to be formalised and better recorded. Staff monitoring, assessment and appraisal and training are insufficiently linked and too informal in some areas, although practice in the Sixth Form residential house is better. Many departments have targets for improvement and development, which are monitored well; the College has no overall targets at this time.
66. It is impossible to offer a firm overall judgement on the strategic management of the budget by governors and senior management on site because of their not having a delegated budget, allied to the uncertainties over the number of students likely to be attending in even one year's time, and changes in the level of subsidy from RNIB Education & Employment Division year to year. This means that governors cannot exercise full oversight or proper management of future planning, and this was the situation noted at the time of the last inspection. The RNIB Education & Employment Division is considering delegating budgets to schools and colleges and recognises that, in this regard, present practice is out of step with mainstream and many other non-maintained institutions. There is also a recognition that cost centres within RNIB, this college for example, might be able to achieve greater efficiency and better value given the freedom to seek some services from providers other than RNIB. This consideration is ongoing within RNIB Education & Employment Division; the present situation makes the full pursuit of Best Value difficult for the College and, seen from the College perspective, RNIB corporate overheads lack transparency. Strategic imperatives are emerging within the College; for example, relating to the need to address admission levels and marketing, and the need to examine critically the balance between permanent and temporary staffing in the future.
67. The College manages satisfactorily the money over which it has control which is a good achievement bearing in mind that items can be added to, or removed from, the budget in mid-year. The most recent audit report (July 2000) found that financial records and control systems were sound; most, but not all, of the recommendations of the previous audit had been implemented. Almost all the financial arrangements and procedures in the College are currently being reviewed by the newly-appointed officer (CAFO) to ensure greater efficiency, transparency and accountability; in, for example, subject department budgets where there are significant anomalies. The budget available for staff training is used satisfactorily; an adequate sum is committed to appropriate training required by RNIB Education & Employment Division of teachers and care staff. Arrangements are improving from a very unsatisfactory situation where training was agreed on the basis of individual request, without much overall planning or accountability. There is greater monitoring now, through a senior manager, and records of training undertaken by individuals can be traced through a computerised record. The next step, which is recognised as necessary in the College, is to develop a professional development programme which in part is derived from an identification of institutional and individual need arising from monitoring and evaluation (including the direct observation of teaching, which is proposed to start next term).
68. The College's arrangements for induction of new staff and the provision it makes for teachers in training are good. Although there is no induction handbook in the College, the RNIB Education & Employment Division has its own procedures and due regard is given to DfEE guidelines; the programme of prior visits, familiarisation and Braille lessons constitutes a good introduction for new staff. The College provides placement of up to three weeks for about five student teachers in training each year from a range of courses; contact with these students from the 'supervising' teacher on site is daily, and the placements are managed carefully and successfully overall.
69. The College has very good provision of teachers, who are very well qualified for the subjects they teach, all of whom have or are getting appropriate qualifications for teaching visually impaired students.

Qualifications are a good match to the range of 'A' and 'AS' level subjects taught. There are inadequacies in the numbers of staff available on the boarding side where there is a shortage of full-time professional staff to operate the duty rotas and to provide support for younger students in particular to have differentiated independence programmes. The College is well provided with various levels of administrative and secretarial staff who provide very good support to teachers and managers.

70. The amount and quality of accommodation available to the College is very good overall. The space available is generous in many areas, although it is not always in the ideal place or right size, and the College could accommodate more day and boarding students without much difficulty. The very good quality accommodation promotes students' access to the curriculum. There are many rooms available for clerical, administrative and management staff. Boarding provision is adequate and in good condition. The accommodation is being extended currently with changes involving the chapel and the library. Accommodation for physical education, including a gym, multi-gym, swimming pool and fields, is good and the College supplements this with extensive use of facilities off-site. Science and information technology are extremely well provided for and there is a generous allocation of good quality practice rooms for music. However, the accommodation available to the English department is cramped for some of the bigger classes, even though larger rooms are empty and available at the same time. Outdoor areas and the site in general are very well maintained; parts of the site are insufficiently lit at night. Overall, this is a spacious and well-cared for learning environment.
71. Resources available for learning are good overall and very good in some subjects; for example, in science, art and, particularly, information technology. In religious education, where there is an improving range of artefacts, resources are satisfactory and increasing from a low base. Arrangements for students' use of ICT as a tool to support their learning and, in particular, to help them deal with their visual difficulties, are very good. The availability and use of laptop computers, particularly amongst older students, is very good. The use made more generally of new technologies throughout the site, in both the curriculum and for administrative purposes, is excellent. There is a shortage of large print books in some areas, in science for example. Here, as in many subjects, the shortage would be greater but for the considerable efforts of teachers producing their own; this is particularly the case in history and geography. For the most part, resources are in good condition, although some musical instruments are not. There are sufficient resources available in the boarding houses to support a range of activities, with good provision, for example, for outdoor pursuits.
72. The College has excellent facilities for the production of braille, large print material, tapes and specialist diagrams in both braille and print. Texts can be produced for students on demand to support a wide number of subjects to A-Level. The resources department also produces examination materials. However, teachers still spend a considerable amount of time in transcribing resources as the demands on the department are very high and there is a need for materials to be carefully checked.
73. The library is an improving resource with a good development plan. A librarian has been appointed and the old library is shortly to transfer to a new purpose built building. Much work has taken place to renew out of date texts with library loans from NLB. Students are encouraged to use the library and the librarian holds lunchtime reading sessions of popular teenage fiction. There is a three-year development plan for the library which gives clear priorities for the introduction of new and appropriate texts in print and braille to support the various National Curriculum areas. There are detailed plans for new technology to be made available so that all students will be able to use the Internet irrespective of their lack of sight.
74. The policy of the College is to provide as wide a range of post-16 courses as possible. The College is very successful in meeting this aim, and in achieving standards above average in the Sixth Form across the range of subjects, and frequently at the highest A level grades. Class sizes are frequently small. The overall cost effectiveness of the Sixth Form, however, is good, because the range of accreditation is wide; progression to higher education is the norm; and the taught curriculum and extra-curricular activities are, together, highly successful in promoting students' personal and social development, and their independence skills.
75. The fees charged do not fully reflect the costs of education at the College because RNIB Education and Employment Division provides some additional money. Sixth form groups, although small, are not significantly smaller than groups of younger students and are very efficient in the context of this college. Bearing in mind the quality of the teaching and the learning environment, and the progress made and the students' attainment across a wide range of studies, the College gives good value for the fees it charges.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

76. In order to further improve provision at the College and to enable it to deal effectively with the challenges it faces in the short and longer-term future, the governing body and senior management team should:

- establish with establish with RNIB Corporate management and Education and Employment Division a governing and financial framework that will provide the basis for realistic strategic planning, to enable any necessary changes in the staffing establishment to be adequately planned and provide adequate safeguards against the effect of sudden, significant drops in student numbers.. **(This was a Key Issue in the previous report, which has not been resolved.);**
- continue the good start made by the new SMT in establishing systems for taking and implementing management decisions based on evaluation and monitoring of the College's needs and performance and involve governors more fully in this;
- improve the staffing in the residential provision and ensure that practice is sufficiently monitored to ensure that it is consistent from house to house, especially in relation to issues of mobility and independence;
- increase the opportunities for students to integrate with the local community to enable students to participate in a good range of academic and recreational activities along with sighted people;
- review communications with parents to ensure that the good features of the College are adequately celebrated and, in particular, undertake monitoring to ensure that parents' concerns are fully and sensitively addressed.

