INSPECTION REPORT

WOODHAM COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Newton Aycliffe, County Durham

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114304

Headteacher: Mr S Harness

Reporting inspector: Mr C. Sander
4151

Dates of inspection: 6th – 10th November 2000

Inspection number: 223901

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Washington Crescent Newton Aycliffe County Durham
Postcode:	DL5 4AX
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Elizabeth Bryant
Date of previous inspection:	17th September 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Cedric Sander 4151	Registered inspector		The school's results and achievement How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
Phiroze Daruwala 9499	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?
Peter Scott 1407	Team inspector	Mathematics	
John Bryson 20629	Team inspector	English, drama, media studies and performance studies	
Jennifer Martin 23498	Team inspector	Science	
Elaine M Dearmer 8240	Team inspector	Information Technology	
Jeffery Pickering 31129	Team inspector	Art	
Geoffrey Edwards 1759	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Carol Woodhouse 10554	Team inspector	Geography	
Niall Carr 12825	Team inspector	History, sociology, psychology	
Nigel Stiles 17522	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Thelma McIntosh 11975	Team inspector	Music	
Barry Hodgson 22906	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
David Griffith 1517	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils: personal development
Susan Leyden 2423	Team inspector	Special educational needs	

The inspection contractor was:

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Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Owing to very severe weather conditions the college was closed to students for two days during the inspection week. During that time inspectors undertook additional analysis of students' work in order to establish a full evidence base of the standards reached in each subject. They also discussed students' performance in detail with their teachers. They extended the period of lesson observation on the final day of the inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Woodham Community Technology College is an 11-18 comprehensive school for boys and girls with 1210 pupils on roll, of whom 108 are in the sixth form. It has been a specialist technology college since September 1999 and is a resourced college for students with physical disabilities in South Durham. The college is larger than the average size of other schools nationally but approximately 10 per cent smaller than when it was previously inspected in 1995. The social backgrounds of the students are broadly average. 16 per cent are eligible for free school meals, broadly in line with the national average. There are 177 students with special educational needs, a proportion below the national average, and 60 with a statement of special educational needs, a proportion above the national average. 99 per cent of the students are white and there are none who speaks English as an additional language. Standards of entry are broadly average and improving. More than two-thirds of the students continue their education beyond the age of 16, either at Woodham or other local colleges.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

This is a good, well-managed college where standards are satisfactory and now rising. It is becoming increasingly effective in fulfilling its aim to promote high achievement for all. Very good leadership and effective management, well supported by the governing body, have enabled it to achieve technology college status. The students achieve well and their progress is very well monitored. Nearly all of them are positive in their attitudes, confident and keen to succeed. Students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, learn well because they are well taught and the care and guidance arrangements are good. Induction arrangements for new students are very good. The curriculum supports their personal development well and is starting to prepare them very well to succeed in a technological society. These measures are achieved in a cost-effective way for students between the age of 11 and 16. The arrangements for the sixth form are not cost-effective. Overall, when the above average level of funding is compared with what the college achieves and provides, it gives good value for money.

What the college does well

- Very good leadership and effective management define very clearly the future development of the college.
- It achieved standards in the 2000 national tests at the age of 14 that are above the national average for all schools in English and mathematics.
- The average points score at GCSE in 2000 was above the national average for all schools and well above the average for similar schools.
- Standards in art are excellent at the age of 16 and very good in the sixth form.
- Students of all abilities learn and achieve well because their teachers have high expectations and want them to succeed.
- Very good use of information and communication technology (ICT)in many subjects is improving the quality of students' learning.
- Students' personal development is good and provision for their moral development is very good.
- There is very good provision for extra curricular activities.
- It takes good care of all its students and monitors their progress very well.
- Links with local businesses and industry are very good, particularly in design and technology.

What could be improved

- Standards in modern foreign languages at the age of 16 are not high enough.
- The quality of teaching is not monitored systematically throughout the college.
- There are no targets to raise standards in the sixth form and provision is not cost-effective.
- The links between the college development plan and subject development plans are unsatisfactory.
- Legal requirements for religious education in the sixth form and for the provision of a daily act of collective worship are not fully met.

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

The strengths of the college far outweigh the weaknesses.

