

INSPECTION REPORT

**JOSEPH LECKIE COMMUNITY
TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE**

WALSALL

LEA area: Walsall

Unique reference number:104243

Headteacher: Mr K Whittlestone

Reporting inspector: Mr M Pavey
17650

Dates of inspection: 6-10 November 2000

Inspection number: 223771

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Councillor C R Beilby
Date of previous inspection:	23 September 1996

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			The school's results and achievements
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
Daljit Singh 9974	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
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Hamish Wilkie 3753	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Vernon Williams 20497	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Joseph Leckie Community Technology College is a coeducational, comprehensive school of 1291 students including 155 in the sixth form. There are 668 boys and 623 girls. The college has grown rapidly in recent years. It acquired technology college status in 1999 and now participates in the Excellence in Cities programme. It is multi-racial and a majority of students have Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi family backgrounds. The college serves an area in the borough of Walsall, with both relatively favoured and deprived homes. Overall, the socio-economic background of its students is below average, and more students are entitled to free school meals than in the average school. A relatively high number of students join and leave the college during the course of the school year. Almost a third are on its register of special educational needs (SEN), a high proportion, and there are 85 students at an early stage in learning English as an additional language (EAL).

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Joseph Leckie College is a good school which has many more strengths than weaknesses. Good leadership ensures a strong, shared commitment to the improvement of educational standards. There is a positive climate for learning, greatly appreciated by parents. Though standards of attainment are below national average levels, good teaching ensures that students achieve at least as highly as expected in most areas. The college gives good value for money and the sixth form is cost-effective.

What the school does well

- The headteacher gives very clear educational direction to the college. As a result, staff share a strong commitment to further improvement.
- Teaching is of good quality and students learn well, at all stages.
- Compared with other subjects in the college, students attain very high results in art and religious education (RE), and high results in science, modern foreign languages, geography and music.
- The college provides a good curriculum, with particular strengths in personal, social and health education (PSHE), careers and vocational education, and education in moral development. Teachers are very well matched to the demands of its many courses.
- Courses and achievement in ICT are very good.
- Tuition for those needing help with the early stages of English as an additional language is very good.
- Community links are very good. The college is closely involved in the local community.
- Arrangements for the induction and training of new staff are excellent.
- Parents' views of the college are positive.

What could be improved

- Standards in English, drama, design and technology and the key skills of literacy across the curriculum are in need of further improvement.
- The college needs to develop its procedures for setting students targets to improve their performance, based on its very good analysis of their attainment in tests and examinations. Progress towards these targets needs to be better reported to parents.
- The senior staff and governors need to make more thorough evaluations of standards in faculties and subjects, for example in teaching, the curriculum and schemes of work.
- The quality of students' statements of SEN needs improvement and staff in faculties need training in the production of individual education plans (IEPs) for those students who have them.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in September 1996. Since then, improvement has been good. Numbers have risen considerably and the college is now oversubscribed. There have been good improvements in leadership, teaching and the curriculum. Attainment in GCSE has improved somewhat, and the college has maintained appropriate standards for these students. Improvement has been good in the management of most subjects, though it has been unsatisfactory in English and design and technology. Progress in meeting the key issues for action in the last inspection report has been satisfactory overall; it has been very good in providing resources for ICT, but

unsatisfactory in finding enough time for RE at Key Stage 4 and in improving the quality of IEPs for students with statements of SEN.

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. In this summary, 'similar schools' refer to schools with similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals.

Performance in:	compared with				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	E	D	E	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	E	D	E	n/a	

When students enter the college, their attainment is below, sometimes well below, the national average. Results have been well below average in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, but were well above the average for similar schools in 1999. Students' achievements and progress are satisfactory during Key Stages 3 and 4. GCSE results in recent years have been below, but not well below, the national average, and were above those of similar schools in 1999. Results in the Key Stage 3 tests have risen in line with the national average, but those in GCSE have risen faster. The college sets realistic targets for attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 and succeeds in reaching them.

A level and vocational results were below average in 2000, and have remained at this level over several years. Students' achievement and progress over the course are satisfactory. Despite low A level results overall, most students go on to further study or employment. In an average year, under half of A level leavers go into higher education and a third into further education, with a number also who find employment with training. Students taking the one year GNVQ course leave with results below the national average, but many go on to useful courses in further education or employment, often with training.

Standards in the key skills of literacy and numeracy are below average, and in the case of literacy hold students back in their GCSE achievement. However, attainment in ICT is high overall and students' progress is good. When students are reading and writing at the computer, they are not hindered by the problems of literacy seen in many other lessons.

Standards in English are below average at Key Stage 3 and well below at Key Stage 4. In mathematics and science, standards are also below average at Key Stage 3. They continue below average in mathematics at Key Stage 4, but rise to average levels in science at this stage. Students' progress over Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory in English, satisfactory in science and good in mathematics. Standards and progress in art, music, science, geography, modern foreign languages and ICT are stronger than in other subjects. Standards and progress are lower in English, design and technology, PE and literacy skills. Generally, girls attain less highly than boys in tests and examinations at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. At all stages, students make satisfactory progress overall and their achievements are high enough.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students like coming to college and want to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good and cooperative in lessons. Generally good around the college.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students develop responsible attitudes. Relationships between staff and students are good, often very good.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The college works very hard to achieve this. Punctuality is satisfactory, but sixth formers sometimes fail to keep good time.

Very good attitudes, behaviour and relationships reflect the care taken by the college to ensure a positive foundation for learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching is of good quality overall. Of the lessons seen, 3 per cent were excellent, 27 per cent very good, 42 per cent good, 24 per cent satisfactory and 4 per cent unsatisfactory. There were no poor or very poor lessons. Teaching is good in almost all subjects. It is very good in art and music. In English, design and technology and PE, teaching is satisfactory overall but has some weaknesses. Teaching is good in mathematics and science. The college meets the needs of all its students well. The learning support faculty provides a good education for the students which it teaches directly at Key Stage 3, who make good progress.

Teachers' particular strength is their management of students, which leads to a secure and supportive atmosphere in which to learn. There is no particular weakness in the overall quality of teaching, though the assessment of students' work and teaching of the basic skills of literacy are less strong than other aspects.

As the result of good teaching, students learn well. Their learning of the key skills of ICT is particularly good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. The curriculum is particularly well supported by programmes of personal and social education (PSE), careers and links with the community. It allows all students to benefit from it equally well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good in terms of teaching and progress within the learning support faculty. Management of the faculty is satisfactory, but liaison with other faculties and the quality of students' IEPs need improvement.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good for those who have support in the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language. For the many others, the lack of an overall policy and good practice for literacy across the curriculum means that provision is unsatisfactory.

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Provision for social and cultural development is good, and very good for students' moral development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory overall. Teachers are concerned for students' welfare and have excellent programmes for improving attendance. Procedures for encouraging good behaviour are satisfactory, and are good for eliminating bullying. Procedures for monitoring students' work and for notifying the teacher responsible for child protection issues need some improvement.

The college has a satisfactory partnership with parents, who are pleased with its work. There is not enough time for RE to be taught in the detail required by the locally agreed syllabus at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher and senior team provide very good leadership and senior staff lead the college well. Together, they have created good potential for further progress.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Well. Governors are well led and informed about the work of the college. They take a close interest in its development, which they actively pursue.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory by senior staff and many departments, but in need of further improvement in measuring the overall effectiveness of the college's work.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The college's finances are well managed and good use is made of the range of grants available.

Staffing resources are adequate and very well deployed, though it has been difficult to recruit and retain staff in several areas, including English and mathematics. Training for new staff and students is excellent. Learning resources are good. Accommodation is satisfactory for lessons, but the buildings and site are unattractive and inconvenient. The parking of cars on the only playground, though necessary, is a problem for students' safety.

The particular strength in the leadership of the college is the dedication and energy of the headteacher. There have been some weaknesses in the leadership of English, design and technology and PE, but these have been resolved in English and PE.

The college applies the principles of best value well. It provides a wide programme of education and gives good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards of attainment and progress, and the high expectations of the college. • Teaching, which is good and gets a positive response from students. • The college's role in helping students to become mature and responsible. • The college's very good response to suggestions and concerns. • The improvements in recent years under the leadership of the headteacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents feel that homework should be improved. • Some parents feel that the college does not work closely with parents or keep them well informed. • Some parents consider the range of extra-curricular activities to be not interesting enough.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents. They judge that homework is well used by teachers and that links with parents are satisfactory. Inspectors judge that the range of extra-curricular activities is good, though not in sport, and that participation by students is often good.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

* In this main report, 'similar schools' refer to schools with similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals. Reference is also made to the progress made by students in this school and nationally between their performance in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and that in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4.

1. On entry to the college, standards of attainment are below the average level - well below for a minority - measured by the nationally validated tests taken when students join. Results of the national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 2 are currently not far below average, but the level of attainment on entry has been rising in recent years, so that the potential of students now in Year 7 is higher, for example, than that of those now at Key Stage 4. Tests to determine students' reading ages confirm attainment below the average, with a substantial number of students well below the expected level. In view of the level of attainment on entry, overall performance in the tests and examinations at the end of key stage is high enough.

2. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 over the four years to 1999 and in 2000, attainment was well below average in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, taken together. Over the four year period, the performance of boys was below the national average, but that of girls was well below. Science results at level 5 and above were best, then English, with mathematics results the worst by some way over the four years to 1999. However, science results at this level dropped behind English and mathematics in 2000. Overall results have risen somewhat over recent years, in line with the national trend. Though results were well below average in 1999, they were well above those in similar schools.

3. The standard of work seen during the inspection confirms that students' attainment is below, but not well below, the expected level nationally by the end of Key Stage 3. Generally, students make satisfactory progress over this key stage, so that by the end of the stage their achievement is as high as should be expected for these students in all subjects except the key skills of literacy across the curriculum. Low levels in speaking, reading and writing persist and hold students back in several subjects. Progress is good at this stage in mathematics, modern foreign languages, RE, art, music and ICT. In lessons and work seen, there was no particular variation in the work of students from different ethnic backgrounds, at any stage, although literacy problems are most acute for students who have not lived long in this country.

4. Attainment in the GCSE examinations in 1999 of 35.5 per cent for five or more passes at grades A*-C was below the national average of 46.6 per cent, but fell back to 30 per cent in 2000 because of the low performance of girls at this level. Performance at this level was below average over the three years to 1999 also. Attainment of five or more grades in the A*-G range was well below the national average in 1999 and 2000, and very low over the three years to 1999. Results expressed in total points scored, though below the national average in 1999 and 2000, and well below over the three years to 1999, have risen more rapidly than the national trend, and were above those of similar schools in 1999. Boys attained higher results overall in total points than girls in 1999, but a little lower in 2000. Over the three years to 1999, both boys' and girls' results have been well below average.

5. The college has carefully analysed the average points scored by boys and girls from different ethnic backgrounds in the 2000 GCSE examinations. Results show considerable variation between ethnic groups and between boys and girls in the different groups. For example, white and Caribbean boys scored equally highly, while girls from these groups scored well below boys. Boys and girls of Indian background scored equally highly, while girls of Bangladeshi background scored much more highly than boys from this group.

6. Students attain higher GCSE grades in science, modern foreign languages, geography, art, music and RE than in other subjects, with art and RE the strongest results by some way. They attain lower grades in the textiles aspect of design and technology. In 1999, students performed highest in relation to other students in RE, followed by art and design, science, French, and the graphics aspect of design and technology. Students performed lowest in the textiles aspect of design and technology, and in mathematics. Over recent years, English results have continued well below the national average for grades A*-C. Science results have been rising to just above the national average and are the highest among the core subjects. Mathematics results continue well below average and are the lowest among the core subjects. This is due to the recent history of staffing change; it cannot be explained by any problems in leadership or present teaching. There is no particular pattern of improvement or decline in other subjects, with the exception of history, in which results have been rising steadily.

7. In addition to GCSE, the college gives students the chance to gain recognition in the Certificate of Achievement awards. Seven subjects are offered and success is generally high. In 1999, of 22 passes in English, 14 were with merit and two with distinction. Of the 19 passes in numeracy, 11 were with merit and five with distinction. Of the 11 science passes, five were with merit. Results were very good in geography, ICT and RE, but were modest in history. The overall pass rate for all subjects was over 80 per cent.

8. Standards seen in work during the inspection confirm that, overall, attainment continues below the expected level nationally by the end of Key Stage 4, and well below in English and design and technology. However, for several subjects standards have improved over this stage and are now generally in line with the national average level of attainment. These subjects include science, ICT, modern foreign languages and history. Standards are now above average in geography and music, and are well above these levels in art.

9. By the end of Key Stage 4, therefore, students have made very differing amounts of progress. Their achievement and progress in lessons seen vary from good to unsatisfactory in relation to their previous levels of attainment. Students achieve very well in art and well in mathematics, ICT, modern foreign languages, geography, music and RE. Their achievement is satisfactory in science and history, but unsatisfactory in English, design and technology and PE. Good progress and high achievement are due to particularly effective teaching, good schemes of work and a good use of resources to interest and engage the students. For example, teaching is lively and committed in art, with plenty of vivid work for all to see and gain inspiration from. Very good resources combine with well chosen courses and good teaching in ICT to generate good progress. Dedicated leadership and teamwork in mathematics are now raising standards considerably over the key stage. However, problems in the continuity of leadership, combined with ineffective schemes of work, have led to the unsatisfactory progress in English, design and technology and PE.

10. Generally, inspection findings confirm that students make at least satisfactory progress, achieving at least as well as expected, over Key Stage 4. However, the grades they actually attain in GCSE remain below average, and are still affected by relatively weak skills in literacy and English. The data provided for this inspection includes a calculation of students' progress over Key Stage 4, made by comparing the results of tests held at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997 with those for the same students at GCSE in 1999. This concludes that students' progress was well below average when compared with similar schools, and does not agree with inspectors' findings of at least satisfactory progress for the Key Stage 4 students whose work was seen during the inspection. The disparity is perhaps due to the differing levels of aspiration which the college now holds for its present Key Stage 4 students. It has achieved good success in setting accurate targets for GCSE achievement. In 1999, it just exceeded an ambitious target of 35 per cent for the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C. In 2000, the college reached a carefully calculated target of 30 per cent. For

2001, it has raised its target twice, on firm evidence, from 33 to 35, and now 40 per cent of grades A*-C. Inspectors' findings of often good progress at Key Stage 4 concur with the increased ambition the college now has for its students.

11. In the A level examinations, the average points scored by those taking two or more subjects were below average in 2000 and well below over the three years to 1999. Results were well below the national average for vocational subjects also in 1999, but have improved greatly in 2000, to well above the average national figure for 1999. Though A level and vocational results have been below average in recent years, they are appropriate for the levels of attainment with which students began the course. Recent figures confirm that three quarters of students find places in further or higher education and that the great majority of students is able to put A level or vocational qualifications to good use when they leave the college. Standards of work seen during the inspection are below the average nationally for the various courses, but students achieve satisfactory levels in relation to their abilities at this stage. Although standards are well below the national average in many subjects, they are high in science and average in mathematics and vocational subjects. Most students make at least satisfactory progress in all subjects and a good number achieve well.

12. In English, students' attainment in tests and examinations and work seen at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well below average, confirming that students do not achieve as well as they should over this stage. Though attainment is below average at the end of the sixth form, students' achievement is satisfactory at this stage. In English and in literacy skills across the curriculum, students' ability to speak clearly and at good length is below the expected level over Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards in reading are below the expected level at Key Stage 3, but do not improve as they should for many students at Key Stage 4, by the end of which they are well below expected levels. Standards in writing are below expected levels at both key stages and are not high enough to support attainment at average levels in GCSE. In the sixth form, standards are generally high enough to help students' attainment in the various courses.