77. In addition to these, the Governors should address the less important issues identified in the report by :

- agreeing all job descriptions and ensuring that these are appropriate for the needs of the College;
- establishing a formal structure to support EAL students;
- ensuring that there is adequate trained support for transcribing materials to make them accessible to students and reduce the amount of time spent by teachers on this task.
- resolving the tension in timetabling between the academic curriculum and mobility, braille and therapy needs.
- encouraging students in the use of low vision aids.

PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	108
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	65

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	49	36	6	0	0	0

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

Information about the College's students

Students on the College's roll	No of students
Number of students on the College's roll	99
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	N/A

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	5

Student mobility in the last College year	No of students
Students who joined the College other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Students who left the College other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence	%	Unauthorised absence	%
College data	5	College data	0

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Total
	2000	14

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Total	12	7	7
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	86 (80)	50 (73)	50 (60)
	National	63 (64)	65 (64)	59 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	35 (45)	50 (33)	36 (33)
	National	28 (31)	42 (37)	30 (28)

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Total
	2000	14

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	Total	10	14	14
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	College	71 (85)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	47 (46)	92 (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	College	52 (58)
	National	39 (38)

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Numbers of students who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Total	Average A/AS points score per candidate	All students	
	2000	19			
				College	18.3 (15.6)
				National	18.1 (17.9)

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	4
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	89
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last college year

There were no exclusions in the previous year

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	35
Number of students per qualified teacher	2.8
Average class size	5

Education and residential support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	32
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1346

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
	£
Total income	2,776,573
Total expenditure	3,134,742
Expenditure per student	29,026
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	(358,169)

Budget deficits are not, in fact, carried forward but are met by way of variable grant from RNIB so that there is actually no carry-forward. The level of planned subsidy is determined in advance of the financial year to which it relates so that it forms part of the budget process. However, the final level can only be determined at a late stage in the financial year, when the extent of actual overspend is established.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	99
Number of questionnaires returned	61

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	62	32	3	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	52	36	7	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	51	42	2	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	36	6	0	17
The teaching is good.	52	38	5	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	39	19	3	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	36	8	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	25	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	38	33	19	8	2
The school is well led and managed.	47	34	3	12	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	65	33	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	53	40	2	5	0

Other issues raised by parents

A number of parents expressed concern about changes in extra-curricular activities and linked these concerns to dissatisfaction they had about communications. The delays in appointments made as a result of recent changes meant that the full programme was not in operation at the time of the inspection, but longer-term arrangements are secure. Well-founded concerns about the future of the College in the light of what appear to be reducing numbers of students are not adequately answered and the inspection team felt strongly that the ability of the College to market itself and to demonstrate a flexible response to changing circumstances were significantly impeded by the framework within which the College operates, rather than by any shortcomings in the senior management.

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

ENGLISH

78. As at the time of the last inspection, attainment in English continues to be above, and in some cases well above, national expectations throughout the age range. Teaching is mostly very good, and sometimes excellent, throughout Key Stages 3 and 4; all teaching seen in the Sixth Form was excellent. This indicates that the school has maintained the high standards reported at the last inspection. Very good progress is being made in writing, including writing in Braille and, particularly, using the word processor in the Sixth Form. Speaking and listening skills are highly developed throughout.
79. In Year 7, teaching and learning in a lesson examining extracts from a Harry Potter story are very good because the work is closely related to National Curriculum Programmes of Study and is adapted well to the needs of the visually impaired; noticeable improvement is occurring in reading, questioning and in answering comprehension questions. As a result of exceptional preparation and skilful management of learning, students in this year group make excellent progress in an introduction to Old English, during which they translate and pronounce words with increasing confidence and competence. In Year 8, well-planned teaching with a good knowledge of the text being studied is exploring issues sensitively at an appropriate level. Attention to the needs of individual students is given despite the fact that there is no classroom assistant support. In conjunction with very good work habits amongst the students, this leads to very good progress in understanding what is read and heard in studying 'Waiting for Anya'. Students offer lengthy and cogent explanations of what is being developed in the story they are reading; explanation and analysis are above age expectation; students are making sound deductions and developing well-reasoned arguments.
80. Year 10 students, exploring 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', are making very good progress in drawing on prior learning, in understanding the content and context of the poem and in learning about Coleridge's personal life history. Very good teaching to Year 11 students studying 'An Inspector Calls' is leading to very good progress in understanding of the text in preparation for GCSE; here the text is brought to life by very skilled interpretative reading by the teacher and learning is fostered well by good pace in a lesson in which students and teacher engage in a shared task, showing mutual respect and very good relationships. Elsewhere, students at the end of Key Stage 4 are making very good progress in sharpening their observations of character, and extending their vocabulary of literacy criticism, during a detailed examination of relationships in 'Educating Rita'. Very good teaching here secures excellent involvement in listening, discussing and acting amongst students who challenge each other in debate in a sensible, mature fashion without anybody becoming defensive.
81. Students are being prepared well for 'A' Level entrance in the Sixth Form. Here, very mature attitudes and study habits amongst students, allied to knowledgeable and enthusiastic teaching, is promoting very good achievement. For example, skilled teaching to Year 13 students, who have very mature approaches to study and who mix steady application with gentle humour, is resulting in excellent insights into Shakespeare's craft and a growing appreciation of the subtleties of character and motivation. Teaching here achieves excellence in the extent to which it secures an ideal balance of guidance, encouragement and improving responses in the context of very good relationships amongst all in the room. Combined with work in theatre studies, this teaching is sharpening students' powers of critical analysis.
82. Progress amongst students in Year 12 in theatre studies is very good because of excellent teaching to a very disciplined and highly motivated group. Overall, the standards being achieved are high. Students' improving understanding of text (for example, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream') is informing their acting and directing. Insights into the importance of tone of voice, gesture and the timing of movement are developing well. Enthusiastic students collaborate in an atmosphere of excellent relationships; the balance of analysis and performance is astutely managed; amongst the students, confidence and self-awareness is growing. Work in expressive arts at GCSE, and in 'A' level theatre studies, is making a wider and significant contribution to speaking and listening, confidence, and the exploration of issues, conflicts and emotions; a similar contribution is made by studies in law and in critical thinking elsewhere in the curriculum.
83. English is managed very well. A clear philosophy is detailed in a comprehensive departmental handbook. The department continues to extend the range of materials available in Braille and large print, using the National Library and in-house facilities, for example. As a result of the limited availability of reprographic technician time, a considerable amount of teacher time is taken up in this preparation, which is not always the most efficient use of their time. An excellent variety of expertise exists amongst the English teachers,