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was previously inspected in 1995, since when there has been a satisfactory degree of improvement in standards. The good quality of teaching has been maintained and the proportion of good or better teaching has increased. The range and rate of improvement has increased significantly over the last three years, during which time it has achieved technology college status. The governors' well-constructed action plan has enabled the college to deal successfully with most of the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection. The planning for further development is now very good. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. Arrangements for homework are now better and broadly satisfactory. The length of the school day has been increased to the recommended time and this is helping to raise standards. However, the legal requirements for religious education in the sixth form and for a daily act of collective worship for all students are still not met. Accommodation is now satisfactory although its maintenance is a heavy financial burden. Over the last five years, standards in the national tests at the age of 14 have been in line with the national average but have risen dramatically in 2000. They are now above average. Standards in GCSE at the age of 16 have also been in line with the national average and have improved this year. The proportion of students obtaining 5 or more A*-C grades declined after the previous inspection but is now rising, as also is the proportion who gain 5 or more A*-G grades. Standards at GCE A-level have remained below average.

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	C	C	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	D	

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

Standards are good and improving at the age of 14 and at the age of 16. Examination results in the sixth form at GCE A-level have been below the national average but standards are rising and are currently satisfactory. All students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.

Results in national tests at the age of 14 are rising ahead of the college's target. In 2000 standards overall were above the national average for all schools and also for similar schools. They were well above it in English and mathematics and broadly in line with it in science. In 2000, the proportion of students reaching the national expectation and above rose by 29 per cent in English, by ten per cent in mathematics and by six per cent in science. Nearly a third reached standards above the national expectation in English and science. Well over a third did so in mathematics. These proportions were well above average for similar

schools in mathematics and above average in English and science. Standards in work seen at the age of 14 are good in English, mathematics, art, design and technology and geography. The skills in these subjects are very well taught. They are satisfactory in all other subjects.

In the year 2000 GCSE examinations, 43 per cent obtained 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C, a proportion broadly in line with the national average and well above the average for similar schools. 97 per cent of the students obtained 5 or more grades A*-G, above the national average for all schools and well above it for similar schools. The average points score per student was well above the average for similar schools and above it for all schools nationally. Results in English were well above the average for similar schools but in mathematics and science they were below it. Higher attaining boys achieve good results but the other boys do significantly less well than the girls. At the age of 16, standards in work seen are excellent in art, very good in English and good in design and technology, geography, and music. They are unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages. Standards are satisfactory in all other subjects. In the sixth form, standards are very good in English and art, good in design and technology and satisfactory in all other subjects.

Standards in the year 2000 GCE A- level examinations were below the national average because only a minority of higher attaining students continue their studies at the college beyond the age of 16. Results in examinations have been consistently below the national average. They were good in mathematics and physics in 2000.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Good. Nearly all the students work hard and want to succeed. They value their college highly and many willingly take responsibility. The members of the school council demonstrate excellent attitudes in wanting to improve further what the college offers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Most behave very well at all times but a small minority occasionally spoil the learning of others through misbehaviour in lessons. Behaviour around the school is very good. Movement is orderly and purposeful. Fixed term exclusions were high last year but are much reduced this year.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students of all ages work well with each other in lessons. They willingly take part in activities outside lessons. They are mature and thoughtful. The respect and concern shown by nearly all the students to each other is a strong feature of the cordial relationships throughout the college.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence was above the national average last year. It has now reduced and is close to the most recently published national average.

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.

The quality of teaching is good. It was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons seen during the inspection. It was good or better in 61 per cent of lessons, of which 29 per cent were very good or better, and excellent in eight per cent. It was unsatisfactory in five per cent of lessons and poor or very poor on two occasions. The quality of teaching is very good in English and good in mathematics. In science it is good in lessons for students up to the age of 14 and satisfactory for students between the ages of 14 and 16. Students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, learn well because their teachers have a good level of specialist knowledge and high expectations that encourage their pupils to work hard. They learn particularly well when enthusiastic and creative teaching challenges them to think for themselves and take an active part in the lesson. Learning is less effective when they are required to

