

INSPECTION REPORT

MINSTHORPE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

South Elmsall

LEA area: Wakefield

Unique reference number: 108282

Principal: Richard Brown

Reporting inspector: David Morton
13154

Dates of inspection: 20 – 23 November 2000

Inspection number: 223866

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 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
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Date of previous inspection:	April 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Minsthorpe Community College is comprehensive with 1744 boys and girls on roll, including 185 in the sixth form. It is much bigger than other secondary schools and has doubled in size since the previous inspection; this is owing to a reorganisation of schools in the local authority in 1996 and being continually oversubscribed. The school population is generally stable; few students join or leave the college except at the usual times. The school serves the villages of South Elmsall, South Kirkby and Upton; this area is undergoing a process of regeneration in which the college has a part. The socio-economic background of students is poorer than the national average; the percentage of students entitled to free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students who come from ethnic minority backgrounds is very low and few have English as an additional language. The attainment of students who entered the school in September 1995 and 1996 was well below average. Those who entered the school in September 1997 and 1998 were below average; the attainment on entry of those who entered the school in 1999 and 2000 was average. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs, including statements, is broadly in line with the national average.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

Minsthorpe is a good community college with many outstanding features. It provides a rich and enjoyable education for its students, who benefit from working in a well-appointed environment, often alongside very young children and adults. The college is becoming increasingly successful in its aim 'to provide life-long learning for all ages within the community'. It is an effective college. The core of the college is the education it provides for students in the age range 11 to 18; it also includes facilities for adult education, a community sports and fitness centre and all-weather pitch, and a family learning centre. Students' learning is enhanced through their use of many of these facilities. Well over a thousand children and adults use these modern facilities each week; a significant proportion of students take advantage of its excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Students, teachers and parents sometimes hold meetings in a purpose-built training and conference centre that plays an important part in the ethos of the college. The principal of the college sustains a good climate of achievement and the college is effective in meeting the learning needs of students. With the support of the leadership team, he has created a habit of self-evaluation and improvement through which all members of staff strive to better their past performance and that of students. Teachers have a high level of commitment to ensure students value and benefit from their time at college. The majority of teaching is good: students in Years 7 to 11 achieve well and make good progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the college in Year 7, although attainment overall is marginally below average at the age of 16. Students with special educational needs are well provided for and make good progress. The college gives good value for money.

What the college does well

- The leadership of the principal, well supported by the leadership team, is outstanding and a significant reason for the many qualities achieved by the college.
- The quality of students' learning is good as a result of their good attitudes to the college, the good behaviour and relationships fostered by the college and its very good provision for students' social development. The positive ethos of the college is a strength and a key reason why students achieve well and make good progress. Students take part in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities.
- Teaching is good overall; teachers have high expectations of students.

- The college has established a culture of achievement. Through a range of monitoring and supporting measures, it strives to be a constantly improving organisation, especially with regard to the standards achieved by students.
- It is achieving considerable success in improving students' basic skills of literacy.
- Attendance is good.

What could be improved

- The provision and promotion of the sixth form and the standards achieved by its students.
- Although significant advances have been made in the provision and practice of information and communication technology, it is not used sufficiently to enhance students' learning across the range of subjects. The college fails to meet fully the requirements of the National Curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11.

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

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college has improved significantly since the previous inspection in 1995. Results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations have improved at a rate broadly in line with the national trend, are better now and close to the national average. The proportion of good and very good teaching has increased. In its partnership with the area's programme of regeneration, there have been major improvements to the accommodation provided by the college, much of it now being excellent. Most of the concerns expressed at the previous inspection have been successfully tackled, notably in the measures now taken for review and self-evaluation, and in meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. The college remains unable to provide a daily collective act of worship for all students. The college has received a number of national awards, notably the Charter Mark for excellence in public service, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Sportsmark Award.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	D	C	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	E	E	E	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations have improved steadily in recent years and at a rate broadly in line with the national average. Results in A and AS-level examinations have remained well below average.