13. In mathematics, attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 is well below average, but is around average in A level examinations. Standards seen in lessons and written work are generally higher than those seen in test and examination results, and students achieve well for their abilities and make good progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards in number are somewhat lower than in other aspects of the subject. Numeracy standards are low on entry to the college but are rising as the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) takes effect. Across the curriculum, several subjects contribute to the development of numeracy skills, which are high enough to support students' work and progress.

14. In science, though results at the end of Key Stage 3 are below average, those in GCSE at grades A*-C were just above average in 1999, and rose further in 2000. Students achieve satisfactorily over Key Stages 3 and 4, and well in the sixth form, where A level

results are good for most students. In classes at all stages, some work is at least at nationally expected levels.

15. Attainment in the key skill of ICT is high overall and progress is good. At all key stages, students show rapidly developing skills in communicating information using word processing or desktop publishing software. Skills in handling information using the Internet or CD ROM-based information are good and increasingly in use in many lessons. Modelling and measuring work does not feature as strongly across the curriculum, although there are planned opportunities for such activities to take place. Students' knowledge, skill and understanding in control technology are at a very basic level and limited by the availability of resources. The great majority of students has satisfactory practical skills in using the keyboard, mouse and peripheral equipment such as printers.

16. Students with special educational needs (SEN) who receive support either in a set for lower attaining students, by support in or withdrawal from class, make good progress across Key Stage 3. Their progress is not as great at Key Stage 4 where there is no support provided in the classes. Progress is greatly improved when there are clear ways identified to meet the requirements of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The quality of these plans varies greatly. Good practice is seen in the subject-specific IEPs produced by modern foreign languages, which are well focused and illustrate clearly how teachers can help students to meet the different targets and objectives.

17. Gifted or talented students are not identified as part of the large number of students with SEN. The college has not developed particular ways of identifying and teaching such students. However, some individual teachers cater well for the most able. Some very good practice was seen in science and music.

18. Improvement has been satisfactory since the last inspection. Overall results in GCSE have improved faster than the national trend and those for tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved in line with the trend. Results at A level have remained at around their previous level. The college has at least maintained its previous standards, which are appropriate for these students.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

19. Students' attitudes to learning are very good and most like coming to college. These attitudes are matched by their very good behaviour in the classroom, their good relationships with almost all teachers and the very good atmosphere in many classes. As a result, their personal development is also good. Attendance is satisfactory, being broadly in line with the national average, and staff continue to work diligently to raise this.

20. Most students are keen to learn and make good efforts to achieve their learning goals. Most can sustain concentration, respond well to challenges and are prepared to persevere. They take pride in the presentation of their work and make a positive contribution to classroom discussions. Relationships amongst students and between them and their teachers are generally good. They collaborate very well in groups, are supportive of one another, and girls and boys work well together. These good relationships enable students to respond very positively to teaching. However, very occasionally in some lessons, a small minority of students loses concentration and engages in very lively and immature behaviour. This was evident, for example, in a PSHE lesson when students were engaged in unsupervised role-plays.

21. Most students are courteous, respectful and friendly, but although no bullying or aggressive behaviour was observed, some students consistently reported incidents of anti-social behaviour. Informal interviews with students and college documentation clearly indicate that racism, sexism and bullying affect the social development of some students. However, most are adamant that incidents of bullying are well dealt with and that racism and sexism are not tolerated. The challenging behaviour

of a small number leads to exclusion from college. During the last college year, there were 36 fixed period exclusions, involving 32 boys and 4 girls. There were also 5 permanent exclusions, 4 boys and 1 girl. The college has a clear anti-bullying policy and regularly carries out surveys to identify persistent troublemakers. The college takes a very serious view of any such incidents.

22. Students' personal development and relationships between students are often constructive and purposeful, particularly in the classroom. Students have good opportunities to serve the college and community. Those undertaking responsibilities as representatives of the college council, and who serve the wider community as fundraisers and through work experience, are responsible and mature. Individual students represent the college in sports and cultural events. These experiences help create a positive ethos for learning, which includes the views of different minorities and cultures, and which enables students to learn in a tolerant, outward-looking community.

23. The attitude of students with SEN is very positive and enthusiastic in the Key Stage 3 classes observed. They benefit from a very supportive and secure atmosphere. Their behaviour in most classes is often good or very good. Students with particular behaviour problems respond well to the positive behaviour management procedure, recently introduced.

24. Taking the college as a whole, attendance is satisfactory and broadly in line with the average nationally. Registers are taken at prescribed times and comply with statutory requirements. However, despite the college's hard work, some parents continue to condone absences and older students, especially at Key Stage 4, are absent from college, often for lengthy periods, on the Asian sub-continent. This causes attendance to fall below 90 per cent in these years. Poor time-keeping is not an issue for most students, but is evident in the sixth form.

25. Since the last inspection, attendance has slightly improved and students' good attitudes and behaviour continue.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. Teaching is of good quality at all stages. Of the total of 216 lessons seen, 3 per cent were of excellent quality, 27 per cent very good, 42 per cent good, 24 per cent satisfactory and four per cent unsatisfactory. No lessons were poor or very poor. This is a good result and confirms that far more teaching is good or very good than satisfactory, and that the amount of unsatisfactory teaching is small. There is little difference between the quality of teaching at the three key stages, though figures reflect the strongest teaching in the sixth form. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is a little stronger than at Key Stage 4. Teaching and learning are very good in art and music, satisfactory in English, media studies, design and technology and PE, and good in all other subjects. In science, some problems of literacy and comprehension make learning satisfactory, whereas teaching is good. Generally, because teaching is good overall, students learn well, responding positively to their teachers and making secure gains in the knowledge and understanding of their subjects.

27. Good teaching is marked by clear planning, good schemes of work, an assured pace, good management of students and often very good relationships with the students. In the many such lessons, learning is at least good, and students work well, acquiring knowledge and skills at a rapid pace. There is no single cause of the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen. In a few lessons, teachers lacked enough control of their students to make the experience satisfactory. In a few others, temporary staff had not planned the lesson well enough. In another few, planning and knowledge were sound, but the teaching lacked pace and was dull. In unsatisfactory lessons, students find it hard to work productively and lack the focus and interest they show in most other lessons.

28. Overall, teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. This helps them plan well and gives students confidence. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher's

knowledge of *The Diary of Ann Frank* and how to teach the text led to a very successful lesson; students gained knowledge very fast, worked productively and concentrated very well. Teachers' knowledge is one of their strongest assets.

29. Basic skills are well taught by individual teachers, when the opportunity arises in lessons. This happens often enough in ICT to enable students to make good progress in some, but not all, skills across the curriculum. In numeracy, good teaching, especially in mathematics, allows students to make enough progress to cope with the demands of the curriculum. However, the overall effect of literacy teaching is unsatisfactory. It does not improve literacy enough at Key Stage 3 to allow students a firm foundation in literacy for Key Stage 4.

30. Teachers plan lessons well - excellently in music, and very well in geography, art and ICT. Good planning allows teachers to cover the necessary ground well. For example, in a sixth form advanced GNVQ lesson, the teacher had carefully planned how students would acquire a grasp of French commercial vocabulary. As a result, students acquired a good knowledge of the words they would use when delegates from a French company made a visit. They made a real effort to learn more, showing good interest, and found it hard to leave when the lesson ended.

31. Teachers' expectations are high in most subjects - very high in art and history, and satisfactory in design and technology and PE. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics revision session, the teacher made clear his high expectations of the amount and quality of work students would produce, and they worked productively on a good range of problems. Clear expectations help students realise how to learn and what they need to do to improve, a facet of their learning where they need considerable support.

32. Teaching methods are at least satisfactory and are good overall, but less effective in English, mathematics, design and technology and PE than in other subjects. There are many examples of good methods. In a successful Year 7 science practical investigation, the teacher let the students suggest the methodology, and then took the role of safety monitor, questioning students about their procedures; students had to justify their decisions, and learnt well. In a Year 11 design and technology lesson, the teacher's approach did not include enough emphasis on design, so that students failed to make enough progress in this respect.

33. Teachers' management of pupils is a strength, and is sometimes outstanding. For example, in a Year 11 art lesson, the teacher's excellent management of all aspects of a coursework session produced learning at a very good pace, with a high degree of

awareness by students of their own strengths and weaknesses. Management of behaviour is good in many lessons and seldom unsatisfactory.

34. The use of time, support staff and resources is good overall, and satisfactory in English and design and technology. Music is a subject where resources are very well arranged and used, for example in a blues lesson for Year 9, when all resources were to hand and students were able to use them constructively, as needed, leading to very good progress in knowledge.

35. The quality and use of assessment are satisfactory overall. Teachers often mark work well, with helpful comments on students' written work, though sometimes work is marked too lightly to be helpful. Teachers often make very helpful comments when giving back written work and in encouraging students in group work in class. Their setting of targets for students to improve their work, and their use of assessment data to monitor progress and set challenging personal targets, have not yet been developed in many subjects or years. Further progress in this is needed to enable students to gain the confidence they sometimes lack and become more aware of how to increase their progress. Teachers generally set homework well, marking it with promptness and clarity.

36. The teaching of students in the learning support faculty is at least satisfactory and, in many lessons, good or very good. Teaching is well planned and clear objectives are set. Teachers use a variety of methods: whole class, small group and individual teaching. Some subjects have devised good methods to meet the targets set in students' IEPs, for example in mathematics, PE, history, religious education and PSHE. Such methods are particularly good in modern foreign languages. This faculty has a detailed section in its handbook which also identifies staff training needs for improving this aspect of teaching.

37. The pace of the best SEN lessons is brisk and meets the needs of students well. Teachers reinforce the lesson objectives when students are working independently. Where additional in-class support is provided at Key Stage 3, this is well co-ordinated and directed. Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution, both for those with specific needs and for many other students. More in-class support is needed in some Key Stage 4 lessons, where there is a very wide range of ability.

38. Across the college, most teaching provides at least adequately for students with SEN. In several subjects, tasks suitable for different abilities are set. Some departments have a structured approach in using the subject IEP proforma and place importance on this in their departmental meetings and policies. Modern foreign languages has some very good practice in identifying ways to meet IEP objectives. Although gifted and talented students have not been formally identified, they are often set challenging work in top sets. Homework is not regularly set in lower ability teaching groups, though evidence of homework was seen in the reading scheme and in some mathematics lessons observed.

39. Teaching of PSHE is of good quality. Good programmes of health, sex, and drugs education provide students with information and opportunities to discuss issues in a mature and supportive atmosphere. Very good teaching was observed in a Year 10 lesson on the responsibilities of parenthood. Students engaged in thoughtful discussion and numerous contributions from both boys and girls showed insight and responsible attitudes.

40. Teachers are aware of the need to promote equality of opportunity in their teaching. For example, they try with some success to involve the full range of students in their classes, although there is a reticence from a significant proportion of girls which reduces their chances to improve their speaking in public. Teachers do not have the benefit of a whole-college approach to the teaching of key skills.

41. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved considerably. In 1996, teaching was already good in over half the lessons seen. It is now at least good in approaching three quarters, and is very good in over a quarter. The deficiencies noted in the last report were not generally seen during this inspection.

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

42. The curriculum is soundly managed, regularly reviewed and an appropriate consultation and decision making process takes place.

43. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 offers good breadth and balance, although the time allocated to some core subjects, such as English, is higher than the national average. This is a good feature of the curriculum, given students' low attainment in literacy when they join the college, but it results in subjects such as history and geography receiving less than the minimum recommended teaching time at Key Stage 3. However, the strategy for teaching literacy across the curriculum is in need of further development, though there have been several useful initiatives following the last inspection report, for example in science and in the presentation of key words in several subjects. A numeracy strategy is in the planning stage. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at Key Stage 3. It provides good progression and continuity of learning overall, except for drama, which is insufficiently based on skills and does not form an effective foundation for the Key Stage 4 course.

44. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is good. It has recently been revised and is now well planned to meet the particular learning needs of students. It provides a broad core that includes, as well as the National Curriculum subjects, a humanities subject option, which is studied by most students, and a further optional subject taken from art, business studies, media studies, drama, music and ICT. All students take PSHE and PE. The recent introduction of an intermediate level GNVQ course in ICT is a very good innovation. This course is oversubscribed and is taught after school as well as in the main curriculum. An unusually extensive range of Certificates of Achievement, covering seven subjects, provides a useful qualification for some low attaining students, as does the Youth Award Scheme Club 2000 course, based on problem-solving skills. There are limitations in the present structure. For example, students cannot study two humanity or two creative art subjects or a second modern foreign language subject, and there is no GCSE in PE. Overall, the curriculum at Key Stage 4 provides a relevant programme of study. Statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 4, except for RE where there is insufficient time to meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus in full. The curriculum makes good provision for the progression and continuity of students' learning, partly by making available a good range of subjects which continue those at Key Stage 3 and partly by the generally good width of study provided in the schemes of work. No students are disapplied from studying the National Curriculum and there is equal opportunity of access for all.

45. A good, well varied sixth form curriculum provides opportunities which meet the needs and aspirations of students. In Year 13 a range of thirteen advanced level courses and an advanced GNVQ in business are studied. In Year 12, the curriculum has been suitably drawn up to meet the requirements of the new Curriculum 2000, with students selecting four AS level subjects as well as a very well planned key skills certificate course. Vocational courses play an increasingly important part in the sixth form, with GNVQs at foundation level in business, at intermediate level in ICT, and at intermediate and advanced levels in business, and health and social care. In addition, the college provides further enrichment for all students in the form of work shadowing opportunities, planned support for community activities and a weekly tutor period which includes PSHE. Students also have a period of PE each week. However, there is no general provision for RE, but in all other respects the sixth form curriculum meets statutory requirements.

46. There is good extra-curricular provision, with that in music, drama and ICT very good. The college has a good tradition of presenting ambitious musicals such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Bugsy Malone*. In music, a very wide range of opportunities is offered, and activities such as those in the new World Music Centre reflect the multi-cultural nature of the college well, and are already very popular. In ICT, the computer suites are very extensively and productively used during lunchtime and after college. However, extra-curricular provision is limited in design and technology, and links with industry to enrich the subject curriculum need developing. In PE, the provision of sporting activities, particularly for boys, is currently very limited, although there are plans for its development by the faculty's community sports officer. Many students participate in activities involving drama and art, and many subjects make their facilities available at lunchtimes and after college for activities, including revision classes. There is also a number of educational visits in subjects across the curriculum, including visits to theatres, museums, foreign exchanges to France and a joint residential course in geography and biology in North Wales.

47. Provision for students' personal, social and health education is very good. The PSHE course is well planned and taught, and covers necessary subjects, for example sex, drugs and health education, very well. It provides carefully structured support for students, combining the acquisition of knowledge and the development of positive social relationships. The programme takes account of the requirements to introduce students to the responsibilities of citizenship. The course is taught by staff who receive regular training, to a carefully constructed syllabus with clear and helpful schemes of work. Students appreciate the course and the help it provides.

48. The PSHE course includes regular careers information, suitable for the ages of the students, from Year 9. There is close liaison with the local careers service, which provides very good support to all students from Year 9 and beyond. Students speak very warmly of the good advice they have received, and of the thoroughness of the college's preparation for options choices at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and for careers or education after their time at the college. Parents confirm this view. In addition, there is a very well organised work experience scheme of two weeks for all students in Year 10, as part of vocational courses, and further optional work experience in the sixth form. The college works very successfully with the local Education Business Partnership (EBP) scheme, which confirms its appreciation of the college's approach. Students' records of achievement are of a very high standard. They are most carefully presented, receive commendations from local employers and the EBP, and students are rightly proud of the achievements they record.