listen or complete tasks rather than make decisions or offer interpretation or ideas. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught and in many subjects good use of information and communication technology is starting to raise standards further.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. There is one gap in the required range because legal requirements are not fully met for religious education in the sixth form. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. There is a good level of additional support in classrooms and students with special educational needs, including those with physical disabilities, are able to take a full part in lessons. As a result they make good progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. The provision for students' moral development is very good. There is good provision for their spiritual, social and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its students	Good. The monitoring, support and guidance of students' academic performance and personal development are very good. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are also very good. There are good procedures to promote and monitor students' behaviour and attendance. Arrangements to assess, monitor and support pupils' academic and personal progress are good. There are good procedures for ensuring their welfare. The college has established good links with parents. Induction arrangements for new students are very good.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership. Targets for improvement are well defined and progress towards them is carefully monitored. Development planning is very good. Teamwork is very good, roles and responsibilities are well defined and key staff contribute very effectively to the good management of the college. The college gives good value for money.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors support the work of the college well and contribute much to its development and financial planning. Some minor legal requirements are not fully met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Senior managers and heads of subject have a good understanding of what they do well and where they need to improve. The analysis of results is very thorough and well used to decide its priorities and set targets for further improvement. The college regularly seeks the views of the parents about how well it is performing and takes action in the light of their comments.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning is very good and well linked to college priorities for improvement. The principles of best value are regularly applied. However, the sixth form is not cost-effective. There is sufficient staffing to meet the needs of the curriculum and an excellent induction programme for newly qualified teachers and others joining the staff. The quality of learning resources, particularly in information technology, is good. There is sufficient specialist accommodation but maintenance costs are high.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
• The college has high expectations. • It is well led and managed. • The teaching is good. • Students make good progress. • They feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or when problems arise.	• Arrangements to inform them about students' progress. • More information about the activities available outside lessons.

The inspection team noted the concern of parents about how the college reported to them on their children's progress. It found that the new monitoring arrangements have been planned to give a very clear and regular picture of how well each student is doing. There are lots of high quality activities available for the students but the inspection team agrees that there is no place in the student planner where these are described. The inspection team agrees that high expectations are now a hallmark of the teaching in this very well led and effectively managed community technology college.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Students' standards in English, mathematics and science on entry to the college at the age of 11 have risen over the last three years and are now just above the national average.

2. Standards overall are good and continuing to improve by the ages of 14 and 16. They are broadly satisfactory in the sixth form. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were generally higher than in the most recent national test and public examination results. Overall, they were satisfactory or better in over eight out of every ten lessons seen for students between the ages of 11 and 14, seven out of every ten of those lessons for those between the ages of 14 and 16 and in over nine out of ten lessons in the sixth form.

3. Standards were higher in the lessons for students up to the age of 14, reflecting the rising standards on entry to the college. They were generally very good in English and art, good in geography and design and technology and satisfactory in all other subjects.

4. Students of all abilities generally achieve well and make good progress by the age of 14. When comparisons are made with standards on entry they achieve very well in geography and well in English, mathematics, art, design and technology, music and modern foreign languages. Their achievement is satisfactory in science, history, information and communication technology [ICT], religious education and physical education.

5. Standards overall were above average in the 2000 national tests taken by all students at the age of 14. They were above average in English and broadly in line with it in mathematics and science. In comparison with similar schools, standards were above average in English and mathematics and broadly average in science.

6. The proportion of students reaching the national expectation, level 5, or better was higher than the national average for all schools in English and mathematics and in line with it in science. It was well above the average for similar schools in English and mathematics and above it in science. The proportion reaching standards higher than the national expectation was in line with the national average in all three subjects. It was well above the average for similar schools in science and above it in mathematics and English.

7. Similar standards to these results were seen in students' work between the ages of 11 and 14 in English, mathematics and science during the inspection.

8. The proportion reaching the national expectation or above in English at the age of 14 rose by over 30 per cent in 2000. These results reflect recent much improved teaching in the subject. Standards in both mathematics and science have risen over the last three years. Girls continue to reach higher standards than boys and the gap is similar to that nationally.

9. There was less consistency between the most recent statutory teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 and the work seen during the inspection. Statutory assessments were above average in design and technology and physical education but below average in art and well below average in information technology. They were broadly in line with the average in all other subjects. In the work seen, standards were good in art, geography and design and technology. They were satisfactory in all other subjects.