ranging from specialisms in Chaucer studies, through the nineteenth century to modern poets and theatre studies. Assessment is thorough and includes samples of students' work retained in portfolios to help moderation and to illustrate progress. The department uses visits, for example to The Globe or more local theatres, effectively in support of learning. Information technology is used to good effect, for example, in Year 13 imaginative writing around the story of Hamlet. Accommodation is barely satisfactory for the teaching of English. At times teaching groups are working in cramped circumstances although there are, at the same time, larger rooms not being used; storage space is at a premium.

MATHEMATICS

84. Students achieve very well in mathematics; average attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average. In national mathematics tests at fourteen years in 2000 the higher attainers reached above average standards while the lower achievers attained below the national average. In other years, there has generally been a higher proportion of pupils attaining above average levels. Good standards have been maintained consistently since the last inspection.
85. Attainment in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students attaining the higher (A*-C) grades was well above the national figure. This is a significant improvement upon the standards noted at the time of the previous inspection. Although relatively few students progress to study Advanced level mathematics in the Sixth Form, their results are good and often very good, the majority attaining the highest grades.
86. At all levels students enjoy full access to the mathematics curriculum. From Year 7, students are taught that mathematics is essentially a way of understanding the world. They learn well the basics of mathematics and also how mathematics can be applied in problem solving. Consequently, they respond well to lessons and enjoy the knowledge and understanding that develops as they progress through the course. Students are fiercely determined to learn and do so with impressive commitment to getting the right answer and understanding the result.
87. At Key Stage 3, students know how to multiply decimal numbers by powers of ten and where to place the decimal point. Students solve simple equations, plot data on bar charts and pictograms and understand the rules of probability. They recognise patterns in number and are adept at finding the next terms. Students have ample opportunity to practise and refine their skills when they play a mathematical game called *Frogs* in which one set of chessmen changes position with another in the smallest number of moves. They record the pattern of moves and describe well what they have discovered. In the inspection week, the programme was supported by a visit to a show called *Maths and Legends* where students sat alongside their sighted contemporaries and demonstrated their prowess in mathematics.
88. At Key Stage 4, students significantly extend their knowledge of number, shape, measure and data collection. Most progress rapidly to GCSE standard. Classroom displays of their work include the nets of regular 3-D shapes and graphical ways of depicting averages. Students solve simultaneous equations, interpret cumulative frequency curves and solve problems of distance and direction using trigonometry. In one lesson students use their well-developed numerical skills to determine how many cereal packets it would be necessary to buy to get a full set of six picture cards. Some students effectively use the computer to work out a result.
89. In the Sixth Form students embark upon Advanced level GCSE courses where the options they study are based upon their interests and needs. By this stage, students are highly numerate and have a very good grounding in the essentials of mathematics. They apply what they know to solving practical problems. Students are expected to think and to reflect. They have a good mathematical vocabulary, which aids clarity of thought. In one lesson, a student describes the significant features of a series of complex graphs by touch alone. He engages in a dialogue with his teacher that is a perfect example of the unity of purpose with which both approach the work. In another lesson, two students endeavour to determine the significant parameters in pulling a heavy block across the floor. Students work closely together, pooling their knowledge in deciding what is required. Students are well prepared for courses in higher education.
90. Students apply their numerical skills well in other subjects. For example, students make good use of bar charts in geography to show the distribution of land. Their measuring skills are put to good use in science and design and technology. In history, a time line ensures that students remember significant dates. In music, the relationship with mathematics is firmly established and a well-developed sense of rhythm and pattern unlocks the door to understanding musical form.
91. The overall quality of teaching is good and it has very good features. Teaching is sound or better in all lessons observed. It is good or better in more than nine out of ten lessons. Teaching is notably better than at the previous inspection. Although the quality of lesson plans is variable the overall quality of medium and long term planning is much better than it was. Teachers plan together and are sensitive to the individual needs of the students. Teachers spend a large proportion of their own time in preparing good

quality work sheets and in transcribing text into Braille for those unable to read print. The demands of mathematics are complex, particularly the presentation of diagrams. Teachers have devised ingenious methods for conveying information to students. Assessment is now good and teachers know exactly the skills and knowledge that students have acquired and plan for individual need. Assessment records are well kept and easily accessible. Marking is good. Teachers take time and care in explaining how students may improve the quality of their work. Consequently, students make extra effort to rise to the challenge of mathematics because they know that their efforts will be valued. Teachers manage the students very well and are acutely sensitive to individual need. Relationships are excellent and based upon mutual respect. Teachers encourage students to use the language of mathematics and to think and reflect. They encourage students to work independently, thus developing self-confidence, but intervene at exactly the right moment to clarify key points. Good humour is never far away from the classroom and this helps to create a safe and secure learning environment in which all students thrive.

92. The department is very well led and managed by a very good mathematician and teacher. The strength of the department is teamwork and all work together for the good of the students. Teachers work long and hard preparing materials in Braille and this has a major impact upon the quality of learning. The development plan for the subject identifies appropriate priorities that will secure the present high standard of teaching and learning. As was noted at the previous inspection there is no formal structure for the monitoring and evaluation of teachers' performance, although good practice is shared as a matter of course. There is no evidence of the 'extensive non-contact time' noted at the previous inspection. The department is forward-looking and totally committed to the needs of the students.