49. Involvement with the EBP is one example of the college's constructive relationships with partner institutions. The college has successful relations with its local primary schools, and the headteacher of one of its major primary schools is a governor of the college. Faculties have good links with these schools and ensure that the curriculum is as closely matched to that in the primary schools as possible. The college has just begun a new relationship with some other local secondary schools through the Government's Excellence in Cities programme. It works very successfully with university departments of education to provide a good programme of teacher training, and the college is a member of a Government pilot project with Nottingham University, to improve the quality of education for all.

50. The curriculum for students with SEN is at least satisfactory and often good or very good in the learning support faculty. The best schemes of work provide for both the least and the most able students. At Key Stage 3, some students are withdrawn from mathematics and English lessons to work on 'Success Maker', improving both literacy and numeracy skills. However, this work does not always have a direct link with the class work being done. Students enjoy developing their skills using this programme, which gives them an element of independent learning, though some are reluctant to be seen using it. This valuable programme is therefore under-used outside class time.

51. The college has a clear commitment, in policy and practice, to the equality of opportunity and provision, regardless of race, gender and ability. The curriculum provides equal access for all students and examination results are analysed in the light of race and gender to identify any areas of concern. Staff have received training in accelerated learning techniques which support students who learn in different ways from each other, and after-college homework clubs provide additional support.

52. The college is good at giving students an awareness of the unacceptability of racism. In lessons, for example in PSHE, it provides chances to consider approaches to combat it. The 'Equal Peoples' Day' for students in Year 9 raises awareness of opportunities in work and seeks to counter gender and racial stereotypes. The visit of the 'Women in Science and Engineering' bus also raises the profile of women in traditionally male areas of work. The college benefits from the rich cultural diversity of its students. It has in the past included some Asian languages in the curriculum, and plans to reintroduce them. At present, students are only able to follow such a course outside the college day.

53. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement in the quality of the curriculum and of SEN provision. The deficiencies identified at Key Stage 3 have been rectified. This has improved equality of access and the balance of the curriculum within the key stage. ICT is now taught as a separate subject at Key Stage 3 and students who show an aptitude for languages can take German as a second language in Year 8. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been revised. New vocational subjects have been introduced at this stage and in the sixth form.

54. The provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. A clear policy has been formulated to guide teachers' planning for spiritual development and an audit of present provision has been made. Some good examples of teachers raising students' awareness of spiritual issues were seen during the inspection. In geography, students are encouraged to reflect on the beauty of the world around them; in music, they are helped to relate their own experiences to a range of musical styles; in history, work on the diary of Anne Frank provides opportunities for reflection, the same theme also being explored in a Year 8 assembly. A strong contribution is made through RE and contacts with members of faith communities. Assemblies are held for all year groups and contain a very strong moral emphasis on the principle of concern for others. In some tutor groups, students presented their own thoughts on remembrance and Remembrance Day. Muslim students bring a depth of spiritual understanding from their own homes, which they share with other students in the Muslim morning assemblies provided by the college, and in Ramadan. In these, girls have good opportunities to lead reflection. In general, however, collective worship provides few opportunities for reflection, and does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of worship. Whilst the intention of the college, as indicated in the policy document, is clear, in practice there are some missed opportunities to help students' reflect on issues of meaning and purpose.

55. The provision for students' moral development is very good. The college sets out high expectations in a clear code of conduct and these are underpinned by its rules, which stress respect for people and property, behaving honestly and recognising the difference between right and wrong. The programme for PSHE provides students with good opportunities to discuss moral and ethical issues. Teachers insist on high standards of conduct and behaviour from students and many good examples of this were observed during the inspection. An impressive exercise in raising students' awareness of disability was observed in a Year 12 GNVQ lesson. In RE and history, students are encouraged to consider the moral issues which arise in their studies; ethical issues related to poverty and development are raised in geography and the moral dimensions of genetic engineering and pollution are discussed in science. There is a very strong commitment to charity. Students play a major role in the organisation of fund raising and deciding which charities to support. Currently students and staff are raising funds to help the British Legion Poppy appeal, The Terrence Higgins Trust, the Marie Curie "Fields of Hope" appeal and students are organising a disco in support of the

BBC Children in Need appeal. Other charities supported include UNICEF and Denim for Diabetes. These commitments show real generosity of spirit on the part of students and teachers.

56. The provision for students' social development is good. Students have some experience of taking responsibility through the College Council to which they elect representatives. Social development is helped by many classroom activities which draw upon and strengthen students' social skills. In design and technology, they are conscious of the need to work safely and ensure the safety of others. They work together well in groups and ensembles in music and are encouraged to take responsibility in art. Visits in history, fieldwork in geography and in biology, and participation in teams in PE provide further opportunities for the development of positive attitudes and good relationships with others. Residential visits to France and Germany greatly help to develop social maturity.

57. Provision for students' cultural development is good and has improved since the last inspection. A range of clubs and activities gives students opportunities to extend their cultural experience, complemented by chances to participate in the cultural life of the local community. The contribution of music is particularly strong, in encouraging individuals to develop their musical talent and in giving students the chance to work together and with professional musicians. There are good links with Walsall Art Gallery through the art faculty and the humanities faculty. Theatre visits are organised by the English faculty and visitors from several faith communities have contributed to RE. Students have the chance to join a number of clubs and activities, for example the French e-mail club, the environment club and young ornithologists' club. Successful and popular visits to France and Germany are organised, giving students an excellent chance to learn about a new culture. Students are encouraged to value their own cultural heritage, but there are some missed opportunities. There is little evidence generally of the celebration of cultural diversity during the school day, but the college is often used by the area's many community groups in the evening, for example for community festivals and the new World Music Centre.

58. The positive features of social and moral provision noted at the last inspection have been maintained; good improvement has been made in the provision for cultural development; satisfactory improvement has been made in the provision for spiritual development, but initiatives in this aspect have not yet had a significant effect on provision across all curriculum areas.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

59. The overall provision for the care of students is satisfactory. Many of the arrangements for care, support and guidance are good, some very good, but there are shortcomings in child protection procedures and the accuracy of IEP documentation. Arrangements for target setting need further development.

60. The college has good procedures for monitoring and supporting students' personal development. Most parents are pleased with the way that the college cares for their children. The college ensures that students receive good levels of individual support and guidance. Good levels of careers advice ensure that students have confidence in the courses they have selected. The PSHE programme is very comprehensive and adequately supports students' welfare and personal development. Topics about health, drugs, alcohol abuse, anti-bullying, racism, sexism and citizenship enable students to make informed choices. The college is concerned that students should start the day with some nourishment and provides a breakfast club, funded by the local health authority. Registration time and Christian and Muslim assemblies are often used to celebrate students' achievements, inside and outside of the college.

61. The college is able to prove that it meets the requirements outlined in students' statements of SEN, but the evidence for this comes more from the SENCO's very good personal knowledge of the

students than from documentation. There is a lack of common approach to the identification of the best teaching methods for all students and for monitoring their progress. Some of the IEPs seen do not identify targets clearly, and departments are making only a patchy response at present to completing the required subject proforma. As a result, the learning support faculty is not being given the information it needs in a clear enough way to ensure that the requirements of students' statements and IEPs are being met.

62. At present, IEPs often confuse objectives with targets, which presents some difficulties in identifying clear methods to improve students' work. There is the need to develop IEPs further and include students who are gifted or talented. IEPs are distributed to staff, but there is no common approach to their use. The records kept on students' progress, and the monitoring which identifies movement on the register, need to be more carefully compared. There is, however, a high level of care for SEN students with statements. Learning support assistants are well placed, trained and supported in their role. Students with SEN are respected by their teachers and peers. Teachers know their students and are able to provide for their particular needs.

63. There are excellent procedures for monitoring and recording students' levels of attendance. The information is shared widely, ensuring good levels of investigation by staff at all levels and support from the Educational Welfare Officer. The college has a wide range of methods to raise existing levels of attendance, including the very effective work of the attendance clerk, who is employed to contact parents and investigate all absences within 24 hours. Information from the home is passed on to heads and assistants of year and form tutors to take appropriate action. However, the more active involvement of some form tutors is needed further to raise levels of attendance.

64. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are satisfactory. The good, often very good, behaviour in the college is supported by a new programme of behaviour management. This is a balanced system of rewards and sanctions, designed to support and encourage good behaviour. It works for the majority of teachers, helping students and teachers to maintain very good order in classrooms and supporting generally good relationships. However, it is a very new scheme and is not yet working for all. This is evident through the number of exclusions in the college, which is high compared to the national average and has risen since the last inspection. The college works hard, though, to help disaffected students participate in activities and build their self esteem, for example through the work of its 'Club 2000', which helps give a sense of belonging to such students. Supervision at lunchtimes is not always consistent, and the good practice found in many areas is not common to all. All reported incidents of bullying and other types of anti-social behaviour are investigated, but some black and Asian students believe that their concerns about racism are not fully considered.

65. Despite these views, the college's procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are good. To address racism, bullying and sexism, the college takes positive action by conducting surveys amongst students. It assesses the nature of any bullying, identifying persistent troublemakers and targeting strategies to modify their behaviour. The college also makes effective use of initiatives, such as the Afro-Caribbean project, which works closely with Year 9 students, offering individual counselling and other strategies to raise their confidence and self-esteem. It has joined with other selected schools in a well researched project to raise the achievement of Pakistani pupils. The college is also working closely with three development workers, one black and three Asian, who are funded through a Government initiative. The project is intended to work closely with parents, schools and the community in order to raise achievement and indirectly remove barriers, leading to greater links between home and school. All parties involved believe that the success of this work will enable students to progress academically and socially and ensure equality of opportunity and of treatment for all. Staff training days are planned to coincide with prominent Islamic, Sikh and Hindu holy days, so that students are not disadvantaged through missing college time. However,

some students continue to express strong feelings of isolation, which the college could further help through the use of its staff from the ethnic minorities as mentors to particular students.

66. The required arrangements for child protection are not fully observed. Senior staff and governors should ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff are aware of the necessary procedures and that they report all concerns directly to the designated teacher. In practice, concerns about students' safety and well-being are well handled. The clear health and safety policy supports good practice, and the only problem identified during the inspection was that of car parking on the playground.

67. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good overall. The college has a clear general policy, which has the capacity to help teachers assess their students well and so to improve their work. However, implementation of the policy is in the hands of faculties, and varies in quality. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good in science, modern foreign languages, art and ICT; good in mathematics, geography, RE, music and PE; satisfactory in design and technology, modern foreign languages and history; and unsatisfactory in English. The assessment of students with SEN is effective. Students are well diagnosed and taught within the learning support faculty, though record keeping is uneven between the different faculties.

68. The collection and analysis of assessment data are very well carried out, and the college has now assembled a comprehensive central data base. The quality of information on attainment provided by faculties is improving, as they develop and refine their own systems. The analysis of baseline, test and examination data using three nationally recognised systems to help set target grades for years, subjects and individual students at Key Stage 4 is extremely thorough. The member of the senior team responsible for the use of assessment data gives all faculties very comprehensive information, and has been able to instruct several teachers in its use. At the moment, however, teachers' use of assessment information to guide their curricular planning is no more than satisfactory in most subjects. It is good in mathematics, science, RE and music, and unsatisfactory in English. Many teachers are not clearly aware of how they might set demanding, individual targets, based on the evidence of assessment, to help improve their students' performance and reach more challenging goals. The college is aware that this needs to be done. Target setting is a priority in the college development plan.

69. There is also a clear need for all other aspects of the assessment policy to be well implemented. The policy contains many valuable concepts, for example on diagnostic assessment, identification of learning objectives and the effective monitoring of learning, but much training is needed to ensure that the good practice which exists, for example in science, is shared by all teachers. The present quality of reports indicates a lack of clear understanding of the basic purpose of assessment - to establish an accurate level of attainment, and then to measure students' progress from this point, with the right intervention to improve progress if need be.

70. Overall, the college has made satisfactory progress in this area since the previous inspection. Since then, the good level of care and support has been maintained, but procedures for further improving IEPs, target setting and child protection procedures now require its attention.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

71. Most parents rightly compliment the college, recognising its effective contribution to their child's development and progress. They perceive teachers as approachable and acknowledge the college's constructive processes, which adequately meet their complaints and act on their suggestions. Parents are pleased with the leadership and management of the college. They feel their children like coming to college. However, a small, but significant minority have expressed concerns about the level and consistency of homework provided. The inspection team supports parents'

positive views of the college. It feels that homework is satisfactory overall, though some form tutors and parents do not consistently monitor the homework diaries.

72. Parents appreciate the quality of information provided through the newsletter, correspondence, regular parents' and consultation meetings. They appreciate the opportunities to attend their children's SEN review meetings. They are actively involved in reviewing statements and are also called in to discuss the placing of their child on the register of SEN. Information in the college prospectus and the annual report from governors is satisfactory. However, the governors' report omits information about students' authorised absences and so fails to cover all statutory requirements. All documentation, including letters to parents, for example about SEN reviews, is in English. The college does not state that translations could be available.

73. Though parents are satisfied with the annual reports on their children, these have shortcomings. Reports concentrate on students' attitudes to work and their personal and social development. Some aspects of the report provide parents with an opportunity to assess and monitor their child's academic progress, but comments are often too brief and general and not always specific to the subject. There are opportunities for parents to respond in writing about the contents of the report and to discuss it with staff. New and prospective parents are invited to the college. There are regular opportunities for parents to participate in workshops, discuss their child's needs, and support their achievements. Overall, there are sound channels of communication between the college and home.

74. Some parents do not think that the college works closely enough with them, but inspectors consider that sound relationships between parents and the college encourage a satisfactory partnership. A significant number of parents value and support the work of the Parents, Teachers and Friends Association, which raises funds and gives parents the chance to meet socially. Most parents contribute generously to support educational and social visits to France and Germany, which significantly aid students' linguistic, cultural and social development and enable them to recognise the importance of being good citizens of Europe. Parents also offer generous support and encourage students to participate actively in college concerts, performances and musical events. The standard of uniform and the involvement of parents in improving reading skills illustrate their support for the college.

75. Since the last inspection, parents' views have remained positive and the college has further developed its partnership with parents. For example, it now works with local authority projects to encourage the participation of parents in the education of their children. Projects of this nature ensure the continuing support of its parents and community.

COMMUNITY LINKS

76. Community links are strong and growing. There are regular meetings with key agents in the community and the formally constituted Community Association provides a positive forum for the development of links and initiatives. Formal and informal education for adults and young people is evolving. Four strategic areas have been identified – sport and recreation, technology, art and the family. In some aspects a specific appointment, for example in community sport, has been made to increase and develop participation.

77. Other initiatives such as the world music day, which provided forums for the celebration of dance and music from different cultures, serve to demonstrate the college's commitment to community participation and its involvement in the life of the college.

78. Although funding has been reduced, a range of activities continues to be available – yoga, swimming groups, aerobics, play schemes and a very successful table tennis club which has competed

in national leagues. The students following the GNVQ health and social care course are able to make good use of the nursery school on the college site, as well as other care settings in the locality. The college is also an active partner in the Walsall Education and Business Partnership.

79. Previously the college has provided accommodation and bases for some activities, but increasing numbers of college students has prevented this continuing. Where teaching gaps permit, the college encourages use of facilities, for example badminton and swimming, but further development of a community education programme during the college day is also limited by this pressure on college facilities.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

80. Overall, the leadership of the college is good and has created an effective, improving school in which students are keen to learn. There is a very good, shared commitment to

succeed and the capacity to do so. The college has a good set of aims, with high aspirations well matched by clear objectives. It works hard to achieve them.

81. The headteacher leads the college very well, providing clear educational direction which promotes good teaching and an active quest for improving standards. Parents agree, with 97 per cent confirming that the college expects its students to work hard and achieve their best. In his four years in the post, the headteacher has assembled a very effective senior team with particular strengths in the assessment of performance data, the induction and training of staff, the development of vocational education and the application of new technology to the management of the school.