In 2000, results in tests taken at the end of Year 9 were in line with the national average overall; in English and science, results were broadly average and in mathematics below average when compared

with all schools. This represents good achievement and progress in English and science in relation to students' attainment on entry to the college in Year 7. Compared with similar schools, results were above average in English, well above in mathematics and science and well above overall. The college's performance in 2000 improved significantly on that of 1999 when compared with similar schools.

In 2000, results in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 were average overall when compared with all schools. The proportion of students gaining five or more of the higher A* to C grades and the full range of A* to G grades was broadly in line with the national average; the proportion of those gaining one or more grades A* to G was well above the national average. When compared with similar schools, GCSE results were well above average; the college has improved on the levels of results achieved in 1999. The college also exceeded the appropriate targets it set for the GCSE examinations, especially in the proportion of students achieving five or more of the higher A* to C grade passes. Most subjects achieved close to the national average at A* to C and A* to G. Results in English were below the national average compared to all schools but well above when compared with similar schools; those in mathematics and science were broadly in line with the national averages but well above when compared with similar schools. The best results amongst other subjects were in German, design and technology, French and art. Compared with these subjects, results in all other subjects were less successful and below the national average.

In 2000, results in A/AS-level examinations, although a little better than in 1999, were well below the national average. No subject achieved significant success at the higher grades, although all students entered achieved a pass in chemistry, all boys achieved a pass in French, biology, geography, history and art; all girls entered achieved a pass in physics. Students entered for the BTEC Public Service examination achieved qualifications comparable with the national average.

Evidence of the inspection indicates that the overall standards achieved by students is average in Years 7 to 11, although below average in English, mathematics and science. Given the students' level of attainment on entry to the college and at the start of Year 10, this represents good achievement and good progress in English, mathematics and science and very good progress in other subjects. Standards of literacy and numeracy are below average when students enter the school, but the literacy project is leading to more rapid improvement during Years 7 to 9 and by the age of 14 skills of literacy are average.; although less ordered, students' skills of numeracy are also average and are beginning to improve as greater focus is given by subjects in seeking ways of extending measuring and graphic skills. Standards in the sixth form were broadly average and students make satisfactory progress in relation to the average attainment seen at the end of Year 11. The work seen in lessons, therefore, was better than that of recent examinations; there is some evidence of lack of consistency and the sustained application of skills required in examinations at this level. In addition, students entering the sixth form have not all achieved at GCSE level the results generally found in sixth-form A-level students; the college has a policy of inclusion for those students seeking further study beyond 16.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Students enjoy school and comment positively about it; they are keen to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good teaching has encouraged good behaviour in the classroom. Behaviour around the school is sometimes boisterous and noisy.

Personal development and relationships	Students' personal development is good. They form constructive relationships with teachers which support their learning.
Attendance	The rigorous work undertaken by the college ensures that attendance is good and improving.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	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.

The quality of students' learning is good. The learning needs of differing groups of students are met through careful planning, and good attitudes to learning are developed by teachers. Students are encouraged to be curious, take responsibility for their learning and to have high expectations of their own performance. Most are keen and work hard, achieve well and make good progress in assimilating new learning. This is a result of teaching that is good overall. It is good or better in 72 per cent of lessons; in 15 per cent of lessons it is very good and in 28 per cent it is satisfactory. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Good or better teaching is almost evenly spread across all year groups, although it is marginally better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Sixth-form teaching is generally good and sustains the average standards of students when they begin their courses; there is insufficient effort made, however, to help students meet the national average in A-level examinations, although efforts are hampered by some lack of application by some students. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is consistently good; the teaching of English and science is sometimes very good across all ages. Very good teaching was seen in geography in Year 9, music in Year 8 and French in Year 11. An emerging strength of the teaching is found in the work with a focus on the improvement of literacy skills in Years 7 to 9. The development of numeracy skills is less well ordered but attention to equipping students to use aspects of numeracy in other subjects is satisfactory overall, good examples being seen in design and technology, geography and science.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum for Years 7 to 11 provides students with learning that is broad, balanced and relevant. However, this is not true of the sixth form although a start is being made to increase the number and range of courses.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The college provides well for students with special educational needs; these pupils make good progress.
Provision for students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and including	Good provision is made across all subjects; provision for students' social development is very good and that for cultural and moral development is good. Arrangements for spiritual development are