SCIENCE

93. Standards in science are above average overall when compared nationally. Standards in science on entry to the College, at the age of eleven, are in line with the national average. Current Year 7 students have made exceptional progress in their first half term, indicating an excellent response to highly effective teaching and developing the confidence to use basic laboratory equipment independently. They are achieving very high standards in science. Their motivation is excellent and they are very eager to succeed. Standards in national science tests at fourteen years in recent years have been average overall; the higher attainers reach above average standards; the lower achievers attain below the national average. Students in the current Year 9 are also achieving average standards but they are progressing very well in relation to their own past performances. The lowest attainers, for example, are confidently using light probes to detect changes in solutions during diffusion experiments. They can explain their results to their peers who, in turn, ask well-focused questions to further their own understanding.
94. Progress in Key Stage 4 is exceptionally rapid, and the GCSE results in the double award science examinations are well above average. There is no significant difference between the grades achieved in the biology, chemistry and physics components of the GCSE examination, because the quality of science teaching is very high in all three disciplines. The standard reached in Year 11 across the full range of investigative skills is above average, an exceptional achievement for partially sighted and totally blind students. Their skills of analysis and application are very well developed.
95. Achievements in the Sixth Form are very good and above average when compared with GCE A level results in maintained schools nationally. Chemistry students are making excellent progress in their independent access to practical work. They titrate, for example, using specially adapted burettes to measure volumes, and light probes to detect the end points of their titrations accurately to 0.1 ml. The biologists are given excellent access to well prepared materials to learn about DNA in viruses. The physicists use their mathematical and information and communications technology skills very well to analyse spreadsheets and calculate, for example, the speed that a one-kilogram mass will need to leave the earth to reach the surface of the moon. They apply their prior learning about imaging and sensing to understand the working of a digital camera.
96. The overall quality of teaching in science is very good with some excellent teaching. Teaching is always at least of a good standard and has improved since the last inspection. The most significant strengths in science teaching are the use of highly effective methods and excellent adaptation of equipment to facilitate students' access to practical work. As a result, students from Year 7 onwards perform most practical tasks independently and can effectively communicate independently the results of their scientific investigations. The whole team of science teachers has very good knowledge of their specialist subjects, they teach with, and generate, a high level of enthusiasm for science. This very strong science teaching team, working in excellent accommodation, and to a very high professional standard, is further enhanced by excellent support from the science technician. Excellent adaptation of published resources, requiring specialist science skills, and time-consuming research to adapt commercially available scientific equipment to meet the different needs of partially sighted and blind students; have, historically, required far

more time than has been available to teachers in their weekly non-contact time. It is too soon to judge the impact on developments in the science department of the very recent cuts in science teaching and technician staffing levels.

97. Assessment procedures, including end of topic testing, are well established from Year 7. Thorough record keeping and detailed annual reporting keep good track of individual progress. Science teachers receive commendation from examination boards for the high quality of their coursework assessments. The quality of questioning during lessons, especially during Sixth Form practical work, to monitor understanding of what is being taught, is less well developed than the more formal assessment procedures.
98. The science curriculum is very effective and closely follows the National Curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4. It is enriched by a programme of extra-curricular visits and by visitors to College. Homework is a well-established and integral part of the science curriculum and is always thoroughly assessed and discussed. The science team are excellent role models in supporting students' personal and social development. Through their presentation of topics such as re-cycling, green issues, genetic engineering and pollution, staff develop students' understanding of ethical issues. The newly appointed head of science has made a good start in reviewing science documentation; but more work still needs to be done to update the policies and schemes of work in the handbook.

ART AND DESIGN

99. Achievement in art and design is very good. Students' attainments and their examination results are well in line with national averages and at a similar level to that found at the last inspection. Students' achievements in art have traditionally been very good and current students are on target to maintain these standards with predicted B grades at A level. The changes in the syllabus have been incorporated successfully into planning and students are becoming skilled in planning, designing making and evaluating as part of the subject requirements. Their colourful tactile and textured displays enhance the College both in and around classrooms and demonstrate the obvious pride students take in their work. The concentrated and consistent way in which the students work within lessons shows their interest and commitment to the subject as well as their ability to succeed.
100. Younger Key Stage 3 students show great interest and natural curiosity in the subject. They listen very attentively to the teacher as he talks about the qualities of clay, skilfully linking the information he gives to previous work so that they can refer back to their successes. Students recall their cross-curricular work on spirals in English and drama; they define the meaning of the word and clearly understand that their own thinking can follow a 'spiral' model. They mould the clay in their fingers and roll their clay to a long even shape, which they then carefully turn into a spiral shape. They make links to objects they know such as place mats, work which establishes firmly the 'use' of the shape as well as the abstract meaning of the term.
101. By the end of the key stage, students work with a variety of materials and use tools, such as knives, with care and safety. Teachers use very good skills in questioning to check students' understanding, promote their use of the technical vocabulary and to extend their thinking. When a student has difficulty answering a question, the teacher is rigorous but supportive in explaining the tasks again. Students enjoy very good relationships with each other and with the staff. They make constructive comments and suggestions about the work.
102. Sixth form students show very advanced skills of independent learning as a direct result of the expectations placed upon them by the teacher. They are encouraged to be fully responsible for their chosen projects and they only ask for help when it is needed. The teacher maintains a supportive overview and, feeds in suggestions by asking questions, which guide the students to a choice of solutions. For example, one A level student explained her difficulty in deciding on suitable materials and methods of fixing wings to her model. She outlined the processes she had followed with the teacher to find a suitable solution – an exercise, which clearly deepened her understanding of the qualities of various materials.
103. In all lessons, behaviour and response to work are at least very good and often excellent. The atmosphere in the art room is one of calm, concentration and confidence. Students discuss their work with maturity and justify their choice of projects by reference to the work of other artists or source materials that they have enjoyed. Because the teacher has high expectations that they will work hard and concentrate on their own work, they co-operate well and maintain their attention throughout the lesson. This results in high standards of work particularly where detailed and complex techniques are required.
104. A course in Expressive Arts offers students in Year 11 an opportunity to work across the disciplines. The quality of teaching and learning in these lessons is very good. Students are clearly enjoying the challenge of working creatively in the range of media. Several have gained inspiration from College visits. For example as a result of a visit to a 'Senses' exhibition in Birmingham, one student is working on a sound dome, linking the design and construction work in art to his musical composition of a storm. Another

student, inspired by Christo's work in wrapping buildings, is wrapping 'spiders' in various kinds of paper. He has clearly learnt a great deal about the difficulties of three-dimensional work as he outlines the problems he encountered and the strategies he has developed to overcome them. He is now working on the musical component of this project.