82. Examples of the college's ambition to improve its performance are seen in its gaining of technology college status in 1999, with an immediately good effect on standards in ICT; membership of a national project, run by Nottingham University, on improving the quality of education for all; and in its contribution to national initiatives in achieving success in challenging schools and the Government's Excellence in Cities programme. A further example of the college's desire to make the most of new developments is seen in its very careful preparation for performance management. A very good policy has been drawn up, and the college is ready to make positive use of new arrangements as soon as this becomes possible. Responsibility for management of subjects and students' welfare is well delegated. Members of the senior team are well linked to faculties and years, the great majority of which provide very good leadership and management. Leadership by the heads of year is a particular strength, with effective procedures and communication to ensure that students' welfare and guidance are well attended to.

83. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties effectively. Governors are well led, and the chairman brings over 50 years of distinguished service to the college to his chairmanship of its committees. These are well chosen, and give governors good insight into the college's strengths and weaknesses; they are well served by the senior staff allocated to them. A strong feature of governors' meetings is the frequent presentations by staff of aspects of the college's work. However, they are not able to make use of a regular programme of monitoring and evaluation within the college, and have no clear means of judging the effectiveness of its policies. The membership of the governing body reflects the multi-cultural nature of the college very well, and individual members are well qualified to support the college's work in specialist fields, for example in its work for students with SEN.

84. The monitoring and evaluation of the college's performance are satisfactory overall. The headteacher observes all new staff teaching. Each member of the senior team has observed a lesson by all teachers in his or her linked faculty area and has discussed findings with the teachers and head of faculty. As a result, valuable support has been given in some cases. Current arrangements are recent as, although members of the senior team have been linked to faculties for some time, they have not long been linked to areas which reflect their own teaching backgrounds. Heads of faculty have not so far all taken an active role in the monitoring of teaching. Though the curriculum and schemes of work are generally good, the college is aware that it has not yet implemented a regular programme for the monitoring of the work of all faculties and other areas, with a rigorous evaluation of outcomes. However, it has prepared a useful policy for this. Its implementation is a feature of the current development plan. This plan is detailed, well presented and relevant to the future needs of the college. It is generally well reflected in the plans of faculties and years, which select items from the extensive list of priorities, and which account regularly for their progress in implementing them, via their link members of the senior team. Staff are involved in the preparation of the plan. Governors consider new plans in a special committee, but are not sufficiently involved at the earliest stages. They review the progress of the established plan through the regular meetings of committees and the full body.

85. The college makes good strategic use of its resources. It allocates its income carefully and supports new developments well. It is successful in attracting valuable new sources of income, for

example the funding for its technology college status, achieved in 1999, which is providing £123,000 per annum and has allowed it to create new computer suites and launch a very worthwhile new GNVQ course in ICT at Key Stage 4. Very effective use is made of ICT in the education of students and the administration of the college.

86. A further example of new income is the very recent funding of £2.2 million which the college will be sharing with other local schools in the Government's Excellence in Cities initiative. Good use is made of regular grants. For example, money is well allocated to meet the purposes of the national standards fund, which provides for the summer schools in literacy and numeracy among many other objectives. Grant for the education of students with SEN is well used. The college has a budget of £308,000 for SEN, which allows it to provide well for the many students with special needs. This funding has been used to reduce the student-teacher ratio, creating very small groups in the lower ability range. A number of promoted posts are funded from this budget, as are the salaries of 11 learning support assistants. Several computers have been purchased and extra facilities for literacy in English have been provided.

87. The college applies the principles of best value well. It makes very careful comparison of its educational achievements, consults well within the school and with parents, and ensures that services are provided competitively. It is particularly good at challenging itself in the setting of realistic but demanding targets for examination performance. Very careful analysis of performance in tests leads to detailed and accurate forecasting of prospective grades and overall targets. Targets set for GCSE in 1999 and 2000 have been met almost exactly, although these exceeded the predictions of a nationally established organisation. The college has raised its targets well beyond such predictions for 2001, with the most challenging target yet of 40 per cent of passes at grades A*-C. This is a brave but realistic goal. On past and present performance, the college knows it can be achieved. However, it has not yet refined its systems so that overall goals are translated into specific targets for individual students and subjects, which together amount to the projected target level. It is making progress towards this in Years 11 and 13, but has not undertaken much work in other years. The college recognises the need for development in this area, with further training of staff in the interpretation of data, setting of specific targets to achieve the maximum potential possible, improvements in the accuracy of recording attainment and the involvement of tutorial staff in the overall counselling of students. It is rightly concerned at the amount of time required to implement such a system well, but is keen to develop this work.

88. The management of the learning support faculty is satisfactory. The SENCO ensures good teaching, a very good atmosphere in which students wish to learn, and good resources. The quality of IEPs is not as good as it should be and the lack of documentation from some faculties makes it difficult to prove that particular subjects are doing all that is possible to support the provisions of statements of SEN. The policy document does not identify gifted or talented students as part of the large number of students with SEN.

89. Since the last inspection, the college has made good progress in improving the quality of its leadership and management. There is far greater precision in the roles of senior management, better monitoring of teaching, greatly increased use of statistical data, and governors are more fully involved in evaluating the college's work. Areas for improvement mentioned in the last report where further improvement is still needed are monitoring of faculties and the role of governors in evaluating college policies.

90. Overall, the college has a teaching staff very well qualified to meet the demands of its curriculum. The exception is in English, where recruitment and retention have been very difficult lately, and the faculty is staffed by too many supply teachers to be judged satisfactory in the long term. Teachers almost always teach in their specialist subject areas, and are very well supported by a committed non-teaching staff. Areas of shortage in non-teaching staff, for example in ICT and food

technology, will have new technicians starting soon. Teams of staff work together very well. The staff's age profile is an unusually polarised one, comprising greatly experienced staff and younger recruits. The college has deliberately chosen to retain its costly experienced teachers so that pupils will benefit from their expertise now that numbers on roll are growing again. The match of staffing to the needs of the curriculum is generally very good, although the long-term absence of some key staff, including a deputy head and a head of faculty, has created difficulties.

91. Although formal appraisal has been suspended recently at whole-school level, many heads of faculty have carried out appropriate interim systems. New systems are ready for implementation and are very good. The college's whole system of professional development, including its induction procedures for newly qualified teachers and others, is excellent. The college also makes excellent provision for teachers in training through the strong contacts most departments have with local universities. Staff training is excellently documented, with all information on-line, providing very good information and access for all staff. Teachers' ICT training has been very successful, with most staff now possessing a good level of competence with computer technology. However, a programme for the training of the SEN coordinators in faculties has not been considered, and there is no common policy for their work.

92. The college's accommodation enables the curriculum to be taught effectively. The majority of subjects are in rooms sited together, and this encourages professional communication. The college has gone to great lengths to enliven the buildings with worthwhile displays. These celebrate students' work, as in art and RE; set and promote high standards, as in history and PE; or enliven the surroundings, which otherwise have a somewhat drab appearance.

93. Sadly, major environmental problems exist. Externally, the college offers a depressing picture. The stream dividing the campus is polluted, rat infested and a magnet for litter and general detritus. Access to some teaching spaces involves transit through mud and wet, via uneven paths. Cars have to park on the playground, which poses a danger to students, particularly when a car arrives or leaves at breaks or lunchtime. Cars are parked on PE teaching spaces, which often have to be used due to the poor provision of playing fields. The open site makes the college vulnerable to damage by intruders. Litter collects in many corners and was made worse at the time of the inspection by the fallen leaves in many areas of the college. The entrance to the playground is uneven and unattractive. Internally, many parts of the college suffer from the presence of asbestos - not a danger unless disturbed, but a factor which further reduces the usefulness of this ageing set of buildings. Circulation space is very restricted in some places and distances are great. There is no space for storage of heavy bags. All of this serves to undermine the general high standards of presentation set by the college.

94. Improved changing room facilities are long overdue and sports facilities have been neglected. There are leaks in the sports hall roof, the floor surface is in a poor condition, and heating is inadequate in both the gymnasium and sports hall. Some outdoor spaces have been resurfaced, but the general condition of the playing fields is poor and is regularly abused by dogs and the public. The all weather surface remains unusable.

95. Lunchtime arrangements are made difficult by inadequate facilities for catering and eating. This will get worse as the college increases in numbers as will the problem of inappropriate facilities for large group assemblies.

96. A purposeful estates strategy exists which has brought about improved accommodation in several areas. New music facilities, comprising both practice rooms and a recording studio, now offer the subject very good teaching accommodation. Some newly refurbished science laboratories and improvements in the technology block are also positive advances. Provision for ICT has also been much improved since the last inspection. Further developments are scheduled for February 2001 – a new teaching block to replace temporary huts, changing room extension and the conversion of some science laboratories.

97. Resources for learning are good. They are excellent in art; very good in history, modern foreign languages and science; good with some very good features in music; and good in information technology, mathematics and physical education. Resources are inadequate in English in every area, including books, equipment and information technology, but finance is in place to resolve this issue. Since the last inspection, resources for ICT have greatly improved, and has improved in religious education. Resources to support multi-cultural education, particularly in music, are very good. Students with physical impairment are supported by the use of microphones, support assistants or large print examination papers for the visually impaired.

98. Since the last inspection when resourcing in the library was good, book stock has been reduced by the removal of old and outdated stock, so that book levels are now below nationally recommended levels. The library is now undergoing a major redevelopment as a multimedia learning resource centre to support independent learning. Computers are already in place, ready for networking and connecting to the Internet later this term. Re-stocking is part of the development plan under the new resources centre manager.

99. Improvement in staffing, accommodation and learning resources has been good overall since the last inspection. There have been notable improvements in the college's arrangements for staff training. Good progress has been made in refurbishing classrooms. The improvement in ICT resources has been considerable.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

100. The headteacher and senior staff should:

- (1) Raise standards of attainment in English, drama, skills of literacy across the curriculum, and in design and technology, particularly

in English, by improving:

- attainment in the key skills of literacy,
- schemes of work well linked to improved resources and methods of assessment, especially at Key Stage 3,
- teachers' marking and setting of homework;

in drama:

- by providing a policy for the development of the subject,
- by improving the curriculum and schemes of work at Key Stage 3;

in literacy, by providing:

- a whole-school policy to develop the skills of speaking, reading and writing in all subjects,
- training for all staff,
- the further inclusion of opportunities to develop literacy in schemes of work;

in design and technology, by improving

- standards of designing, particularly in resistant materials,
- the quality of planning in the teaching of textiles.

(See paragraphs 3, 12, 40, 43, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 115, 117, 118, 163, 164, 165, 166, 168)

(2) Help all students reach their full potential by

- providing comprehensive training for all staff, as teachers and tutors, in the use of the very comprehensive assessment data now available,
- setting all students clear targets, in all subjects,
- improving the regular assessment of students' progress towards these targets, and hence the quality of teachers' reports to parents.

(See paragraphs 35, 68, 69, 73, 87)

(3) Ensure that all faculties and subjects reach the highest possible standards by introducing a programme of regular review and report by the senior team, governors and heads of faculty, to agreed criteria, on issues to include:

- the quality of teaching, learning, the curriculum and of schemes of work,
- progress on issues of priority to the whole college, identified in the faculty development plan,
- the faculty's contribution to the teaching of key skills and of students with SEN,
- the effectiveness of the college's many policies in raising standards of attainment and students' personal development.

(See paragraphs 83, 84)

(4) In the learning support faculty, improve:

- the quality of statements of SEN, so that specific targets can be clearly identified and monitored,
- training for staff with liaison responsibility for SEN in faculties, so that a common approach can be adopted to the making of IEPs in the different subjects and the quality of information from faculties to the learning support faculty improved.

(See paragraphs 61, 62, 88, 91)

101. Improving students' literacy, target setting and the review of faculty performance are already items in the college development plan.

102. In addition to the above key issues, the following other weaknesses should be considered for action by the college:

- (1) Provide sufficient time to meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus in RE at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- (2) Ensure that arrangements for the notification of any issues of child protection are reported in accordance with the required guidelines, and that all staff are made aware of them.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	216
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	56

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	27	42	24	4	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 school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1136	155
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	471 for all years	-

Special educational needs	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	33	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	409	12

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	757

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	57
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	56

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.7
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	124	113

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	39	41	34
	Girls	72	50	41
	Total	111	91	75
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	47 (58)	38 (47)	32 (43)
	National	63 (64)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (18)	19 (23)	14 (20)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	37	43	39
	Girls	54	53	49
	Total	91	96	88
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	38 (51)	41 (48)	37 (51)
	National	64 (64)	66 (66)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	8 (18)	19 (23)	10 (19)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	108	76	184

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	33	84	97
	Girls	23	57	67
	Total	56	141	164
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	30 (36)	77 (80)	92 (93)
	National	49 (47.9)	88.8 (88.5)	94.4 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	27.8 (31)
	National	38.7 (38)

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

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	14	14	28

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	14.1	8.3	11 (12.9)	0	3	1.2 (6)
National	19.2	19.8	19.5 (17.9)	3.1	3.4	3.2 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	28 (19)	87.5 (26.3)
	National		72.9

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	41
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	228
Pakistani	383
Bangladeshi	146
Chinese	1
White	489
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	1
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	14	1
Bangladeshi	1	0
Chinese	0	0
White	21	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	84.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	278

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	21.8
Key Stage 4	22.2

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	3008480
Total expenditure	2971718
Expenditure per pupil	2444
Balance brought forward from previous year	90815
Balance carried forward to next year	127577

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1291
Number of questionnaires returned	360

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	51	7	2	3
My child is making good progress in school.	36	53	5	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	43	43	7	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	44	10	3	4
The teaching is good.	36	52	4	3	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	49	14	3	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	42	6	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	35	3	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	26	50	14	5	5
The school is well led and managed.	39	42	6	3	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	45	5	3	9
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	39	8	5	14

Other issues raised by parents

At the parents' meeting, parents were very satisfied with the standards achieved by their children, which resulted from a positive, 'can do' atmosphere set by the college. Behaviour was generally considered good, but there was some time-wasting behaviour in some classes. Parents at the meeting considered links between home and college to be good, with good information, homework, reports and information evenings. Most parents said that RE teaching was good and well balanced, and that the college has responded well to their suggestions and concerns. There had been considerable improvement in recent years, under the leadership of the present headteacher.

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

ENGLISH

(Drama is taught within English at Key Stage 3, and is included in this report.)

103. Although literacy levels of students when they enter the college in Year 7 are improving, the majority still have literacy levels below the nationally expected level.

104. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 tests, the proportion achieving level 5 and above in English was below the national average, but above average in comparison with similar schools. Results were below average in 2000 also. Although the proportion of students achieving level 5 and above has fallen over the four years to 1999, the result in that year was an improvement over the previous two years. The proportion of students attaining the higher level 6 and above has improved over four years, but remains below the national average. Results in these tests are below those in science, but above those in mathematics. Girls' results are substantially better than boys'. Inspection evidence reflects these test results, with attainment in English below the national expected level by the end of the key stage.

105. In the 1999 and 2000 GCSE English language and literature examinations, the proportion of students achieving A* to C grade passes was well below the national average. There has been a decline in the proportion of students achieving these grades in recent years. The results of girls, in these examinations, are better than those of boys. Inspection evidence reflects these examination results with attainment well below the nationally expected level by the end of the key stage. Twenty-two students were entered for the Certificate of Achievement examination for the first time in 2000, gaining good results. Two students gained distinctions, 14 passed with merit and the remaining six candidates gained pass grades.