cultural development	satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students	Teachers are well-informed and trained in procedures for child protection; these are securely in place. The college takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe working environment and ensures that students' welfare is safeguarded.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	The leadership of the principal is excellent. He knows the college well and has a clear vision for its continuing evolution in meeting a wide range of education and training opportunities for adults, alongside provision to meet the differing learning needs of students of all ages. The assistant principal and the leadership team ably assist the principal; they bring a high level of rigorous practice and expertise to the management of change and development.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are well informed; they stringently ensure effective management, serving as partners in the process of leading a constantly improving college.
The college's evaluation of its performance	A culture of achievement has been established as a result of a very good system of review, evaluation, improvement and development. Curriculum, pastoral and non-teaching leaders make an important contribution to this process.
The strategic use of resources	The college makes certain that allocated funding is well spent within the priorities it has established; it follows principles of seeking the best value for money when making purchases.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>The majority of parents are pleased about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress their children make. • Their children being required to work hard. • The good leadership of the college. • The range of extra-curricular activities. 	<p>A minority of parents would feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They should better informed about how their children are getting on. • The college should work more closely with parents.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents. They also agree that the college should constantly review the ways in which it reports students' progress to parents. However, inspectors feel that the college has good procedures for involving parents in college life.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE COLLEGE DOES WELL

The leadership of the principal, well supported by the leadership team, is outstanding and a significant reason for the many qualities achieved by the college.

1. The leadership of the principal has contributed very significantly to the successful development of the college in the recent past. He has a clear view of the type of community college Minsthorpe should be and has worked hard, both as principal and in his previous post as assistant principal, to ensure that the college is part of the regeneration programme for the area. This has resulted in the provision of amenities that are outstanding and of immediate benefit to students in the core 11 to 18 provision of the college. It also means that these students see on a daily basis, people around who are still learning well beyond their school days. It is also encouraging parents and the community to have positive attitudes to life-long learning that can take place in spaces within the college that are bright, well-maintained and rich in resources.

2. The principal knows the college in detail; this includes a clear understanding of the strengths of the teaching staff and the relative strengths and weaknesses of departments. His quiet, perceptive approach is such that he makes demands on staff in senior and middle management, within curriculum areas and of students; this brings out the best in them. He is always sensitive and considerate to the needs of students and the well-being of staff and, as a result, the expectations of staff and students are high. This is particularly noticeable in lessons and when samples of students' work are analysed. For example in a science lesson Year 9 students showed very positive attitudes to their learning. They had researched topics about the joints and muscles of the body thoroughly and prepared short presentations carefully and thoughtfully, with attention to detail. This is a good example of students working independently and demanding high standards of themselves. Such attitudes have been fostered through the leadership and the value placed on learning the principal has encouraged. As a result, often from very modest starting points, students at the college achieve well and make good progress.

3. The principal and the leadership team drive the college's endeavour to be a constantly improving organisation. All decisions have a clear purpose. Well-defined procedures ensure that members of staff know well their own responsibilities as well as those of others. This has meant that a leadership team has evolved with distinct responsibilities that also allow it to work as an effective and coherent whole. The assistant principal, for example, with great energy and commitment, has involved most of the staff of the college in devising quality assurance procedures; this has been achieved skilfully, for it is not something imposed from the top but a key school policy agreed through negotiation and collaboration. It has as its driving force the aim of helping students achieve their potential, getting the best out of everybody. The leadership team works openly and vigorously to maintain the high expectations of staff and students; new initiatives are seen as challenges to be met, not problems to be solved. The encouragement of the literacy strategy is an example of this.