105. The art drama and music teachers work very closely as a team to promote students' gains in learning in this subject. They enjoy very good relationships with the students, explain the GCSE requirements and ensure that the students understand through making their high expectations clear to them. The introduction of the subject is already proving beneficial in enabling students to plan for integrating a range of skills into a complete presentation. The subject is currently only available for students at Key Stage 4 working towards GCSE but, with future success, may also benefit students in the Sixth Form.
106. Teaching in art and expressive arts is very good and often excellent. The art teacher is a practising artist and has excellent knowledge of the subject. His quiet, non-interventionist but supportive approach motivates students to maximise their efforts and produce original work. Teachers of expressive arts are generous with their time and have taken students to many exhibitions and galleries to inspire them. One A level student has visited a local potter and studied his techniques of design and throwing better to help him with his three-dimensional work. Art and expressive arts make good contributions to students' social, moral and cultural development.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

107. All students are achieving a good standard of work developing their personal capabilities and skills on a course matched as fully as possible to National Curriculum requirements, although they do not take a formal qualification in this subject. At the end of Key Stage 3 students make a Christmas cake complete with iced decoration to their own design. They design and make an ornate surround for a clock mechanism. At the end of Key Stage 4 they interpret a circuit diagram for a simple continuity tester. They write a product specification and draw up a work schedule. They assemble and evaluate the finished product.
108. The quality of teaching is very good throughout the College. The teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject. They organise their students and manage practical work to a good standard. Very good teaching took place in Year 7 when students were testing commercially produced mousse against their own produce. Teachers set high expectations for learning to which their students readily respond. This includes teaching skills, such as soldering in lessons on electronics. Very good classroom organisation and management coupled to close individual attention enables students to develop the maximum range of skills possible within their personal capabilities.
109. The quality of learning is good throughout the College. This is a consequence of a good scheme of work that ensures a rich and stimulating education tailored to the long-term needs of the students. In particular there is good emphasis on the development of life skills. There has been an improvement in the standard of students' work since the last inspection and the quality of learning has further improved.
110. Students make very good progress when they study food technology, for example in Year 10, when they make products using different types of pastry. They successfully advance their skills in designing and evaluating the things they have made taking into consideration the views and preferences of the users of their products. They sustain their concentration on their tasks and many clearly enjoy this subject. They work hard and persevere even when faced with very challenging projects, such as the construction of a circuit that includes soldered joints. They complete their work with care and attention to the best of their abilities.
111. The scheme of work is carefully constructed to maximise students' learning according to their long-term needs. Their learning experience is broadly based and includes good use of information and communications technology. Procedures for assessing students' work are good. An experienced, knowledgeable and enthusiastic member of staff manages the subject to a very good standard.

GEOGRAPHY

112. Achievement is very good and students attain well in relation to those of similar age. By age 14, most students have a strong grasp of the interaction of physical and human processes and link this to their analysis of case studies, such as the environmental damage caused by the Exxon Valdez disaster. They are skilful in finding and using relevant sources for their enquiries and make very good use of ICT. They have a strong understanding of place and relate, with accuracy, the economic activity and population distributions of countries they have studied, to facts about climate and relief. They have, through adaptive techniques, developed the skill of interpreting maps and symbols and they have extended vocabularies of technical terms.

113. By age 16, students who take geography at GCSE achieve well. All those entering the examination are on course to achieve grades between A and C. A small number of students are taking geography at AS and A level. All are predicted to gain a grade between A and C on completion of their courses. In 2000, 3 students achieved passes at GCSE. There were no entries at AS and A level.
114. Students have very positive and mature attitudes to learning. They make consistent efforts in class and, in completing their homework, they use initiative to ensure that they acquire essential information in usable forms; very good use is made of their ICT skills. Students' behaviour is excellent.
115. Teaching is very good and enables the students to develop their enjoyment of the subject and to take pleasure in their learning. Students are very well known to their teachers who are skilful in adapting teaching to meet their particular needs. Teaching is informed by very good subject knowledge and lessons are well planned. Assessments of students' work are accurate and are used well in planning and in keeping students informed about their progress. Students gain confidence as they successfully meet challenges within their work.
116. Accommodation is spacious and there are sufficient resources to support learning. The quantity and quality of resources of all kinds, including texts, maps and globes, is a tribute to the technical knowledge and dedicated energy of the former co-ordinator who produced many of these. Resources, however, need updating frequently due to changes in course requirements. Because there are insufficient technical support staff, the burden of making these adaptations to texts and maps falls heavily on the teachers, which is not the best use of their non-teaching time.

HISTORY

117. Achievement in history is very good and, by the age of 14, students attain at a level that is good in comparison to their peers in mainstream schools. In their work on Britain from 1750 to 1900 they show very good skills in interpreting source materials that are adapted from text to braille. They read with understanding complex sources such as reports to parliamentary committees and identify and evaluate the evidence these contain. They show some independence in pursuing their lines of enquiry and contribute their ideas clearly.
118. By the age of 16, there is very good achievement and good attainment. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, 10 candidates were entered and 8 obtained grades in the range A to C. Students' undertaking the GCSE courses this year are in line to achieve grades in the range A to C. Volume of work may lead to the decision to enter some candidates for the short course option.
119. A number of students in Years 12 and 13 take AS and A level courses in history. In 2000, 6 students were entered and achieved grades in the range A – D at A level. At both AS level in Year 12, and A level Year 13, students are on course to achieve grades in the range A – C.
120. Students enjoy their work in history. While this is particularly apparent in Year 7, where the story of William's conquest of England is enlivened by an exchange of questions and answers between students and the late King William by means of e-mail, it is also a feature of lessons across the age range. Students in Year 12 show very good attitudes to learning as they balance evidence on the absolutism of Louis XIV as do those in Year 13 who assemble evidence of the decline of Spain in the 17th century against criteria of time and significance. Behaviour is generally excellent.
121. Across the age range teaching is of very good quality. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and deep knowledge of the learning characteristics of their students. They motivate them very well and stimulate both learning and confidence in learning. Assessments are accurate and used to inform planning. Because of these features the teaching succeeds in promoting very good learning. Students collaborate well, use their initiative, make very good use of ICT and share their ideas clearly and readily.
122. The subject is very well led by the co-ordinator who has worked hard to produce resources adapted to the needs of the students. The necessity for teachers to produce much of this literature places a great burden on them and does not make the best use of their time.
123. Standards in the subject have been maintained since the previous inspection and the quality of teaching, which is very good, has improved

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

124. Throughout the College students are achieving very well and reaching standards of work that are above those expected for students of the same age when compared nationally. Standards of work are particularly high in handling and communicating information. Students demonstrate well above average skills when they successfully use an application so they can hear the "on screen" options to use a fully featured word processor and operate "Windows".