106. The proportion of students achieving A and B grades in the A level English literature examination in 1999 and 2000 was well below the national average. The proportion achieving a pass grade was below the national average. There has, however, been an improvement in the pass rate in recent years. Inspection evidence reflects these examination results, with attainment below the nationally expected level by the end of the key stage.

107. In drama, attainment is below the nationally expected level by the end of Key Stage 3. The reason for this is the nature of the curriculum, which is based on using texts to produce plays rather than developing students' own drama as individuals and in groups. Students are not learning and developing adequate communication skills through drama. There is no scheme of work that identifies the knowledge and skills students should be developing at Key Stage 3. As a consequence, their achievement and progress are unsatisfactory at this stage. Because of this slow start, students' attainment, achievement and progress are below the nationally expected level by the end of Key Stage 4. No GCSE examinations have been taken in drama in recent years, though there are now examination groups in Years 10 and 11.

108. By the end of Key Stage 3 in English, students' listening skills are in line with nationally expected levels, but their speaking skills are below. Most students speak colloquially and in short phrases. A criticism in the previous inspection report was the low level of oracy at Key Stages 3 and 4. The change in teaching style since that inspection allows for increased interaction between students and teachers in lessons, but there is still insufficient time devoted to extended class discussion. Students do not have sufficient practice in learning to organise their thoughts and articulate them clearly and fluently. By the end of Key Stage 4, higher achieving students are careful listeners and confident speakers, but the majority of students continue to respond hesitantly and make

insufficient progress. There has been insufficient progress in the development of speaking and listening skills since the last inspection.

109. Attainment in reading is below the nationally expected level by the end of Key Stage 3. Students with special educational needs make the most progress. By the end of the key stage, higher attaining students are independent, fluent readers, but are not being sufficiently encouraged to read widely outside the current reading scheme. Progress is unsatisfactory for average and slower learning students. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in reading is well below the nationally expected level for all but the higher attaining students. The current reading strategy is failing to provide most students with sufficient skills to succeed in the GCSE English language and literature examinations. There are two main reasons for this; first, the content of much of the reading material provided is unsatisfactory and second, the management of students' reading lacks rigour. By the end of the sixth form, most students read fluently but not always with understanding. Most sixth form students find difficulty analysing the language of literature texts.

110. By the end of Key Stage 3, the quality of writing is below the nationally expected level for all but the higher attaining students. The failure systematically to develop basic writing skills impedes the progress of all but the higher attaining students. This criticism, made in the previous report, remains. Although the faculty is increasing the proportion of basic skills teaching, it has not yet identified clearly enough the knowledge and skills which individual students require, nor produced a plan for teaching and assessing them throughout Key Stage 3. As a consequence, by the end of Key Stage 4, the writing skills of the majority of students are insufficiently developed to enable them to attain the higher grades in the GCSE English language examination. As students move through to Year 11, progressively higher standards of writing are required and with poor basic skills, most students fall further behind national expectations. The faculty is addressing this issue with a range of strategies, for example teachers make good use of drafting and re-drafting of written work. By the end of the sixth form, written work remains below the nationally expected level. Most GCE advanced level students have satisfactory basic skills, but lack the ability to structure their work effectively, for example in developing an argument. However, advanced level students and those studying EDEXEL subjects make satisfactory progress.

111. Overall, students make satisfactory progress in English over Key Stage 3, and achieve satisfactory standards in relation to their abilities and their attainment on entry to the college. Those with SEN and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress over the stage and achieve standards at least commensurate with their ability. Students' attainment in Years 7 and 8 is enhanced by good specialist teaching. At Key Stage 4, however, students' achievement and progress are unsatisfactory. They do not achieve as well as they should. There is insufficient support provided for students with SEN, so that their achievement and progress are unsatisfactory by the end of the stage. Achievement and progress are satisfactory in the sixth form, both in English and the basic skills course.

112. The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good and is satisfactory in the sixth form. At Key Stages 3 and 4, almost 90 per cent of teaching is at least satisfactory with at least 50 per cent of a good standard and almost a quarter of a very good quality. There is a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching at both key stages. The quality of teaching in individual drama lessons is satisfactory, but the overall development of skills is inadequate and the setting of targets for students is not always appropriate.

113. There has been an improvement in the style of English teaching since the last inspection, with most teachers adopting inter-active teaching methods which encourage students to work on short tasks in pairs and in groups with opportunities to evaluate their progress as the lesson proceeds. This is proving successful because of the good relationships, careful lesson planning, the range of appropriate tasks chosen by teachers and by the good behaviour and positive attitudes of students, all

of which enhance their learning. Students take a pride in their work, try hard and concentrate well. For example, in an oracy lesson, students working in pairs had prepared well-structured arguments on a range of topics. They refined their arguments, then presented them, and the class evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation. Students learned from their peers and developed new skills. The success of the lesson relied on the teacher's skill and students' shared commitment.

114. Not all lessons are as successful. In some, teaching lacks imagination, and groups of students are insufficiently challenged. For example, in a lesson for students with SEN, the teacher spent the majority of the group work time supporting the students with special needs and did not ensure that the remaining students made satisfactory progress. Areas for improvement at Key Stage 3 include the setting of homework and the marking of students' work. Regular homework which extends and consolidates class work is not a consistent feature of teaching and much of the marking lacks purpose and fails to enhance students' learning.

115. The principal reason why attainment and progress fail to match the quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is the lack of a scheme of work. The outline curriculum provides a pattern of time to be spent on the various elements of English teaching, but does not identify the knowledge and skills to be acquired each year and by the different ability groups. Knowledge and skills are not being developed systematically, and without a sound foundation, students are ill prepared for the examination work at Key Stage 4.

116. Within this proviso, the curriculum is broad and well balanced in concept. To meet the changed National Curriculum 2000 requirements, a new drama element is required, in either English or drama lessons, and ICT needs to be integrated into the curriculum. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form meets the requirements of the examination syllabuses. Students have equal access to the curriculum, and the greater than usual time spent on English during the week is appropriate, because so many students have low levels of literacy.

117. In drama, the curriculum is unsatisfactory. It lacks breadth and balance: the nature of the curriculum does not meet the principles behind Curriculum 2000. The curriculum offered to students at Key Stage 3 does not adequately prepare them for examination work at Key Stage 4. Drama does not play an appropriate role in literacy development. Drama makes satisfactory provision for the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in one lesson, students were exploring themes related to racial discrimination and bullying. The college curriculum is enhanced by visits to the theatre and the annual college productions.

118. Assessment in English is only partially effective. The faculty has made a good start in the development of assessment procedures, and teachers are able to set general targets to their students. However, it has yet to devise an effective assessment system linked to a scheme of work. Currently there is no systematic, consistent approach, enabling teachers to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and groups, plan teaching and learning in the light of such an evaluation, and report securely to parents. A new recording system has been devised but has yet to be implemented.

119. The faculty is well led by a new head of faculty, who has already introduced a number of appropriate changes. For example, there is now a faculty development plan – there was none at the time of the previous inspection. A skeleton scheme of work has been created and new assessment procedures are being introduced. The monitoring of teaching is well supported by senior managers and regular monitoring of teachers' planning now takes place. There is no policy for the development of drama.

120. Teaching resources are unsatisfactory. There are insufficient textbooks and reading books and there is a lack of equipment, for example televisions, video recorders and access to computers. Teaching rooms are spread across the college, creating some communication difficulties. There are no separate rooms for drama or basic equipment such as lighting. The difficulty in recruiting permanent English specialists has yet to be resolved and there is no specialist drama teacher.

121. There has been insufficient improvement since the last inspection. The principal reason for this is the failure to raise standards of literacy and improve results in the end of Key Stage 3 tests and the GCSE examinations. There has been significant improvement in teaching styles; also in the management of the faculty, for example the production of a development plan and new assessment procedures, and in the liaison between the learning support and English faculties.

Media Studies

122. Media studies is taught at Key Stage 4 only. Students were entered for GCSE for the first time in 2000. In this, over 70 per cent of students gained A* to C grade passes and all passed the examination. Although there is a wide range of ability in media studies classes, attainment is in line with nationally expected levels by the end of the key stage. Students have completed a magazine project for the examination in 2001 and some work for this is of a very high standard. A particular feature of the best projects is the excellent use of ICT, both in research and the design, which is carefully matched to the target audience. Students make satisfactory progress over the course and achieve satisfactory standards for their abilities.

123. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory. Teachers adopt inter-active teaching methods in the classroom, providing a wide range of activities, matched to students' abilities. Students respond well. Most students rise to the challenges provided, work hard and enjoy the lessons. Relationships are good. Teachers have a good command of the subject, which gives students confidence to try out ideas in class. Most students behave well and their positive attitudes enhance learning.

124. The curriculum is broad and well balanced and teachers' assessment is satisfactory. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, students listened to several different radio presentations, and discussed the target audience for each and the influence of the language and music employed. The curriculum is appropriately complemented by outside visits, for example to the Granada studios.

125. Media studies is well organised and effectively managed within the English faculty and relies upon it for resources. Although resources are sufficient for the maintenance of the course, they are inadequate to develop the curriculum fully. For example, students do not have the use of a video camera and editing suite.

Literacy

126. The majority of students enter the college with skills in reading, writing, and listening and speaking below the nationally expected levels. The progress of students for whom English is an additional language, though good for their previous abilities, and for many of those where English is not the first language spoken at home, is further affected by a limited knowledge of English vocabulary and idiomatic expression. Although the college raises literacy levels, attainment remains below expected levels by the end of the key stage. Standards of literacy remain below expected levels at Key Stage 4 and are not high enough to promote high standards in GCSE examination work in most subjects. The literacy level of boys is below that of girls.

127. Although most subject areas have some policy guidance as a part of their teaching policy, there is no consistent support given to improving literacy. For example, few identify lists of words specific to the subject, discuss topics in detail to ensure understanding, or provide support to help with writing. As a consequence, in most subject areas, attainment and progress are impeded by students' inability to understand text and by poor basic writing skills. In most subjects, there is an inadequate range of written tasks. Subject areas particularly affected are English, science, history, PSHE and art.

128. Currently there is no whole-college literacy policy with consistent approaches, clearly identified to support learning across the curriculum. A further concern is the current whole-college reading strategy, which is not adequately meeting the needs of the majority of students.

ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

129. With nearly 60 per cent of the college population having English as an additional language, the college has established a support team of four teachers secured through an Ethnic Minority and Travellers' Achievement Grant (EMTAG). They assess each new Year 7 entry through well thought-out written and oral tests and establish a list of those who need a short period of complete withdrawal from the curriculum and of those who will require some continuing support. Excellent documentation has been drawn up and meticulous records are kept. The period of complete withdrawal is restricted to two weeks, with a further period of six weeks during which there is close supervision and in-class support. The aim is for all students with EAL to have support until they reach at least National Curriculum level 3 in English and mathematics.

130. Difficulties with English are a significant feature of the education of many students at the college. In one Year 11 lesson, a quiz which was apparently at an appropriate level did not work because a number of the students with EAL did not understand many of the questions and could not keep up with the questioning. The lack of key skills in communication forced the teacher to change tack and the intended competitive edge to the quiz did not materialise. In a Year 10 lesson about the history of medicine, three students with EAL might have found it difficult to play any part in the lesson as planned. However, a support teacher made sure they understood the questions and they were able to play a full part in the discussion. In a Year 8 lesson, a student who had recently arrived in this country appeared completely lost at the start of the lesson. The support teacher had been in close liaison with the class teacher and made sure that the student understood the gist of the lesson. Later on, he was offering answers as often as the rest of the group.

131. The EMTAG team make a very good contribution to the progress of students with EAL. They make home visits where necessary, and regularly attend other faculty meetings. They have developed a wide range of resources including computer technology. The base is open to students during four lunchtimes a week. However, they are essentially an emergency team working with no more than 80 students, a few intensively and most more occasionally. The task of moving students on from the basic levels falls to all other departments in the college and this is not happening consistently enough. Not all have so far developed policies for literacy across the curriculum, and some of those who have policies are not pursuing them actively enough. In particular, there is too little recognition of the rôle played by the first or home language in the development of English. This is a college matter and not just the concern of the EMTAG team. When a whole-college policy is constructed, much of the excellent EMTAG documentation can go straight into it. The EMTAG team have a low profile and their work is not mentioned in the college prospectus. Their future contribution needs to be in terms of more information to other departments about the students who have continuing difficulties but who are moving outside the scope of support in the classroom. Such documentation will resemble an IEP, but will need another name to avoid confusion with specific learning difficulties.

132. At the last inspection there was little reference to EAL, although it was noted that pastoral referrals were "gathered, monitored and evaluated". Statistical monitoring has now been extended to include GCSE results but no conclusions or recommendations have been made as a result of the monitoring. Concern was expressed in 1996 about students with EAL receiving their full National Curriculum entitlement. The present arrangements have removed this concern. There were also doubts about a clear distinction being made between special educational needs and EAL. This is always difficult to establish in the early stages, but the college team is aware of the danger and does everything it can to avoid confusion. Good progress has therefore been made since 1996.

MATHEMATICS

133. Standards of attainment in the 1999 Key Stage 3 tests were well below national average, both for level 5 and above and level 6 and above. However, results were above those for similar schools. There was little difference in the attainment of boys and girls and the results were a slight improvement on the previous year. The results were lower than those in the other core subjects. Results in 2000 followed a similar pattern, with girls now achieving more highly than boys.

134. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, students attained well below the national average for grades A* to C. There was little difference in the attainment of boys and girls and the results were a slight improvement on the previous year. The results were lower than those in the other core subjects. The results for 2000 were significantly lower than those for the previous year. In 2000, 26 students entered the Certificate of Achievement examination; 19 passed, 11 with merit and five with distinction.

135. At A level in 1999 students attained around the national average for grades A to E. This was lower than in the previous year and arose through several students leaving college before taking the final examination. The results in 2000 dropped further with even more entered candidates not completing the course.

136. Though standards of attainment seen in lessons and written work are generally higher than reflected in test and examination results, by the end of both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students' work remains generally below nationally expected standards. Work in Year 13 is in line with national standards for A level mathematics students. The difference in standards seen in work, compared to examinations, results from the good teaching and learning seen in the college and from the fact that levels of attainment in previous years have been considerably lower than those seen during the inspection.

137. Standards in number are somewhat lower than in other aspects of the subject. Numeracy standards are low on entry to the college but are rising as the National Numeracy Strategy takes effect. By the end of Key Stage 3, many students can estimate confidently but some find lines of symmetry difficult to identify. By the end of Key Stage 4, many students can calculate areas and volumes of regular figures with confidence, but some still find plotting Cartesian co-ordinates difficult. In Year 13, students are able to apply their knowledge of basic trigonometry to complex identities.

138. Students are beginning to use ICT effectively in mathematics lessons. Good use was seen in one Key Stage 3 lesson, where students used software to practise their estimation of angle. They developed their skills quickly with the repeated practice required by this software. Students use calculators appropriately and accurately in lessons. Generally, presentation skills are good and students enjoy answering and showing off their understanding.

139. Students achieve well and make good progress, for their abilities, in work seen and lessons observed at Key Stages 3 and 4. In the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress and achieve satisfactory standards. Particularly good progress was seen in a middle attaining Year 9 class, in which students learned how to make appropriate selections of class interval for representing data for the 1996 Olympic decathlon event. Clear explanations of method and the use of stimulating data were the keys to this good progress. In a Year 11 class, students made good progress in calculating areas and volumes of regular figures because the teacher explained carefully and used effective question and answer, and structured practice on examples. Students with SEN make good progress generally. This was seen in a lower attaining Year 7 group who developed their understanding of multiples through playing a game and by much sensitive help from the teacher.

140. Teaching is a strength of the faculty. Standards of teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form are invariably good with about one fifth of lessons very good. Two lessons were assessed as satisfactory and no lesson seen was unsatisfactory. This is an improvement from the previous inspection.