4. The principal has established good relations with governors. Many are actively involved in the college and have a good grasp of their roles, especially in the leadership they bring to the development of the college. Their commitment to the college is high and they have a shared sense of purpose with the principal and staff.

5. The leadership of the college has established a culture of achievement. It is always seeking to improve the performance of staff and students. This is a direct result of the principles and skills that guide the way the principal approaches his work

The quality of students' learning is good as a result of their good attitudes to the college, the good behaviour and relationships fostered by the college and its very good provision for students' social development. Its positive ethos is a strength and a key reason why students achieve well and make good progress. Students take part in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities.

6. Most students are keen to learn. Their good and positive attitudes to work are an important factor for them achieving well and making good progress. These attitudes are apparent whether they are working as a direct response to teaching or when working in pairs or small groups, for example in music and dance. The good relationships between students and between students and teachers are a further factor that improves students' good achievement.

7. The heads of year and curriculum areas track carefully the overall well-being and development of students in their work and relationships in the school. Members of staff care about the progress students make. They make it clear to students that their expectations of them are high. This overview is effectively coordinated by the best practice of form tutors. In collaboration with heads of year, form tutors are effective in setting targets with their forms and individual students within forms. An effective example of this is 'Target Group 2001' aimed at achieving the best possible grades in the next GCSE examinations for certain students. Students' attendance is good and constantly monitored if irregular attendance appears to occur. There is a strong correlation between the care shown for students and their improving standards and good rates of progress.

8. Students concentrate well, try their best and generally persevere with demanding or difficult tasks. As a result the quality of their learning and their attitudes develop in a mature way. Behaviour is good. Students help each other when appropriate; they take an interest in each other's work and respect efforts made by their classmates. They are well motivated and responsive to teaching that is nearly always good and sometimes very good. For example, in an English lesson in Year 10 about symbolism in the novel "King of the Castle", students settled quickly to work in pairs examining and identifying the nature of symbols used and why they were appropriate to the author's intentions in the novel. They responded well to very good teaching that demanded they explain and extend their thinking, relating the use of symbols to major themes in the novel. Similar responses to very good teaching led to fast and furious oral exchange in a French lesson in Year 11 that enabled students to grasp new concepts and vocabulary and express themselves fluently, accurately and with good pronunciation. This level of working is only possible because of the good working relationships that have been established.

9. A key feature of the overall community nature of the college is the wide range of activities it provides for young children, students in the core 11 to 18 age range and adults. As well as the provision overall being outstanding, the college is striving to use all of the activities as a means of changing boys' attitudes to learning so that they see it natural to participate in learning opportunities. The place is a hive of activity from early morning till late at night. Students aged 11 to 18 are enthusiastic and have positive attitudes to learning; this is reflected in their widespread participation in a wide range of activities. There are many opportunities for taking part in arts, sporting and fitness activities, but there is also a provision for homework and revision clubs, extra learning in ICT and literacy skills and a number of additional clubs and societies catering for a range of interests. It is estimated that over 300 students use these opportunities each day. This is testimony to the quality of the activities provided by teachers and other staff.

Teaching is good overall; teachers have high expectations of students.

10. In almost three out of every four lessons teaching is good or better. The quality of the teaching is one of the main reasons why students have such positive attitudes to their learning, achieve well and make good progress. Teachers know their subjects well and establish good relationships with students. They have created a purposeful climate for learning in which students develop intellectually, physically, socially and creatively. Students from an early age in Year 7 are encouraged to respond on their own terms, for example to the poem 'The Highwayman'. They were asked to work as journalists and had to devise questions they might ask of eye-witnesses or the landlord. The well-structured approach of the teacher was demanding yet humorous and warm; she was liked and respected by the class. Students learned some key skills in aspects of newspaper-writing that also reinforced the students' grasp of the plot of the poem.