125. At the end of Key Stage 3, students create a database as a birthday book of their friends and relatives. They can search the database in a variety of ways for example to find the birthday of a particular friend or to see who has sent them a birthday card. At the end of Key Stage 4, students produce a spreadsheet for the control of stock for a small business, for example a public house. They use this information to predict profit and ordering requirements as circumstances change.
126. All students have a broad experience of ICT and its applications including control technology. They use their skills in ICT to enhance their learning in many other subjects of the National Curriculum. For example, a student in Year 13 used a spreadsheet to process the results of an experiment in physics. Recently a Year 13 student won a Young Engineers Design Award for a computer-based application that could translate text to braille in a range of languages. Overall there has been an improvement in standards since the last inspection.
127. The quality of teaching is very good. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and teach with enthusiasm. The students are given a clear understanding of what they are to do and what is expected of them. High expectations for learning are pervasive and appropriate. The students are well supported when they require help and the pace of the lessons is good. The teachers know their students well and very carefully structure their learning to suit their individual needs. This includes ensuring that their computer is set up to maximise its accessibility. It is this individual attention and the high expectations of the teachers that enable all the students to make very good progress.
128. Outstanding teaching was observed when a high attaining Year 9 student with no vision was taught how to use "Windows" and e-mail using keystroke options for control and a text-to-speech screen reader. By the end of the lesson the student could confidently use e-mail to read and send messages.
129. The quality of learning is very good at Key Stage 3. All students make very good progress with their studies. This progress is maintained through Key Stage 4 as students become increasingly confident and develop more advanced skills. Those going on to study ICT at Advanced level are well prepared and they continue to make good progress. Many students enjoy this subject and work for long periods of time sustaining their concentration on the tasks set for them. They have the tenacity to persevere with their tasks even though they might be slowed down when using applications designed to be operated by the fully sighted. They are confident in their skills and they are prepared to explore new ideas and work creatively.
130. The curriculum is very well planned to ensure continuity as students progress through the College. Students use the ICT facilities in the evenings and at weekends. Those in Year 10 and above are issued with their own laptop computer. This contributes significantly to the development of their skills. All the computers are adjusted to suit the personal needs of each student, to maximise their accessibility.
131. An experienced, knowledgeable and enthusiastic head of department manages the subject very effectively. A full-time network manager makes a valued contribution by keeping the network of computers running to maximise their use and also in supporting students with their learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

132. Achievements in modern languages and in Latin are very good: students nearest the end of Key Stage 3 are achieving at least the expected standard for students of their age and a significant proportion of students reach standards which are high for their age. Those nearest to the end of Key Stage 4 are clearly on their way to GCSE results that are above average. Students in the Sixth Form are achieving very high standards, commensurate with the highest grades in the examination. In a Year 8 class in French, students who had studied the language for half a term only were reaching standards which were in advance of those expected for students of their age, most of whom will have been studying the language for over a year. Students were eager to demonstrate the range of vocabulary and idiom that they had acquired and which would have done credit to students a year or more further on in their studies. Year 12 German students show a high degree of progress made since GCSE and use the language with great maturity and proficiency.
133. Over the past three years results in the GCSE examinations have been consistently well above average, with most students achieving at least grades A* to C and a very small minority reaching grade D. Over this period a small number of students have been entered for the short course in French or German, and have achieved mainly grades C and D. This is in itself creditable given that those entered have been the lowest attainers and they have taken an examination intended for the most able modern linguists, but the College should consider whether the examination targets of these students are best met by the provision which is made for their languages study in Key Stage 4.
134. All the teaching of modern foreign languages seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory, and a high proportion was good or very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high language skills,

and their consistent use of the target language throughout lessons promotes good language habits in students, many of whom have well-developed listening and speaking skills and use the language well for real purposes of communication with one another and with the teacher. Lesson preparation is thorough and takes account of the different levels of visual impairment of the students. In some cases, the lesson has to be prepared in such detail that changes cannot easily be made once it is under way, and this occasionally has an adverse effect upon the pace and impact of the lesson.

135. The curriculum for modern languages is well planned, although the schemes of work are lacking a little in detail, but the department is in the process of developing these further. Overall, the College provides a suitably wide and balanced languages curriculum for its students, which includes the possibility to study two modern languages or two modern languages and Latin where appropriate. The modern languages curriculum is enhanced by the connections which the College has with partner institutions in France and Germany, which lead to e-mail correspondence and reciprocal visits with students on the mainland of Europe.
136. Teachers of modern languages are well qualified and have good subject knowledge, and are skilled in providing for the needs of visually impaired students. They have worked very hard since the last inspection to ensure that there is sufficient braille-transcribed literary texts and associated worksheets to support independent Sixth Form work and to provide suitable material to promote reading development among younger students. The department is well managed. Its needs and priorities are carefully analysed and form the basis of a suitable development plan in which all staff have a clearly defined role to play. Monitoring of the quality of teaching in the department is not at present a feature, and needs to be in place in order to ensure that expertise is shared across the department as a whole. Work is well planned: clear guidelines are provided for the content of the courses taught and departmental policies and schemes of work are periodically reviewed and re-drafted by all teachers of the subject.

MUSIC

137. Students achieve very well in music; attainment at Key Stage 3 is commensurate with that of sighted students of similar age. The standard of performance of most students is above and sometimes well above that of their contemporaries in other secondary schools.
138. The number of students choosing to study music at GCSE level is quite small but they achieve results that are well in line with the national average. Generally, students achieve well and in recent years have attained several high-grade results. Performance standards continue to improve and there are many students who play their chosen instruments confidently and well. Individual students play with style and flair. Ensemble playing is often of a high quality. .
139. A small number of students continue their musical studies to Advanced level. As was noted at the previous inspection, these students are particularly good in aural analysis and they display an instinctive grasp of musical form and idiom. They usually attain the top grades in examinations. Students also contribute substantially to the musical life of the College in their willingness to take a full part in all activities.
140. The full curriculum is taught at each level. Students have ample opportunity to compose and to play together. They also listen carefully to a wide range of music and are given the chance to describe the music and to say how it makes them feel. Many students are receiving expert instrumental tuition, sometimes on two instruments, and they reach very high standards. At lunchtime all the practice rooms are in use and the sound of students practising fills the air. All are committed musicians who have already learnt the joy of music making. Students attain very good performance standards and all contribute to the frequent opportunities for public performance of a rich and varied repertoire. The recordings of College performances are of excellent quality and clearly demonstrate the accomplishments of very talented students.
141. There are many extra-curricular activities in music on offer to all students. For example, there are senior and junior recorder clubs and bands for Steel Pan and Blues players. There is large choir that performs regularly and recently sang at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. The choir's contribution was described as 'one of the most emotional and mature'. The choir was heard in rehearsal during the inspection week. The singing has, indeed, emotional depth and maturity that is not normally found in such young performers. The choristers are committed to finding a high level of professional performance.
142. This is the background against which students learn. The opportunities to perform provide encouragement and inspiration for lessons in the classroom. In Key Stage 3, students analyse an extract of classical music by the use of tactile symbols especially prepared by the teacher. They also sing in two-part harmony and enjoy singing a round of folk song or sea shanty as a round. They use the language of music and that helps their understanding. They use a variety of percussion instruments to compose a piece of music that reflects the calm sea. The tempo and dynamic alters rapidly as a storm approaches

and the timpani and cymbals have their moment.