10. The trend in national test results in English, mathematics and science since the last inspection has been broadly in line with the national trend. The improvements have been greatest in mathematics. There was a period of decline in English until 1999 after which time there has been a huge improvement. There has also been significant improvement in science since 1999. The boys' and girls' standards have fluctuated over the last four years but are improving.

11. Satisfactory results overall were obtained at GCSE. In 2000, 43 per cent of students obtained 5 or more grades A*-C, a proportion broadly in line with the national average, higher than the previous year and close to the governors' challenging target of 45 per cent. Girls performed similarly to their age group nationally. The boys' results were lower than their age group nationally. Ninety-seven per cent of students obtained 5 or more grades A*-G, a proportion above the national average, well above the average for similar schools and within the top five schools in the county. The proportion of boys and girls reaching this standard was similar.

12. Those students who took GCSE examinations in 2000 recorded the lowest results since the previous inspection when they took the national tests in 1998 at the age of 14. Their results two years later at GCSE indicate a very good degree of progress and very good achievement by the age of 16.

13. There has been a trend of steady improvement in the average points score since the previous inspection. In 2000 it was above the average for all schools nationally and well above the average for similar schools. The proportion achieving grades A*-C was broadly in line with the national average in English but well below it in mathematics and science. In comparison with similar schools these results were, above average in English but below average in mathematics and science.

14. The girls obtained better results than the boys although in many subjects the boys did as well as their age group nationally. The proportion of girls obtaining grades A*-C was greater in nearly all subjects but nearly all the boys and girls obtained a grade in the range A*-G. The girls did significantly better than the boys in English and English literature, drama and media studies. However, the gap between the boys' and girls' results in English was not significantly greater than it was nationally. They also did significantly better in design and technology, music, business studies and physical education.

15. The boys and the girls performed similarly in mathematics and science where the standards were below their respective age groups nationally. Results were well above the national average in art with both boys and girls doing extremely well. Results were below the national average in modern foreign languages because boys did particularly badly in French. They were below the national average in music because the boys did significantly less well than their age group nationally. They were similarly below the national average in history because the girls' results were well below the average for their age group nationally. The proportions of boys and girls obtaining grades A*-C in geography were broadly in line with the national average.

16. In work seen during the inspection at Key Stage 4, standards were excellent in art and very good in English. They were good in music, design and technology, religious education and geography. Standards were unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages and satisfactory in all other subjects.

17. Standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. Standards in work seen were higher than those indicated in recent GCE A-level examination results that were below the national average. The average points score of candidates entered for two or more GCE A-levels in 2000 was below the national average and lower than the average for the previous three years. Results have not improved since the previous inspection. No targets are set currently for improvement. Many higher attaining students choose not to continue at the college beyond the age of 16 and this contributes to the below average results. The boys achieved better results than the girls, particularly in the proportion of higher grades.

18. In work seen in the sixth form, standards were very good in English and art and good in design and technology and in vocational courses. They were satisfactory in all other subjects. Students generally achieve well and make good progress. Their achievement and progress are very good in English and art. Students also achieve and progress well in science, design and technology, geography, music, physical education and in the vocational courses. In all other subjects their level of achievement and progress are satisfactory.

19. Standards in literacy are generally good and improving. Students' confidence in speaking and listening is good in most subjects. Oral work in several subjects has helped to develop their speaking and listening skills. For example, very good opportunities for discussion are provided in art where they are encouraged to exchange and develop ideas.

20. In all of their subjects, students are encouraged to read from a range of texts, use reference texts and read aloud. For example, in French and German they are provided with opportunities to read aloud from selected foreign language material. In mathematics they are able to read sheets of computer-produced data with ease. In physical education students use reference books and CD-ROMs to research aspects of their GCSE and GCE A-Level courses.

21. In many subjects there are planned opportunities for different kinds of writing. For example, in physical education students make notes and write at length in coursework projects. In music there are opportunities for them to write extensively at both key stages. In mathematics they write extensively to explain in words how a problem can be solved.

22. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory. In most subjects students have regular opportunities to develop their skills in number. In German, for example, they use number effectively when carrying out addition and subtraction in the target language. In English, they use number patterns when considering rhythm in poetry.

23. Many students can use, manipulate, interpret and display data when solving problems at levels that are in line with their age and attainment. In design and technology at

both key stages, most students can draw and measure dimensions with a good level of precision. In science at Key Stage 3, they are able to calculate volumes and speeds correctly, whilst at Key Stage 4 they understand proportionate values which they use appropriately and successfully.