11. Similarly, work in a geography lesson with Year 9 about settlement and the need for planning looked at a local issue in the South Elmsall Development Plan. Because the students had an understanding of many of the deficiencies of the area they had views on how they might be overcome. They brought a mature level of discussion to their work. The approach of the teacher led to effective learning in which students were required to take responsibility. The teacher's support of students as they worked in groups was perceptive and vital, but it was to guide, not tell, questioning skilfully to develop thinking, posing obstacles without giving solutions. As a result the class was highly motivated and interested. Students learned well and were able to justify their points of view.

12. A regular feature of this good and very good teaching is the high expectation teachers have of students. They expect answers to demanding questions that are thorough and comprehensive. The quality of questioning reflects teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. Sometimes this can be inspirational, for example when helping Year 10 students to devise a dance sequence on the theme of 'Superstars'. The teacher's confidence in the discipline and nature of dance was transferred to students who responded in a well-informed and energetic way. They were keen to maintain agreed sequences yet develop an appropriate style. A group of boys had chosen a boxer as the superstar; their dance was disciplined but with appropriate energy and aggression and they showed themselves responsive to well-led evaluation processes of their fellow-students and the teacher. Students showed a grasp of some of the key technical language of dance and blended their choreography and extended movement with physical commitment and a self-critical awareness.

13. Teachers have clear objectives for their lessons and most share these with students. Lessons end with a check on whether these objectives have been achieved and the learning effective. In the majority of lessons there is evidence of students learning something new or consolidating more deeply areas of previous learning. Students are helped to understand what they must do to improve their work.

The college has established a culture of achievement. Through a range of monitoring and supporting measures it strives to be a constantly improving organisation, especially with regard to the standards achieved by students.

14. The college has established a culture of achievement. Students make good progress. This is one outcome of the thorough system of reviewing and monitoring that occurs in all aspects of college life, but especially that undertaken by heads of curriculum areas and heads of year in tracking the work and success rates of individual students, classes and curriculum areas. Each curricular area keeps a Book of the Curricular Area. This includes a record, in purposeful detail, of the standards being achieved in the subject by students at regular intervals. Each year group keeps a Book of the Year Group. This records

the overall standards being achieved by students across the range of subjects they take as well as their standards of behaviour, personal development, attendance and all-round achievement. It provides a good example of the effective holistic view of students that heads of year have developed. Achievable yet stretching targets are set, designed to accelerate the rate of progress made by students. These systems are effective. They are an important part of the role of middle management to which all members of staff contribute. The college has developed these sophisticated yet practical monitoring procedures over recent years; they have played an important part in the steady improvement the college is making in raising the standards achieved by students.

15. The quality of learning and teaching is also monitored to significant effect. Teaching is good or better in almost three out of four lessons. Some very good and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. This quality is sustained because teachers have accepted that mutual observation of teaching helps in the sharing of good practice. During the inspection, for example, a head of year was observed in an art lesson undertaking a spot check on the attitudes and work rate of a class from her year group. This is a regular occurrence and visits are logged. The college has established an ethos of continuing improvement. Learning from each other shows an accepted and mature professional approach to improvement. Teachers meet together to moderate and analyse the work of students; portfolios of work moderated to the new National Curriculum levels are being developed; in the work of Years 10 and 11, teachers are seeking to extend all students towards achieving their optimum grades. In the sixth form a wider range of courses is being considered to meet more fully the aspirations of students. The leadership team is involved in these processes, but the strength of the self-evaluation lies in its mutual acceptance by all colleagues; it is more than a management tool. The development of the quality assurance philosophy of the college has created a positive open-door approach to colleagues working together. The strategies that have been firmly embedded into the college's policy and practice mean that new requirements for performance management will be more readily assimilated than might otherwise be the case.