143. Students continue the good progress they have made in the GCSE course when appraising the quality of the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth. They describe the music as 'tense' and 'dramatic' and recognise the effect that major and minor intervals have on the piece. A comparison with the works of Berlioz leads to a discussion on the meaning of unrequited love.
144. Sixth form students continue their analysis of music with the works of Boulez and try to elucidate why a different time signature is required for every bar. Students also distinguish melodic and harmonic scales and show their knowledge of musical terms in correctly using 'arpeggio', 'ostinato' and 'baroque'. Music braille is used and the students tackle its complexities with resolute commitment.
145. The quality of teaching throughout the College is good and it has many very good features. This level of teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection. Teachers are bright and enthusiastic in their presentation and this fires the imagination and response of the students. Classes are managed well and the creative spirit is allowed to emerge. Consequently, students develop confidence in their own performance and this, in turn, promotes good progress. Teachers are very knowledgeable and make many helpful cross-references to other composers, for example, which increases the breadth of students' understanding. Planning is good and each lesson carefully builds on prior attainment. Resources are used well and all lessons contain a practical element so that students feel involved in their own learning. Their opinions are sought and valued. Teachers and students make music together.
146. The department is well led and managed by a teacher who recently joined the College. A former head of music, who is now working part-time, ably assists her. They work closely together and effectively monitor each other's work but the work of the instrumental teachers, although self-evidently of a good standard, is not yet monitored. This is a similar observation to that made at the previous inspection. Accommodation is good and includes an excellent set of practice rooms. A major investment in this department would ensure the provision of music technology at Advanced level and that would increase the number of students opting for music. Some of the instruments are in a poor state of repair and require immediate attention. Otherwise, the environment in which music is taught is exemplary. Music, in all its many forms, continues to make a major contribution to the social and cultural life of the College, but there are limited opportunities for students to develop and sustain their ensemble skills through membership of community bands, orchestras or choirs.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

147. Students make very good overall progress in physical education even though the standards they achieve largely remain below those found in mainstream schools. In gymnastics, the youngest students cautiously devise sequences of movements for travelling along a bench but their standard of swimming is in line with that of mainstream schools. Students continue to make good progress in swimming during Key Stage 3 as they confidently begin to use a variety of swimming strokes to travel the length of the pool. Achievements in physical education by the age of fourteen are good as students gain in confidence and move with greater freedom across the range of physical education activities, for example, in national and creative dance and in extra-curricular judo.
148. In Key Stage 4, with their increasing physical maturity and confidence, students achieve very well in trampolining, swimming, football, basketball and when performing their individual fitness programmes in the multi-gym. In basketball, for example, partially sighted students learn to dribble, move, turn and change speed with the ball; and some of the higher-attaining swimmers reach a length of 1500 metres. In the multi-gym, under the direction of very experienced and effective teachers, students make very good use of a single lesson, working efficiently as a group, listening to instructions and persevering to sustain short periods of physical activity as they work through their fitness programmes. Some students request extra individual fitness programmes; and the support they receive to help them achieve their goals is very good. The highest attainers, benefiting from the experience of a well qualified team of physical education teachers, develop to such a good standard, in goalball for the totally blind, that they compete internationally, including to paralympic standard. Team games like these are excellent vehicles for promoting not only students' physical but also their personal and social development and their acceptance of rules and the decisions of referees.
149. In the Sixth Form a small number of students are working towards AS accreditation in a new physical education course introduced this year. They are learning to trampoline and perform the basic skills of bouncing, seat drops and half twists. In the athletics unit, students learn to throw the javelin safely, improving the distances they throw when using standard equipment. They learn to pace their long jump runs for accurate take off from the board, persevering and self-evaluating to improve their techniques. All students in the Sixth Form are required to attend some physical education lessons, and the great majority are motivated to improve their fitness levels. By Year 13, the highest attaining swimmers reach 3000

metres, learn personal survival skills, and achieve the gold standard in nationally recognised swimming certificates.

150. The quality of teaching in physical education is very good overall and it is never less than good. Teachers are very well qualified to provide a rich variety of activities to enjoy. Excellent long-term planning gives students access to training and competitive events round this country and abroad. Teachers' expectations are very high yet also realistic; and opportunities in physical education are very well matched to students' different stages of development and amount of vision. The procedures used for assessing and recording progress in swimming and athletics are good. Teachers are very aware of the progress individual students make and annual reports to parents are helpfully detailed about achievements in physical education. Formal assessment procedures, however, for setting targets and recording progress in areas of activity where performance is more transient and less easily measured, are less well developed. Lessons are well organised and teachers have students' safety in mind, especially in the small and sometimes over-crowded multi-gym, and in the gymnasium where ageing radiators project, uncased, into the hall. At times, however, there are not enough adults in the swimming pool. Risk assessments are not always formally recorded on planning documents.
151. Students' enjoyment of physical education extends through an excellent range of extra-curricular sporting activities, for example, judo, goalball, golf, cricket, athletics, skiing, rowing and cross-country running. They value the training they receive on special occasions from professionals, champions and Olympic medallists. An outdoor pursuits programme is being reviewed in the light of recent staffing changes. Plans for the new programme look set to involve a wider range of students than formerly. Planned links between the outdoor pursuits programme and the physical education scheme of work are not yet in place. The weaknesses in the outdoor pursuits programme, identified at the last inspection, concerning the absence of sequential planning, from Year 7 onwards, to enable individual students to build on their previous individual performances, have not yet been resolved.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

152. There is very good achievement in religious education. By age 14, students are familiar with the customs, practices and beliefs of the major world faiths and are developing understanding of the relationships between faith, spirituality and morality. They recognise that there are similarities and differences between religions and can talk and write about these lucidly. In comparison to age peers, students' knowledge and understanding are high.
153. In Years 10 and 11, students prepare for both the long and short course GCSE. Those in Year 10 make very good progress in their unit of work on elements of Christian belief. In Year 11, students explore theological questions with assurance. Attainment is high in comparison to age peers and they respond to questions testing their understanding of concepts such as incarnation, ransom by blood and the meaning of the Eucharist with accuracy and confidence. They are in line to achieve grades in the range A-C. In 2000, 13 students undertook the GCSE examination. Seven attained grades in the range A*-C; 7 obtained grades in the D-G range.
154. Students in Year 12 are preparing for A and AS level examinations. In work on situation ethics students show good understanding and make very good use of their prior learning. They are in line to achieve grades in the range A to C.
155. There are good attitudes to learning across the age range. Homework is completed well and students make use of previous learning to aid their understanding of new work. Behaviour is excellent in lessons.
156. Teaching is of very good quality in general and promotes learning very successfully. There is very good understanding of the students' particular needs and teaching methods are chosen that match these. Teachers have accurate understanding of the students' strengths and weaknesses in the subject and use this to inform their teaching. Knowledge of the subject is excellent. Especially for those preparing for examinations, the work is challenging and demands of the students an ability to think clearly and express abstract notions both in writing and in discussion. Students rise to this challenge very well.
157. The co-ordinator, who is a recent appointment, is successfully promoting the subject and raising standards, which are now far above of those previously reported.