141. Teachers know their subject well and most of the problem areas associated with it. They plan well, with variation in activities to maintain interest. Lessons are usually well paced and relationships are generally good. Students respond well to the good teaching and are very polite, well motivated and prepared to answer questions. Most of them enjoy learning and using mathematics. They particularly enjoy using ICT and using real world data. They enjoy the mental arithmetic games played in some lessons to warm up. These activities boost their numeracy standards in an effective way. Students learn well when working co-operatively in some classes. Teaching styles are generally very traditional, with the blackboard the main tool. This can be very successful as was seen in a Year 11 group revising for their mock examination. The teacher kept the group on their toes by sheer

dynamism, with quick-fire probing questioning and short, sharp activities. Some of the good teaching seen could become very good with some more excitement added. One Year 9 class responded very enthusiastically and successfully to the opportunity to establish general formulae for movements across square patterns by carrying out the practical movements in small groups of students. There is a need to relate work in mathematics to work in other subject areas, when this is appropriate. In the slightly less effective lessons pace fell off with consequential partial loss of interest by some students. Teachers use homework regularly to supplement classroom learning. Assessment is used well to plan future learning.

142. The large faculty is well managed. The head of faculty has created a warm ethos and a team that is striving to do its best for the students. The work of the faculty is monitored effectively. The new assessment database is a very useful development. There is a need to further develop the use of ICT as a general tool in the classroom and to continue the development of teaching and learning styles.

143. Overall the faculty has made good progress since the last inspection. Teaching has improved, good practice is now well shared, behaviour is almost always good in the classroom, an on-line assessment database has been established and numeracy standards are beginning to improve at Key Stage 3.

Numeracy

144. Standards of numeracy are below the expected national levels, for a significant number of students. They are higher in the present Year 7, reflecting the effect that the National Numeracy Strategy has had in the primary schools. The mathematics faculty is endeavouring to raise standards by using NNS structures in Key Stage 3 lessons. These involve much more structured work on mental exercises and basic numeracy.

145. Several areas of the curriculum make some contribution to developing numeracy. They include science, where students make calculations and plot and interpret linear and non-linear graphs; design and technology where students learn to weigh and measure accurately; ICT where students use formulae in spreadsheets; geography where students analyse investigations and plot data; art where two and three dimensional drawings are made; the vocational courses where projects frequently involve data display, and several A level courses where advanced statistical and data handling is used. There is now a need for the college to map the need for and use of numeracy across the curriculum and to produce plans to develop the skills which are needed.

SCIENCE

146. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, results were below average, though less so than in English and mathematics. Boys performed more strongly than girls. Results have also been below average over the three years to 1999, with boys performing far more strongly than girls. Results in 2000 continued below average, but girls achieved better results than boys for the first time. Results in 1999 were well above average in

comparison with similar schools, and very high for the percentage of students reaching level 6 and above.

147. In GCSE, most students attempt the double award examination. In 1999, results at grades A*-C were just above the national average. Results rose further in 2000, and were above the national average. Lower-attaining students sat the single award examination and achieved results below the national average. In 2000, for the first time in four years, girls achieved better results than boys in both double and single awards. Students for whom GCSE is not an appropriate examination gained six passes and five merit awards in the Certificate of Achievement course.

148. In A level examinations, small group sizes make comparisons with national data misleading, but in recent years the great majority have passed, in all subjects, and around a third of results have been at grades A and B. In 2000, all biology and chemistry candidates gained grades in the A-E range, and only one physics candidate failed to do so.

149. The standard of work seen is below the nationally expected level by the end of Key Stage 3. Students have learned to handle basic apparatus safely and can plan and carry out simple investigations – such as whether tea in a plastic cup cools faster than in a china cup. They present their results in tables and graphs and can explain what has happened. Basic scientific ideas are understood and the students use scientific terms correctly although, for many, describing what they have done accurately with correct spelling is still a huge challenge. Students in the top sets have largely overcome these problems and are working at the nationally expected level. Though the end of key stage results in national tests are still below national averages, some work seen in class is above the national standard.

150. At Key Stage 4, standards of work are in line with nationally expected levels. In the laboratory, students carry out and evaluate more complicated investigations than in previous years, and by the end of the key stage can report clearly and accurately on entire investigations. The standard of presentation of written work is high, with neat handwriting and clear diagrams and graphs. With improving English, more complex ideas can be explored, for instance the atomic structure of materials and the mechanics of inheritance, but verbal descriptions are still clearer and more fluent than written ones and are given with greater confidence.

151. Sixth form students have clearly made the huge leap from GCSE to A level work successfully and willingly take responsibility for independent work. Their levels of practical skills are impressive and the standards of reports for submission to examination boards are high. They attain high standards of neatness and presentation, and excellent graphical work. In discussion, their increased confidence and mastery of technical vocabulary allow them to reach high levels in relation to those expected.

152. Students' achievement is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4. They make steady progress in relation to their levels of attainment on entry during Key Stage 3. They maintain this progress over Key Stage 4, improving their ability to handle more complex work, sometimes faster than expected. In the sixth form, students achieve well, making rapid progress in acquiring new knowledge and applying it well. At all stages, achievement is at least high enough, and is increasingly higher than expected as students move through Key Stage 4 and into the sixth form.

153. Across Key Stages 3 and 4, students with SEN often match the achievements and progress of their peers, when supported by additional staff. Only by the presence of a special needs teacher with them, or by sight of their written work, can they be identified. Spoken answers and practical results often match those of their classmates, but without the additional support their written work falls behind and is often then incomplete. The achievement of the large number of students for whom English is their second language depends almost entirely upon their command of English. In many

cases their inability to read a textbook or worksheet independently necessitates explanation and repetition and slows progress as well as affecting the quality of their written work. These problems clearly affect their ability to read and understand questions in tests and examinations across both key stages.

154. The quality of teaching is good, often very good. More than 80 per cent of the lessons seen were judged to be good or very good and the remainder were satisfactory. No lesson fell below this standard. The best teaching occurs at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where staff are teaching their own specialisms, and their specialist knowledge, enthusiasm for the subject and their commitment motivate students highly and are strengths of the faculty. Where understanding of English presents problems, teachers are most careful to ensure that explanations in simpler language, repetition and an accurate written record help students to understand the science. This often takes a large proportion of lesson time, the amount of science that can be covered is reduced, and the variety of teaching methods that can be used is narrowed because of this.

155. Improvements in resources have resulted in staff being able to use the latest technology to present their lessons and this raises interest and aids understanding. Examples are computer simulations and videos projected onto large wall screens, or live demonstration experiments shown on the screen so that all students can appreciate the finer detail at the same time. Students' strengths and weaknesses are well known to their teachers, and regular assessment and monitoring of progress enable support to be given when needed. The good teaching is supported by a team of hard-working technicians, who deploy and collect apparatus in an unobtrusive and thoroughly efficient manner.

156. Students' behaviour is very good. They are well-mannered and have good relationships with their teachers. Good order in the laboratories is therefore preserved with a very light touch by the teachers. Students come to science expecting to enjoy their lessons and they work well together, sharing results and apparatus and joining in discussion and scientific argument politely. A disadvantage of the well-mannered behaviour is that many of the girls, because of their cultural background, are reluctant to volunteer answers to questions or to contribute to discussions. Staff have to work very hard therefore to ensure that both boys and girls are actively involved, and that shyness and diffidence do not hamper understanding and progress.

157. With recent improvements in resources, changes in teaching methods, refurbishment of most laboratories and improving examination results, good progress has been made since the last inspection. The faculty is well led and works as a very cohesive team with the common purposes of providing the best results for each student and total concern for students' welfare. It has established a cheerful, supportive and pleasant environment in which teachers and students alike can enjoy their science.

ART

158. GCSE results at grades A*-C, in both 1999 and 2000, at over 80 per cent were well above the 2000 national average of 65 per cent, representing excellent achievement for these students. Results have been very high in comparison with those of other subjects in the college. In 2000, almost 20 per cent of pupils gained A grades, demonstrating the excellent progress and achievement of higher attainers as well as others. A level numbers have been very low, and results average.

159. Students in the present Year 7 show low standards of attainment on entry in key skills such as painting and drawing. When the current Key Stage 4 students came into the school, their spatial awareness in particular was very weak and standards were well below average. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standards of these students matched the nationally expected levels, which represents very good achievement indeed. Students of all abilities, including those with SEN, progress very well to Year 9. Through very good teaching and a curriculum which is well planned to redress their deficits

in skills, students rapidly gain confidence and learn to use two-dimensional media, for example to draw and paint, well. In a Year 9 project based on lettering, for example, students were attaining the nationally expected level in an intricate activity in which they were creating complex patterns from designs they had developed, using wax-resist techniques and colour washes. Additionally, students develop an appropriate range of three-dimensional skills in projects which interest and engage them. Overall, students' Key Stage 3 experience prepares them very well for embarking on a GCSE course. A smaller than average proportion of the school currently goes through into a Key Stage 4 art course, and these tend to be the middle to lower attainers. Standards in current Key Stage 4 classes reflect recent examination results, showing similar very good, often excellent achievement when judged against students' underlying abilities. Standards in Year 13 are somewhat below average, but are better in Year 12 compared with expected standards. At all stages, students' written recording of their learning of historical and critical aspects is much weaker than their practical work, impeded, frequently, by low levels of literacy.

160. Students' attitudes towards the subject are mostly very good. They relish their developing skills and enjoy their work in the faculty. Teachers encourage students to become as independent as they can, especially at Key Stage 4, and consequently they become relatively confident of their abilities, especially in drawing and painting. They work productively, and while skills-based work is their strength, some become individually creative as they approach the end of Key Stage 4. They are keen to learn, and talk willingly and enthusiastically about their work. In lessons, students often display eagerness to get on with activities, but listen actively and learn well from teachers' introductions. Although students' writing is impeded by low literacy levels, they often do good research for projects, and remember what they learn about artists' work so that they can discuss it.

161. Teaching is very good overall. No lessons were less than satisfactory, and the vast majority of teaching is good or very good, with some excellent teaching in the faculty. The teaching team shares a strong philosophy rooted in the need for students to acquire a strong skills base before they can apply these skills creatively in their work. Lessons and schemes of work are thus sensibly arranged to give students the maximum opportunity to develop these skills through practical work. Now that classes are smaller, students can also benefit from extremely effective individual learning. Teachers are committed to their students' development and create the very good improvements described above through excellent planning for classes' and individuals' needs.

162. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The many criticisms about over-directed work, dependence on teachers and lack of breadth in the curriculum are now resolved. The examination course at Key Stage 4 was chosen because of the huge numbers in classes, and has made the faculty's focus on painting and drawing entirely appropriate. Provision is also made for three-dimensional work, particularly ceramics. Given its massively improved resources, and smaller classes, the faculty plans, again, to increase its range of options in the Key Stage 4 course. This should allow more pupils to develop work to the standard required for higher grades.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

163. Over the past four years, the proportion of students achieving an A*-C grade at GCSE in each of the separate disciplines of design and technology has been well below the national averages, though A*-G grades have been in line with the national average in some years. Graphics products is the most successful design subject, where the proportion of students achieving an A*-C or an A*-G grade was in line with the national average in 1999, though below in 2000. Results in textiles have been well below average. Of the 30 candidates in 2000, none achieved a pass at grades A*-C. Girls attain slightly better than boys in each of the material areas, although they achieve below the national average for girls. This year, the proportion of girls attaining an A*-C grade was significantly higher than it was in 1999. Boys in general achieve well below the national average for boys. Students do

not, overall, attain as well in design and technology as they do in their other subjects at GCSE. There have been no candidates for A level design and technology subjects in recent years.

164. By the end of Key Stage 3, a significant majority of the students attain below the nationally expected level in design and technology. Students' knowledge and understanding of the principles and processes of designing are underdeveloped. In resistant materials, too many of the tasks required of students provide very little scope for creativity or the development of an in-depth understanding of the principles and processes of designing. The faculty has recently introduced revised schemes of work to meet such problems, in all design areas. However, in resistant materials there remains an over-emphasis on specific tasks and practical skills. There is an inconsistency in students' approaches to design work across the separate strands of the subject. In food, and to lesser extent textiles, individual creativity is encouraged and a small majority of students attain broadly in line with the nationally expected level. Students cannot yet explain the design process with any degree of conviction or accuracy. Higher attainers show satisfactory levels of fluency in the use of technical vocabulary to explain their ideas, but lower attainers remain hesitant and unsure of the correct terminology. Beyond the work done by students in the graphics modules, graphical communication skills are weak. At present, the sketches drawn by students to communicate their design ideas lack structure and detail, with little use of colour to enhance presentation. Students, including those with SEN, generally show good interest in their work and make satisfactory progress for their capabilities, especially when supported by specialist staff.

165. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are variable across all material areas and reflect the results of previous years. A significant minority attain well below the expected levels in resistant materials. In graphics products, a small majority attain in line with expected levels and in the case of a very small minority above these. In resistant materials, too many students have only a very rudimentary understanding of the principles and processes of designing. In all design areas, students' standards of technical writing and graphical communication skills are weak. In food technology, higher attaining students show a satisfactory understanding of the nutritive, sensory, chemical and physical properties of food, whilst the understanding of the lower attainers is at a very basic level. Across the different strands, practical skills are satisfactory and students use tools and equipment safely. However, some of the constructions in resistant materials do not reflect good practice, for example in technique for table or chair construction. Whilst some students use ICT to complete coursework, it is confined to the few rather than the majority. Skills in using computer aided designing techniques and the use of computer aided manufacturing equipment are very much underdeveloped and are limited by an insufficient range of appropriate equipment.

166. Teaching is generally satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good in a very small proportion of lessons observed. Teaching at Key Stage 4 ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. Where teaching is satisfactory or better, most students respond well, make satisfactory progress and show a good level of interest. Where teaching is less than satisfactory, the converse is true. In these lessons, students' concentration is unsatisfactory also; teaching is not demanding enough, and teachers have too low an expectation of what students can achieve. In some areas, particularly textiles, they have too lenient a framework for the completion of coursework. The cause of the low GCSE results in textiles is not the teacher's knowledge or the direction of the class, but the overall planning of the lesson and the course; students are not given tight enough deadlines and instructions, so work is often not properly finished. In most strands of the subject, teachers' design worksheets provide clear guidelines for the work required, but are not well adapted to meet the needs of the lower attainers. Some of the tasks set are over-prescriptive and do not provide sufficient scope for creativity. The technician provides an invaluable contribution to students' learning in the resistant materials area, but the overall technical support time is insufficient in food and textiles areas.

167. In the absence of the head of faculty, the acting head has tackled many of the issues highlighted in the last report and has been very effective in leading faculty staff in the review of the

syllabus which now more closely reflects the National Curriculum requirements for design and technology. The acting head recognises the issues which remain to be resolved and has recently begun implementing plans for improvements.

168. Standards have not improved since the last inspection. Issues in relation to over-prescriptive work remain in some areas, with too little opportunity for students to show initiative and develop their creative and aesthetic skills. In teaching, there remain some unsatisfactory elements, especially in the teaching of designing skills. Assessment procedures have been improved, but it is too early in their implementation to see how effective these now are, particularly in the setting of targets for students at an individual level. The food technology rooms have been considerably improved, as has much of the accommodation. ICT resources remain inadequate.

GEOGRAPHY

169. Results in recent GCSE examinations at grades A*-C have fluctuated considerably, with 1999 results broadly in line with the national average. Results in 2000 were much lower. Few students attain the higher grades. Boys perform slightly better than girls when compared with the national averages. When compared with other GCSE subjects within the college, geography results have been close to the average. Recent A*-G results have shown improvement and are now above the national position. Results in the Certificate of Achievement are good; in 2000, all 16 candidates passed, six with merit and six with distinction. Recent GCE A level results have improved with all candidates passing in the last two years.