16. Members of the management, administration, finance, premises and technical teams of the college are also subject to the notion of review, self-evaluation and improvement. The Charter Mark for excellence in public service is evidence that the culture of achievement in an improving organisation is a whole college responsibility. It is clear that such an ethos has far-reaching benefits, but most significantly in the way it affects students' attitudes to learning and achievement amongst the large number of 11 to 18 students. For the college to be so orderly and purposeful is an indication of the success of the measures that have evolved and been consolidated over recent years. The energy and effort put into establishing such a fine range of facilities has led most students to be proud to attend. The notable outcome of it all is the achievement of students, many from severely disadvantaged backgrounds, and the gradual raising of standards that national tests and examinations are beginning to show.

It is achieving success in improving students' basic skills of literacy.

17. The college has tackled issues of literacy as a community college perspective. Work has involved improving levels of literacy with parents and other adults, as well as the 11 to 18 students. Its success in these endeavours has been recognised by the award of the Basic Skills Quality Mark. In addition to regular weekly provision, the college has mounted successful summer schools. Clubs are run at lunch-times and at the end of the college day; as well as improving literacy skills, there is evidence that the self-esteem of students has been raised.

18. In the sixth form, the key skills programme has the development of skills of literacy in the communications strand of the programme. In a lesson with Year 12, students had to use their reading skills to research evidence in preparation for giving a presentation about the impact of crime on society.

Most students needed help in structuring their presentations into a coherent form. The quality of written notes was below average as most students lacked the skill to select relevant points and arrange them in a significant order.

19. The learning support area provides specialist teaching and support in the development of skills of literacy for the core 11-18 students. The college is committed to including all students and sees the work of the area as key in ensuring that all students have access to the full curriculum. The centre represents some of the significant improvements in provision and practice for students with special educational needs since the previous inspection. Learning support assistants have established good working relationships with students with special educational needs. In one session with two students with significant learning difficulties they showed patience, used ICT effectively and students worked well on a well-thought out comprehension exercise, despite finding much of the work difficult. Paired reading is making a good contribution to students' development of reading skills. Around 36 students are engaged in the activity for a useful fifteen minutes during afternoon registration. These sessions help students with reading and tests indicate that improvement has been achieved. A further six take part in a workshop designed to improve their handwriting; well prepared and appropriate worksheets are used. Students' folders of work show improvement in legibility through improved letter formation.

20. The school is one of the pilot schools nationally planning literacy strategies for Years 7 to 9 based on students' attainment at the end of Year 6 in the primary schools. The coordinator for literacy and a second teacher, who is the overall manager of this project, working on the pilot are well informed about the literacy framework and how the national strategy has been applied successfully in primary schools. They have undertaken a very clear and detailed survey of the strengths and weaknesses of students' skills of literacy within college in order to establish priorities for the project. As a result of an analysis of the National Curriculum tests scores at the end of Year 6, the college is placing a strong emphasis on reading and writing. Careful planning and training have been undertaken to involve all subject areas in this work; as a result, most teachers are contributing to the development of skills of literacy, well beyond displaying key words in classrooms. Students are frequently being asked to explain their understanding of processes or ideas; teachers' marking takes sufficient account of writing accuracy and seeks improvement when necessary. Efforts are made to improve the engagement and performance of boys; in keeping with the national picture, the literacy skills of boys are significantly weaker than those of girls. This makes it more difficult for boys to have full access to learning in some areas of the curriculum. The college is striving well to improve the literacy levels of boys; it is working with parents, especially fathers, to improve attitudes to learning and raise expectations. There are clubs where fathers and sons work together at weekends and in the evenings. These sometimes include pupils from Year 6 of the primary schools in an attempt to develop continuity from Years 6 to 7. In Year 7 the principles of the National Literacy Strategy are being developed in a systematic way. The high level of commitment and understanding of the key staff are well in advance of work in many of the other schools. However, some of the students with low level skills of literacy are taught in very large classes; otherwise this is a very successful area of the work of the college.

Attendance is good.