MOBILITY

158. Students' mobility and orientation skills are assessed on arrival in the College. At the time of the inspection, very nearly half were timetabled to receive mobility training. 12 students assessed as needing tuition were not receiving mobility training due to long-term staff absence.
159. In lessons on the College site and beyond there is much good practice; students are taught long cane

skills and techniques for safe orientation and independent travel. During mobility lessons, attention is also paid to developing social skills, talking to the public and avoiding inappropriate gestures. Students are trained to reach their work experience placements where appropriate. Mobility and orientation work is very successful with the majority of students. It leads eventually to their being independent travellers in a city centre and travelling by train and bus, irrespective of their degree of visual loss. Indeed, several older students are able to travel considerable distances to their homes independently. However, the programme of mobility training does not extend to the boarding houses.

160. Students' progress is monitored regularly and mobility officers communicate frequently with parents and with local LEA's. They also liaise with providers of mobility in the students' home area and contribute to the Annual Review of Statement by written reports although, inexplicably, they do not see statements and do not attend review meetings. Students do not use canes around the College site. For some students this practice would be helpful given the distance between buildings. During the inspection, several students were found to be lost in and outside the College building and were in a state of anxiety about their location. This situation was exacerbated by building work taking place on site. There is not a complete understanding by all staff of mobility needs and methods. Some staff are very supportive but others particularly in the boarding hostel, help students inappropriately, thus denying them full independence in their travel.
161. As at the time of the last inspection it is increasingly difficult to timetable mobility against the academic timetables in the College. This issue is now more critical. Recent flexible working by the mobility officers has resulted in a rolling programme of work that changes mobility lesson time from week to week. One officer also works on Saturdays. The College has a draft policy for mobility, which is adequate but needs further development and has not been approved by the governing body. The College has a scheme of work that is entirely appropriate to training students. It extends competencies in independent travel in a gradual programme of skills.
162. The mobility staff are supported well in their requirements for professional development and sufficient time is available for administration. The mobility officers are managed by the Head of Care through regular meetings but do not have job descriptions. This practice is new and is to be developed. Officers collaborate effectively with one another but there is no senior officer in the department.
163. After the last inspection a plan was introduced to increase mobility services to students. Additional staff were appointed but the tension between the timetabling of academic subjects and mobility training has not been resolved. This issue is of concern given that the subject is a key skill for visually impaired students. The budget for the service is managed by the two part time officers and is adequate for requirements. Students are issued with their own canes.

BRAILLE

164. Two thirds of the present College population use braille. Three teachers teach students the code on a part time basis. Two other staff supplement this work. The subject has a co-ordinator who teaches braille to Sixth Form students. The College SENCO works with the co-ordinator and is responsible for braille assessment.
165. Students, new to braille, learn the various contractions and word abbreviations in carefully graded steps. They use specialist texts supported by tape material where required. At Key Stage 4, a student who has recently lost sight is making good progress with learning the code. In less than two months, he has acquired the knowledge of nearly half the contractions. He is also improving his writing of the code and is beginning to use two hands to read text accurately. A student in the Sixth Form experiencing problems with the code and with English spelling is able to read fluently with expression on inter-lined braille text. The student found the frontispiece of the text and recovered information quickly about the author. Due to the effective specialist teaching, students' learning had accelerated greatly. One student's spelling age has increased by nearly three years in the last two months.
166. Students enjoy their braille studies, co-operate well with the teachers, learn the braille code effectively and make good progress. They display great perseverance in this difficult process. The attainment of many older students is high in using the code but checks on code usage do not extend to all students as they move through the College.
167. Overall, the teaching of braille is good; on occasions it is very good. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and are familiar with techniques for improving touch-reading skills; two handed scanning techniques and the appropriate posture and technique for reading and writing braille. Teachers vary activities in lessons to motivate students and keep them on task. They are sensitive and perceptive to student' needs particularly when a student needs to learn braille due to failing vision in adolescence. Appropriate homework is set regularly.
168. The College has a policy of introducing an intensive course in learning the braille code to students whose

vision has suddenly deteriorated. This is good practice and helps the rehabilitation of students back into the mainstream of the College curriculum. The development in the use of lap top computers with 'QUERTY' keyboards means that not all students communicating in braille receive a hard copy of their work in all subjects at Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. Sometimes teachers do not see a braille copy of their work and a print copy is marked. Little choice exists for students other than selecting the 'QWERTY' keyboard or speech to communicate, as there is limited access to dedicated braille computers with refreshable braille displays.

169. Braille literature likely to appeal to teenagers to support reading and writing skills in braille has been supplemented recently by the NLB lending library. This is a rolling programme and has been successful in encouraging reading amongst all blind students. Excellent facilities exist in the College for the production of braille copy, tapes, maps and diagrams. However, there are insufficient braille writing machines in the College and there are still no braille machines for use in the boarding houses. Inadequate funds are available to support the subject in this area, and there is insufficient technician support. A policy has been drafted but it needs to be extended to be fully appropriate. Schemes of work exist that complement individual students' braille needs. However, the College does not publish a statement of its braille teaching policy and programme of work nor have the governors approved the policy and programmes of study.
170. Since the last inspection improvements in the teaching of braille have been made. New students have a thorough assessment of their accuracy in interpreting the code, their speed of reading and their understanding of the text on arrival. The College also uses a variety of published reading and writing schemes in braille that introduce the complexities of the code in a graded manner to those students requiring tuition. Adequate records are kept of progress but at present no detailed checklist exists of the students' braille competence and knowledge.
171. Co-ordination and responsibility for the teaching and assessment of braille is separate but effective communication exists between the staff responsible. The braille co-ordinator teaches and organises the students, materials and the timetables. The SENCO assesses students. A start has been made by the braille co-ordinator to monitor the teaching of the subject by other braille teachers. This work does not extend fully to checking competencies of older students on a regular basis neither are there links with the ICT department. The College has made good arrangements for in-service training for staff since the last inspection and the braille co-ordinator supports staff with regular weekly sessions.