170. Most students attain levels below those expected nationally at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, but close to those expected in the sixth form. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have a satisfactory grounding in geographical skills, and their knowledge of key words is good. Most can use and interpret maps, but need more practice in the construction and analysis of the graphical representation of statistical data. Students' knowledge of location is good but spatial patterns needs developing. Their achievement and progress overall at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory, and would be better if teaching time was in line with national minimum recommended time. Students with SEN do not have enough support from learning assistants, but their progress is satisfactory due to the considerable help and guidance provided by class teachers. By the end of Key Stage 4, students can explain a range of physical and human processes well, for example in Year 10 when discussing resource management. The best individual study projects for GCSE are of very good quality, but more emphasis is needed on this element of the examination for some students who currently underachieve in it. Students' achievement and progress at Key Stage 4 are generally good, given their prior levels of attainment. Sixth form students organise themselves well and generally have a sound grasp of geographical concepts. They make good achievement and progress over the course.

171. Teaching overall is good with some very good teaching at all key stages. Teachers are very concerned for their students and manage and control them well. The best teaching has clear and manageable aims, shared with students and tested at the end of the lesson to ensure that learning is effective; detailed and imaginative planning which encourages interest and offers a variety of suitable tasks; and lively presentation with good pace, challenge and high expectations. In these lessons, staff have a secure knowledge of the subject matter. Their teaching is well structured and focused; this helps students' understanding, as in a Year 12 problem solving exercise where students were required to use knowledge of location factors and analyse these to establish the best place for hi-tech industries in England. Visual aids are well used. For example, photographs in a Year 11 lesson helped students to annotate the geographical significance of a beach scene in Spain, while in a Year 10 class the overhead projection of a spider diagram helped consolidate the main features of China's one child policy. These clarified lesson aims and were very helpful to students. Despite this, teaching and learning would be further enhanced by better illustration and display, for example by re-enforcement of the main teaching points on the board; the regular use of a permanent map; a greater

use of local Ordnance Survey maps and actual examples, particularly at Key Stage 3; and more use of films, slides and the over head projector.

172. Students' attitudes to learning are mostly very positive and many display a real interest and enjoyment in their work. They are attentive, work conscientiously and respond well. Behaviour is very good. Good relationships are established with their teachers, with a very positive effect on students' progress. Students, across gender and ethnic groups, relate very well to each other when undertaking group work. Their individual responses to questions are good, but in many lessons they are less confident in speaking when the whole class is addressed.

173. The department is well run and ably managed. Staff work professionally and well together. Further to improve the good standards of management and teaching, a more detailed operational plan is needed, annually evaluated. There is currently no formal monitoring and evaluation of the impact of teaching on students' learning. The involvement of students in evaluating their own work and setting targets is not adequately developed. Accommodation is in specialist rooms, but not all of these provide enough space for investigatory work. Resources are adequate, but there are some serious shortfalls such as the need for an overhead projector, video monitor and a permanent display map in each specialist room; a fieldwork budget; a computerised weather station and a cluster of more computers for class teaching purposes. At present, ICT skills are weak and a coherent

programme for their development is needed, over the key stages. The fieldwork provided is suitably balanced and greatly enriches students' studies.

174. The department has maintained the good level of teaching and its level of examination results since the last inspection, though the need for better use of ICT and development planning remain important issues.

HISTORY

175. Teachers' National Curriculum assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that standards in history are well below national averages, though a minority of students are achieving standards in line with average levels. Results in the GCSE in 1999 were below national averages, but improved in 2000. GCSE results have improved since the last inspection in 1996. Eight students took the Certificate of Achievement award; results were modest, with only two passes, though at merit grade. Results at A level over the last three years have been below the national average. The number taking the examination has fluctuated widely, so that there is no clear trend or secure comparison with national statistics.

176. In the work seen, the attainment of students at Key Stage 3 is below expected levels. By the end of this stage, most students have an overview of the period studied and use sources and artefacts to identify characteristics of the time. For example, students in Year 7 recognise the need for the co-operation in society which brought about the building of ancient Rome. They are aware of the variety of sources available and use them to make simple hypotheses, supporting their ideas with evidence. They do not yet evaluate the sources, but give them equal status. Students recognise symbolism and the more able students understand its use in manipulating opinion, as in the portraits of Elizabeth I. Students' written responses are limited in the main, relying on the teachers' direction, whereas oral contributions are often more intuitive. Students' achievements and progress are satisfactory over this stage. Those with SEN make good progress where they are supported by carefully designed materials and where there is additional support for their language needs.

177. Students' attainment in work seen during Key Stage 4 is below the expected national level. By the end of this stage they can, for example, recognise the development of medicine over time and can make links between social conditions and the increasing involvement of the state in welfare reform. More able students recognise that there may be several contributing factors to change and the majority of students recognise that history can be seen from a variety of viewpoints, for example the reforms to farming in the 18th century. They can select and arrange information from sources in response to questions and reflect upon why events took place, empathising with the people of the time. Students of lower attainment recognise the effects of change when they are demonstrated, but have less understanding of the process. Most students undertake research, many using the Internet, and higher attainers use it to develop extended prose. The majority of students write in short paragraphs and are dependent on structured questions and the text to develop extended responses. The achievement of a minority of students at Key Stage 4 is limited by failure to complete necessary coursework. Students' achievements and progress are satisfactory over this stage also. Students for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress, although their grasp of abstract concepts is weaker.

178. The standard of work seen in the sixth form is in line with that expected for the A level course. Students in Year 12 understand that events may be seen from different standpoints, for example when discussing the views of unions, government and press during the General Strike, but they are not yet confident in dealing with extended questions. By Year 13, they are more at ease in discussing motives and consequences, for example in their grasp of the manipulation of culture by the inter-war dictators. In both years, achievement and progress are satisfactory, and greatly helped by very good attitudes and clear, well informed teaching.

179. The quality of teaching is good, very good at Key Stage 3. Lessons are well planned and the focus of the lesson is clearly communicated to students. Good use of opening question and answer enables students to become actively involved at once, recalling the previous lesson so that they build on familiar knowledge. Teachers have an excellent rapport with their students who respond accordingly, often eager to be active learners. A good example was seen in a Year 8 lesson on symbols in propaganda, where students' enthusiasm was clear and where, as a result, their involvement was high. The use of group work encourages students to develop their own social skills and ability to listen to each other. Students concentrate well on their work, and teachers' good management creates an effective working atmosphere. A good example of this was a Year 11 lesson where students compared sources relating to the Poor Law and were able to support each other's findings. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and treat their students with respect. Lesson plans emphasise the development of key skills and teachers are concerned to provide opportunities for investigation and analysis, for example in the Year 9 investigation into the 'Palfrey Hermit'. As a result, students are gaining confidence in their own ability to research and are becoming more independent learners. In the best lessons, time is planned to enable students to reflect upon what they have learned and to consider their own findings.

180. The department, which is very well led, has recently moved to an excellent suite of rooms; these are well equipped to support students' learning and the exhibition, for example, of historical drawings in the tradition of Rowlandson and Gillray. Staff have a shared vision for the future and a clear set of priorities for development. Although the department has had limited access to ICT, it is now being developed most effectively, as in a Year 8 class where students grasped the concept of the manipulation of photographs easily, and went on to apply the knowledge to modern and historical pictures. Curriculum time, however, is short at Key Stage 3 and this limits the depth of coverage of the programmes of study. Schemes of work are being successfully re-drawn to include greater use of ICT, and to enable teachers to assess levels of competence in key historical skills more accurately. At present there is insufficient accurate information to monitor students' progress and so evaluate and improve performance.

181. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection, although monitoring is not yet effective and extended writing is still under-developed. Standards of attainment are rising and students' skills of independent investigation and interpretation are developing. Teachers' planning is now very good and tasks are now better matched to the ability of the students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

182. The proportion of students achieving an A*-C grade in GCSE in information technology over the past three years has been well below the national average. It was significantly below it last year for A*-C grades, but the proportion of students achieving an A*-G grade was broadly similar to the national average. Boys attain marginally better than girls, although their achievement is well below the national average for boys. Students achieve as well in the subject as they do in most of their other subjects. Four students took

the Certificate of Achievement award in 2000. All passed, one with merit and two with distinction.

183. By the end of Year 9, attainment in work seen in lessons is generally in line with the nationally expected level, and a small number of students attain above this level. In Years 7 and 9, students confidently and competently set-up their own e-mail addresses and corresponded via e-mail with a friend in the group. Standards are good in communicating and handling information, and satisfactory in modelling and measuring. Students' knowledge, skill and understanding in control technology are at a very basic level, and are limited by the availability of resources. The great majority of the students has satisfactory keyboarding skills, although lower attainers are unsure of the keyboard and are not always confident at inputting text. Most students use the mouse well to negotiate icons, menus and functions when loading the required programs and files from the network. The higher attainers speak confidently about their work, using the technical vocabulary of the subject well. Lower attainers find the concepts difficult to grasp and do not readily use the appropriate technical vocabulary of the subject. Students' achievement and progress are good over this stage. Students with SEN show considerable interest in their work and make satisfactory progress for their capabilities, especially when supported by specialist staff. The great majority of students show a positive attitude to learning and good behaviour in lessons.

184. In work seen across the college at Key Stage 4, by the end of Year 11 at least half the students attain in line with the nationally expected level, with a small minority of these attaining above it. In the GNVQ (intermediate) information technology course in Year 10 and the GCSE information technology course in Year 11, the great majority of students attain in line with the expected levels for the course. The standards seen in lessons and in students' coursework reflect a considerable improvement on the results achieved in the most recent examinations in information technology. There is evidence of a substantial increase in the use of word processing, desktop publishing and spreadsheet work in students' coursework in many subjects across the curriculum, but little evidence of computer aided design or manufacture work. The use of the computer as a research tool for topics in geography, history and religious education is underdeveloped. Developments are however, limited by the availability of sufficient resources in these subjects. In a Year 11 PSHE lesson, students showed satisfactory skills in using word processing software to complete their records of achievement. Students' achievement and progress are good over this stage also.

185. In the sixth form GNVQ intermediate course, standards overall are broadly in line with the nationally expected level. The great majority of students show good ICT skills in business studies. Standards of word processing, desktop publishing, and the research of topics using electronic storage devices are at least satisfactory and often good. Students continue to make good progress during the sixth form, achieving well for their levels of attainment on entry to the courses.

186. In all the information technology lessons observed, teaching is never less than satisfactory and is very good in over half the lessons observed. Information technology teachers are very enthusiastic about their subject and effectively stimulate students' interest. Teachers clearly explain such topics as the skills needed to access the Internet and setting up an e-mail address, through clear, straightforward, effective demonstrations of the applications. Large screen projections of the skills being developed allow all students to see clearly the processes involved. Teachers provide challenging and interesting tasks that are generally well matched to students' interests, posing problems by building on students' existing knowledge and skills. Teachers provide high levels of individual support and guidance, working encouragingly with students at their computers. The system to assess students' attainment and progress has been improved since the last inspection, but teachers have yet to set sufficiently rigorous targets for improvement at the individual level. Teaching styles help students learn. As a result, most students show good interest levels, sustain their concentration for appropriate lengths of time and make satisfactory and often good progress in developing their skills in lessons. The worksheets, produced within the ICT department, successfully identify learning objectives but some written instructions within these worksheets are insufficiently modified to suit

the needs of some lower attainers. During the inspection the lack of technical support to ensure that all equipment worked effectively in lessons affected the continuity of learning for students.

187. The subject is very effectively led and managed. The ICT coordinator, together with very good support from the network manager, provides teachers with clear direction, guidance and support in the teaching of ICT. Systems for monitoring students' performance are satisfactory for ICT across the curriculum, and are at least satisfactory in the department. The assessment of students' performance in the vocational GNVQ course is very good. The provision fully reflects the requirement of the National Curriculum at both key stages.

188. There has been a considerable improvement in standards and in the use of ICT in many subjects since the last inspection. A considerable investment has been made, and continues to be made, in improving the resources for ICT, which is currently having a very positive effect on students' standards and their access to ICT. The computer suites are very busy outside lesson times, reflecting a growing interest, confidence and competence amongst students in their use of ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

189. Reported assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are always close to national average levels. GCSE results are also close to the national average, usually higher than in most other subjects in the college and in most other comparable schools. Few students choose to continue a language to advanced level, but GNVQ students generally reach the required levels in their courses. The discrepancy between boys' and girls' attainment is much lower than nationally.

190. Although students make a slow start in Year 7, perhaps because of setting changes, by the end of Key Stage 3 they have made good progress, achieving standards higher than their performance in the core subjects might have suggested. The able students who start German in Year 8 on a much reduced time allocation make very good progress and reach standards which will enable them to choose French and/or German at Key Stage 4, at least on a comparable footing. In most groups, standards of reading and listening are in line with expected levels and writing is reasonably accurate, if limited. Speaking is usually the weakest skill and does not receive enough emphasis in some lesson plans. Curiously, there is sometimes more French spoken in lower sets than in higher. Students continue to achieve well and make good progress over Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, helped by good teaching and the interest teachers generate in the subjects. At all stages, students with SEN and with English as an additional language make good progress and reach standards above expected levels for these students.

191. Teaching and learning are, on average, good at all three key stages. All eight teachers are good classroom managers and establish a good working relationship with students, who respond accordingly. Students are also very pleasant and tolerant towards each other. The attitude of low-attaining groups is just as positive as the high-attaining. There are frequent examples of lower sets being carried along by the teacher's drive and enthusiasm and sustaining much longer periods of oral work than would be attempted in many other schools. In other lessons, however, promising starts are impeded by rather unambitious or illogical lesson plans which leave students too little opportunity to reinforce their acquired skills. Sometimes, lessons are spoiled by students having to spend too much time copying from the board. All teachers maintain the foreign language throughout most of the lesson. Resources are very well used and the faculty is more advanced in the use of computer technology than in most schools. Enterprising e-mail links with a school in France will soon be providing a mass of stimulating authentic material.

192. As a result of excellent leadership, all aspects of the faculty's administration are very good. Documentation in the faculty is exemplary, with outstanding sections on SEN, good practice in lessons, the correction of errors, and approaches to assessment. There is firm emphasis on the

importance of enjoyment and motivation. The value of a colourful and stimulating environment is stressed and classrooms live up to this policy. Impressive individual lists demonstrate the commitment of all staff to continuing professional development. The monitoring of classroom practice is well advanced and there are very good induction programmes for teachers new to the college and for the French language assistant. Procedures for assessment are very good. Marking is thorough and effective, often in the foreign language, and regular reports to parents are detailed and helpful.

193. There is now an opportunity for the highest attaining students in French to take up German as a second foreign language but Asian languages are not available in the curriculum. Students have a good range of visits abroad and they respond enthusiastically. There is a good supply of books and a good range of audio-visual resources. A GNVQ lesson was enhanced by the proficient use of a digital projector and slides succeeding each other at a pace that would have been impossible with less advanced technology. In another lesson, an overhead transparency was rendered much more effective by the picking out of various sections in different colours.

194. The last inspection report stated that students needed more opportunities to initiate dialogue and that there was insufficient pair-work, although what there was was sensible and enthusiastic. These reservations remain. However, what was described then as a well-led faculty is now very well led indeed. Teaching described as satisfactory and often good is now at least satisfactory and frequently very good or excellent. Overall, therefore, there has been good progress since the last inspection.

MUSIC

195. GCSE results in music for 1999 approached the national average for A*-C grades and average points scores. They returned to previous lower levels in 2000; the students concerned had received no teaching in Year 10 and the four students out of thirteen gaining A grades did so with only two terms' teaching - a significant achievement. There is currently no sixth form provision in music. There is no evidence of different standards between boys and girls.