21. The college has worked hard to improve and maintain rates of attendance. These are now good; in many similar disadvantaged areas suffering from the loss of traditional industries, the social pressures under which families live often lead to poor attendance of children at school. The college has succeeded in developing positive attitudes to the college. For example, unusually, the proportion of unauthorised absence by students is below the national average. In comparing levels of attendance with those often found in disadvantaged areas, standards at the college are high.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The provision and promotion of the sixth form and the standards achieved by its students.

22. There are a number of very positive features about the sixth form provision in the college. Students are making satisfactory progress across the range of courses, although at A-level progress is less secure, mainly owing to inconsistencies in application to the high demands of these courses for average students. However, results in examinations show small signs of improvement. The Key Skills programme is a strength of the sixth form and helps students achieve better grades at A-level. The curriculum this year has increased in breadth, especially in Year 12, mainly in response to Curriculum 2000. Sixth-form students help with sporting activities and play an important role in the Student Council.

23. Efforts are made to promote the sixth form. All Year 11 students have personal interviews and there is a parents' evening with encouraging talks and displays. Students are counselled further about opportunities once the GCSE results are known. A number of additional courses are offered with a view to enriching the curriculum beyond the A/AS- level courses. There are courses that give students opportunities to improve their grades in GCSE examinations in English and mathematics and courses in the development of skills of ICT. These skills are currently at a low level owing to the lack of any ICT provision in Years 10 and 11. GNVQ courses have been introduced in ICT, the performing arts and Spanish. Tutor groups hold lively discussions, and, from time to time, day conferences are held, such as an annual conference on the nature of spirituality. Students sign a 'Post-16 Agreement', individual tutorials are maintained and student profiles kept. Students' progress is checked against their prior attainment. For many of the students, the sixth form is a worthwhile place to be.

24. Nonetheless, the sixth form curriculum is narrow and does not fully meet the potential perceived needs of many students. The standards of attainment of students are too low even though they are making satisfactory progress in relation to the standards seen in their work in lessons at the end of Year 11. Only 10.6 per cent of the college population is in the sixth form; a more usual proportion is around 20 per cent. The college is committed to being inclusive of students from all backgrounds and levels of attainment. It is important, however, to ensure that provision matches the inclusive nature that such commitment brings. There are students following courses at present that do not match their performance in those subjects in GCSE examinations; not all students are building on subjects in which they achieved better examination performance at the end of Year 11. Some students have not developed good study habits and are inconsistent in their application to their work in college and at home. Rates of progress are too slow to achieve the best results and teachers are not pressing sufficiently for work of quality that meets deadlines and the full requirements of examination courses. The size of the sixth form should not be a reason for these students receiving less of the staff's energy. This said, much of the teaching is good in the best lessons. The recently introduced advanced GNVQ courses are a step to matching provision to potential; such courses should be marketed for what they are, the vocational equivalent of A-level. The relationship of such courses to AS and the new A2 courses has to be rationalised. When planning for extension and improvement to sixth form provision, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has a part to play; notably the college's failure to meet National Curriculum requirements for ICT in these years has a detrimental impact on courses in the sixth form. The college has been slow to consider offering a range of GNVQ courses in Years 10 and 11; this would provide suitable links to new sixth-form courses.

Although significant advances have been made in the provision and practice of information and communication technology [ICT], it is not used sufficiently to enhance students' learning across the range of subjects. The college fails to meet fully the requirements of the National Curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11.

25. There has been significant investment in the provision of computers, work-spaces and networking for ICT in the recent past. Each subject area nominates an ICT link person to forge developmental links with the coordinator for ICT; however, meetings have been infrequent and regular records have not been kept. This is a good initiative that is not being realised; the lack of confidence in the use of ICT amongst many teachers and the rarity of its use to support learning in subject areas would benefit from the potential of this idea being realised. Those subjects that do use ICT do not generally keep records of individual students' overall capabilities in ICT. Assessment of the skills students are acquiring in lessons is infrequent.

26. Although there are many subjects in Years 7 to 9 that do not use ICT as a means of enriching learning, there is a discrete course in ICT followed by all students. By the end of Year 9 most students have acquired a good and firm base of essential skills; they achieve average levels in desk-top-publishing and most understand the different uses to which databases can be put. They communicate information to a variety of audiences through word-processing and develop ideas using art packages to experiment with colour and texture. They organise and reorganise sections of text. Most are comfortable using the software available to them; by Year 9 they use CD-ROM confidently. They have made good progress by the end of Year 9 in all strands of ICT except control and modelling where progress is unsatisfactory owing to lack of coverage of these strands, despite them being a part of National Curriculum requirements.

27. However, in Years 10 and 11 there is no discrete course in ICT. As a result many of the skills developed in Years 7 to 9 become rusty, for most teachers are not encouraging the use of ICT to support learning across subjects and students have little opportunity to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject. There is no GCSE full or short course. The requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met at all in Years 10 and 11. One unfortunate outcome of this two-year gap in students' learning occurs in the sixth form. For example, in a GNVQ class in Year 12, the lack of suitable background experience and expertise meant that students working on a unit about handling information were only attempting work at levels 3 to 5 of the National Curriculum. This is the range of levels it is intended that children in the last two years of primary schools should be tackling. Students in the sixth form lack confidence in the use of computers and are slow when working with basic data.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

28. In order to continue its commitment to improvement the college should now:

- (1) improve the sixth form by:
 - responding to the aspirations of prospective sixth-form students at the beginning of Year 11 and seeking to provide a range of sixth-form courses of the appropriate level to match the aspirations, aptitudes and capabilities of students,

- the introduction of a wide range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 as preparation for related courses in the sixth form and to underpin the mission of the college as a comprehensive community college,
 - developing a range of GNVQ and other courses that can be studied at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in the sixth form,
 - ensuring that teaching groups are small enough so that students benefit from the seminar-style teaching of good sixth forms and the interactions between students and with teachers;
- (2) Improve its provision for the use of information and communication technology [ICT] to support learning in subjects and, in particular, develop suitable courses in Years 10 and 11 by:
- providing further opportunities for all teachers to receive training in the use of ICT, thereby developing greater competence and confidence in its use,
 - becoming more aware of the software available to support learning in all subjects,
 - making sure that the coordinator for ICT has sufficient status and time allocated to effect development,
 - considering the introduction of a GCSE course in ICT in Years 10 and 11,
 - developing the use of ICT skills in a full range of subjects.

29. PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

52

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

36

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	15	58	27	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1559	185
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	326	17

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	32	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	364	2

English as an additional language

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	28
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	47

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	92.5
National comparative data	91.0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	140	169	309

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64	76	78
	Girls	117	106	98
	Total	181	182	176
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	59 (55)	59 (51)	57 (36)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (12)	32 (28)	21 (8)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	89	58
	Girls	114	117	74
	Total	167	206	132
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (60)	67 (55)	43 (45)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (16)	40 (31)	16 (14)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	30 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	116	132	248

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	39	107	107
	Girls	66	123	122
	Total	105	230	229
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	42.3 (41)	92.7 (94)	(99)
	National	49.0 (46.6)	88.8 (90.9)	94.4 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	37.1 (37)
	National	38.7 (38.0)

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

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	19	21	40

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	11.4 (11.1)	10.4 (11.6)	10.8 (11.4)	0.0(0.7)	0.0(0.0)	0.0(0.5)
National	(17.7)	(18.1)	(17.9)	(2.7)	(2.8)	(2.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	1
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	1741
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	486	6
Other minority ethnic groups		

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)	87
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	491

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.5
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Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3568489
Total expenditure	3446249
Expenditure per pupil	2095
Balance brought forward from previous year	10310
Balance carried forward to next year	132550

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.9
Key Stage 4	25.2

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1744

Number of questionnaires returned

348

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	47	44	7	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	56	41	2	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	44	4	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	38	50	9	1	2
The teaching is good.	45	49	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	45	13	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	41	4	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	26	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	32	50	13	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	48	44	2	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	50	2	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	61	31	3	0	5