196. On the evidence of work seen during the inspection, by the end of Key Stage 3 students are attaining at the nationally expected level, and students throughout Key Stage 4 are working above the level expected. Achievement and progress increase rapidly as students move through Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4, and are good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Students with special needs achieve well, and the music department identifies students with specific talent and develops these talents well. For example, students in Year 8 having their first class guitar lesson made intensive progress and to their great delight were already at the nationally expected level in this aspect of the syllabus by the end of the lesson. Students in Years 10 and 11 showed a good understanding of the department's software as a tool for their compositions. One lower ability Year 9 boy used the word 'dark' to describe a minor key – a sensitive and highly appropriate use of language.

197. More than 62 students receive instrumental tuition - all free of charge - and this provision is developing rapidly. Well over a fifth of the students take part in musical extra-curricular activities. Forty students from a local primary school took part in the college production of *Joseph and his Technicolor Dreamcoat* recently. The local authority has based its World Music Centre at the college, and many of the students take part in this exciting provision, which closely involves members of the community. The department takes full advantage of opportunities to involve students in musical activities outside the college, including opera workshops and a performance of *Dido and Aeneas* with a professional choir.

198. Teaching and learning are very good at both key stages. Musical development in the college is firmly based on enthusiasm for and delight in music. The best teaching is characterised by total security in both music and in teaching skills. Planning and preparation are linked to clear target-setting which is shared with students, who therefore know exactly what is expected of them and how they are to get there. Organisation and management in lessons are very good, based on excellent relationships. Targets are split into small stages when appropriate, especially with the less able. The teaching of singing is good, with classes singing in three parts. The whole-class guitar session with Year 8 was extremely well taught, building on the teacher's expertise, and celebrating the students' success. Questioning is often probing and analytical, extending students' awareness. Although staff notation is well taught, it is not always relevant to many students.

199. Very good teaching gets a very good student response, at both key stages. It is open and positive, and characterised by enthusiasm and commitment. Students respond well to challenges, and support each other well. In almost all lessons, there is a sense of fun and delight allied to hard work and deep concentration. Year 11 students were asking searching questions of the teacher to support their understanding and musical development.

200. The curriculum is very good, and takes full account of the ethnic diversity in the college. Full advantage is taken of opportunities to extend the curriculum for as many students as possible. Time allocation is adequate. ICT is well provided, using appropriate software, and teachers have appropriate expertise. The good assessment system is founded on a balance between teachers' feedback in lessons and students' self-assessment at the end of each lesson, monitored half-termly. Music provides a very valuable support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the college. Leadership is excellent, and departmental management is both effective and efficient. Development planning is very good, as are systems for monitoring and improving students' performance. The accommodation is very good, but lacks sound-proofing.

201. The issues raised in the last inspection report, concerning attainment, ICT, National Curriculum coverage and aspects of planning have all been fully resolved. Potential for higher attainment at Key Stage 4 is being underwritten by high standards and high expectations at Key Stage 3. Staffing in the music department is totally new since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

202. The faculty has not entered students for GCSE or A level examinations in recent years. It was not possible to observe any sixth form recreational activities.

203. In work seen in the inspection, by the end of Key Stage 3 many students are attaining standards at least in line with nationally expected levels for their age in swimming, some games and gymnastics. In games, boys' performances are not always accompanied by technical accuracy. Girls' performances are in need of more spatial awareness. In girls' badminton, there is evidence of inappropriate movement patterns which severely inhibit progress; this is particularly noticeable among Asian girls. In gymnastics at Key Stage 3, boys participate vigorously but their awareness of what constitutes quality and how to achieve it is not well established. The performance of boys and girls in swimming is appropriate for their age, with many competent swimmers, some improvers and a few individuals at the beginner stage.

204. Attainment towards the end of Key Stage 4 is generally in line with nationally expected levels. However, in badminton, students have a limited grasp of movement, and in health related fitness important concepts are not always fully understood. Non-participants were few but were generally more purposefully engaged in the lessons in girls' groups than in boys' groups. The modest involvement of many students with PE outside lessons at Key Stage 4 is a major factor in their limited development. Although attempts have been made to develop extra-curricular provision for all

and not just the elite, participation rates are still low. There is currently more involvement from girls than boys.

205. Across both key stages, students' achievement and progress are satisfactory. SEN students make particularly good progress and are helped in this by in-class support, seen in a badminton class, for example, and by team teaching strategies which are well used, as in swimming. SEN students are fully integrated and often not discernible in lessons.

206. The majority of teaching is satisfactory with some of it good or very good. As a result, the majority of students make appropriate progress through structured units of work. Teachers often plan well, with a good balance of individual, small group and whole group tasks. They have good subject knowledge allied to accurate knowledge of their students, enabling them to promote realistic expectations for them. Appropriate objectives, brisk pace and the provision of work suitable for students of all abilities were evident in the good teaching. Where teaching was less satisfactory the start to lessons, particularly in games, was often ineffective and wasted time.

207. Under the new head of faculty, the faculty has been brought together and is beginning to work well as one team, but a greater sharing of individual good practice in teaching would help to raise standards further. There is a good overall curriculum map, underpinned by units of work which develop knowledge and understanding as well as skills. The length of those units at Key Stage 3 is not influenced by students' attainment in the different activities, so that it is not possible to devote any extra time to improving areas of performance which need it. The new assessment strategy has good potential to improve the monitoring and evaluation of students' performance. These procedures are satisfactory at present.

208. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory overall, but the faculty now has the potential for greatly improved performance. Two departments have been brought together under one head of faculty and roles and responsibilities have been clarified. A GCSE short course is now available and a full GCSE programme is scheduled for 2001. Boys now experience the full range of games, including net games, and Year 11 students now have the opportunity to take the Junior Sports Leader Award. Facilities have long been neglected and although some hard courts have been resurfaced, provision and maintenance of playing fields remain poor. The sports hall floor requires resurfacing and the heating is inadequate. Changing rooms remain unsatisfactory for the size of groups but are to be refurbished and extended next year.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

209. The attainment of a majority of students in end of Key Stage 3 assessments is below average. Girls perform better than boys at this stage. GCSE examination results at grades A*-C in 1999 were well above average. Girls performed better than boys, but boys' results were well above the national average for boys. All students gained a pass in the A*-G range. Results have been above the national average for both boys and girls for the three years to 1999 at A*-C and above the national average for A*-G. Examination results at A*-C in 2000 were well below the national average and the department's average of previous years, though the percentage of students gaining a pass in the grades A*-G matched the national average. Numbers are significantly higher than in the recent past in the current examination groups, taking in a wider range of ability which is reflected in lower than average attainment overall at this key stage. In 2000, 23 students entered the Certificate of Achievement award; all but two passed, twelve with merit and two with distinction - a good result.

210. The attainment of a majority of students towards the end of Key Stage 3 is below average. They have a basic knowledge of some of the features of the traditions studied, and can describe some of the ways in which belief influences behaviour. The attainment of students in religious education on entry to the college is well below average and many have little prior knowledge of the traditions they

are studying. Achievement by most students over the key stage is good, as is the progress of students with special educational needs.

211. The attainment of a majority of students towards the end of Key Stage 4 is below average. They are able to gather information from written sources about key features of the tradition studied and can answer specific question about these traditions with reasonable accuracy, but many have poor recall of previous learning, and have difficulty in explaining the significance and meaning of what they are studying. The achievement of most students at this key stage is satisfactory and that of higher attaining students is good.

212. The attainment of sixth form students is below average. They are stronger in written expression than orally; essay work shows progress over the key stage and achievement in lessons is satisfactory, though answers to questions in class are often brief and students have difficulty in using specialist terminology confidently.

213. The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good, and at Key Stage 4 it is often very good. Teachers clearly explain the aims of lessons to students, most lessons are conducted at a good pace and teachers' good subject knowledge enables students to make good progress. Students willingly participate in lessons, settle quickly to the tasks set and work conscientiously. They behave well and there are no problems of discipline.

214. Students are extending their knowledge of religious traditions and understand the significance of major events and ceremonies. Students listen attentively and work conscientiously, especially on written exercises. They are less confident, however, in speaking about their ideas and often need a great deal of support and encouragement to express themselves orally. Some lessons at Key Stage 3 lack variety and limit opportunity for discussion and debate between students. In a minority of lessons at Key Stage 4, opportunities to clarify understanding and develop independence of judgement are not always fully exploited by teachers. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons carefully and provide a great deal of additional material to help students understand the themes they are studying. Students work diligently and their written work is carefully presented, but they are weak in their grasp of concepts and have difficulty in explaining clearly, using specialist terminology, their understanding of the issues raised in lessons. Timetabling difficulties have had a negative impact on the progress of students in the philosophy of religion option; contact time with the teacher was reduced by 50 per cent last year and has been reduced by 25 per cent in the current year.

215. The curriculum is based on the locally Agreed Syllabus and meets statutory requirements at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, time allocation for the course followed by the majority of students is insufficient to meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. There is no provision in the sixth form other than in examination classes. At Key Stage 4 and sixth form levels, statutory requirements are not being met.

216. Departmental management is good. Good planning and very thorough and helpful assessment underpin effective learning in the subject. Current procedures for monitoring teaching are not wholly effective and are a weakness in overall management.

217. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory overall. Good improvements have been made in staffing, with the appointment of two qualified subject specialists. Satisfactory improvement has been made in resources, though book resources for the sixth form are insufficient and ICT resources are few. Time allocation at Key Stage 4 has been improved, though this still does not meet the recommended time allocation. This continues to be a good department, making a positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral and cultural development and to the ethos of the college.

VOCATIONAL AND OTHER SUBJECTS AT KEY STAGE 4 AND IN THE SIXTH FORM

218. Attainment in GCSE business studies examinations in 2000 is well below national and college averages. Business studies tends to be chosen by few higher attaining students because of the option structure. However, girls' attainment in the new full business course shows improvement from previous years, and the majority of students, including several with special needs, achieve well and make good progress in lessons where they develop business understanding and key skills of communication, number and ICT. Students generally achieve in line with expected levels for their attainment on entry.

219. GNVQ courses are an increasingly popular vocational option at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. By the end of Year 12, successful course completion rates in 2000 for GNVQ business at intermediate level were broadly in line with the national average, showing some improvement since the last inspection. Students on the foundation business course attain broadly in line with nationally expected levels. Numbers entering GNVQ and completing successfully are too small to make valid national comparisons, but students achieve well and make good progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the course. The overall quality of students' completed work has improved since the last inspection, due to their better competence in ICT, better teaching, and teachers' early identification of students - mostly with special needs - who have the potential to pass individual units rather than the whole course. The majority of students on GNVQ courses go on work experience and produce well presented reports about their jobs. Higher attaining students use this experience to enrich their GNVQ assignments.

220. Attainment in A level sociology is below the national average for the higher grades, although, in 1999, nearly all students passed the examination. The subject does not tend to attract higher attaining students. However, students generally achieve well, at least in line with predictions based on their attainment on entry to the course. This is the result of good teaching and thorough coursework preparation by staff. Students produce clear, well-researched reports, for example on the extended family and how it has changed, according to functionalist and Marxist perspectives. Coursework examination projects are interesting and relevant, for example on the origins of domestic violence, men's and women's roles in the household, and the way newspapers portray different ethnic groups.

221. Students on business and vocational courses in all years acquire good skills in ICT. Students achieve well in their ICT because teachers offer them individual support, including help for their research on the Internet. Students' learning in the very popular new GNVQ ICT course in Year 10 is particularly rapid as the on-line course has been very well planned and structured. The majority of GNVQ students meet basic requirements for the key skills of communications and number, either within their subjects or in separate lessons. All students, both A level and GNVQ, now have separate key skills lessons in Year 12 for communications, number and ICT. In these, they often undertake interesting projects, for example producing well-written reports about elderly people in a local home. The best work usually includes research material from students' part-time jobs and work experience which has been well evaluated. The weakest students rely on copying from textbooks, and show generally poor levels of literacy.

222. Numbers taking A level economics are too small to allow an overall evaluation of attainment. Because of staff absence, it was not possible to observe lessons or gather evidence for psychology.

223. Students approach work with considerable interest and are well motivated to succeed. They behave very well and enjoy working individually on computers, concentrating fully on tasks, which they feel are relevant to the working world. Students generally make good use of case studies in their coursework assignments, and demonstrate reasonable research skills.

224. Teaching in the small sample of lessons seen at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall. Teaching in the sixth form lessons seen is good. Teachers have very good relationships with their students and manage them very well. Teaching in three quarters of GNVQ lessons is very good, as in half of A level lessons seen. In the majority of lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge is reflected in well planned lessons which make good use of topical case studies and relevant material from newspapers and local organisations. For example, A level economics students take part in a schools' competition on inflation, and GNVQ health and social care students work in local care settings for one day a week. For the current Year 13 sociology group, there is limited evidence of the regular setting and marking of essays in order to develop literacy skills, and there is a need for co-ordination during staff absence to ensure students' previous levels of attainment, built up by previous good teaching, are maintained. In lessons, tasks are usually well matched to the abilities of students, including those with SEN, although in a less effective Year 11 lesson seen, there was no help for students who have difficulties with language. Homework is usually set and marked regularly in all years, and more able students are often given extension tasks. Students are prepared thoroughly for unit tests, and trial examinations are built into the course with action plans prepared to reinforce weaknesses found. Most students are confident with this method and, on the whole, successful first-time results are obtained. Written feedback to students is usually prompt and constructive, based on regular targets, supported by checklists based on topics they need to learn. All students, including those with SEN, are fully aware of the exact GNVQ grade at which they are working, and they always know how to improve their work.

225. The vocational curriculum is good at Key Stage 4 where students have the opportunity to study business and take a GNVQ in ICT as a timetabled option or voluntary extra-curricular activity. Early signs are that students' progress on the new GNVQ ICT course is rapid and achievement good. In the sixth form, the new National Curriculum in 2000 has allowed the college to introduce a flexible range of new courses to meet students' varying needs. A number of new AS level subjects, such as psychology and sociology, have been introduced since the last inspection. Although some A level groups are small, this is compensated for by larger GNVQ groups, so that overall the sixth form is efficient and cost-effective. Vocational courses (GNVQ) play an increasingly important part in post-16 education, so that students' diverse needs are well met. The great majority of Year 13 students successfully move on to appropriate courses in further and higher education. The vocational curriculum provides a pathway from foundation to advanced levels which is valued by students whose language development takes longer to mature.

226. Overall, reflecting good leadership generally in the sixth form, these courses are well managed. Dedicated staff promote an atmosphere in which students feel happy, confident and succeed. Both A level and GNVQ teachers work closely together in committed, hard working teams who meet frequently to discuss students' progress. Regular consultation with language and key skills staff keeps GNVQ tutors up to date with assessment requirements, and GNVQ staff arrange frequent visits for students in local organisations. Students on health and social care courses work in local care settings for one day a week, which enriches their studies. Classes attend events organised by large companies to meet GNVQ examination criteria. Students are encouraged to join the college's Young Enterprise project and to participate in trade fairs. A level economics students take part in competitions with other colleges. Staff plans for future improvement are well constructed and realistic. Teachers have undergone relevant assessor training for GNVQ and meet the requirements of the examining board.

227. Accommodation, computer equipment and resources are generally good, although access to computers is sometimes difficult in college time. GNVQ students have good base rooms, but sixth form accommodation is only barely satisfactory, as students have few study facilities or computers. GNVQ and business courses are well staffed by experienced, enthusiastic teachers. Teachers

generally co-ordinate their work well and seek to update their knowledge through training. They make particularly good use of links with the local community and industry.