24. As part of the significant recent developments in the use of information and communication technology [ICT] more students are using appropriate programs in subjects such as science and design and technology. In mathematics at Key Stage 3, those with learning difficulties consolidate classroom work to help them understand fractions better and, in physical education and geography, spreadsheets are used to analyse data and display the results pictorially in the form of pie-charts, bar charts and graphs. In geography at Key Stage 4, students set up hypotheses and seek numerical data to support or disprove their ideas, for example when investigating the relationship between temperature and windspeed at distances from a building. In most subjects they can interpret correctly pie charts, bar charts, graphs and scattergrams. Overall, however, there is insufficient use of information technology for control and data handling. The current strength is its use for communication.

25. Information technology is used well in most subjects to support learning. In design and technology, computers are used regularly for design work and for developing understanding of electronics. Students are also able to use design and technology computers for their own study at lunchtimes. In science, there has been an improvement in the use of computers to present data at both key stages and in the sixth form. Good use is made of the Internet in the sixth form for research purposes. A display of Year 7 work illustrated well the use of graphing facilities and some students have used information technology to present their own work. Computer resources are excellent in mathematics. Good learning has resulted from the use of information technology to develop understanding of fractions in Year 7. Commercial software is used effectively, particularly at Key Stage 3, to support students' independent learning. In modern foreign languages information technology is well used by teachers to prepare display information and by students to learn about grammar. This wider use of information technology is helping to raise standards because students have many opportunities to apply and develop their skills further.

26. Students with special educational needs make good progress at both key stages. In art, design and technology and English at Key Stage 4 their progress and achievements are very good. The effective use of additional support in the classroom in many lessons ensures that they are able to take a full part in the activities, and that any difficulties in carrying out the tasks are quickly identified. Their good use of information technology helps them to express their ideas more easily, demonstrate what they have understood about the subject and present their work well. In a small number of lessons, when additional support is not available, some students do not achieve enough because they find it difficult to concentrate and remain on task.

27. Gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress. By the age of 16 they reach high standards in art and design and technology when they are given opportunities to use their imaginations to explore and develop creative ideas.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

28. Standards of behaviour and courtesy are high. In lessons they are good. In general, nearly all students show a high degree of self-discipline and confidence. They work well on their own and in small groups, and also co-operate enthusiastically with one

another. Movement round the college is orderly and nearly all students observe the college's regulations and safety measures.

29. Relationships between the teachers, other support staff and the students are warm and friendly. The positive rapport is based on mutual respect and trust. Those with special educational needs respond with enthusiasm, taking full advantage of additional help within lessons. These positive attitudes help pupils to learn well in lessons. Consideration is also shown to all members of the college. Relationships are supportive, cordial and reflect a positive response to the college's high expectation of courtesy and respect.

30. Students show respect for property, equipment and displays in the college. They act responsibly when using computers and printers. They participate in discussion and are keen to answer questions. Most complete the tasks assigned to them. Although the opportunities for students to show initiative in lessons are limited, they are generally keen to take responsibility in other ways. For example, during the inspection Year 11 prefects and a large number of other students showed exemplary teamwork with their teachers during the open evening held for parents and their children currently in Year 6. Year 11 pupils also befriend Year 7 students when they join the college and help them to settle in. In this way they contribute very well to the very good induction arrangements for new students. They also help to run lunchtime homework clubs for the benefit of Year 7.

31. During the last academic year, some enterprising Year 11 students showed initiative and confidence to design, edit and produce a glossy booklet, entitled 'Class of 2000' containing the photograph of each Year 11 student, with an apt quotation, identifying his or her aims and aspirations as they entered the adult world. Very good use of information technology skills created a highly attractive publication.

32. Some students from the college excel in sports. Three represent their country in Under-16 international teams in swimming and water polo. Another two students are receiving coaching in the game of soccer at professional clubs. The college attaches as much emphasis to sport, physical well-being and personal development as it does to raising academic achievements.

33. Year council and school council meetings are held twice each term. For each year group, the year council meeting precedes the whole school council meeting. Year council representatives bring issues to the attention of their school council representatives. They, in turn, bring suggestions and concerns to council meeting. This highly effective consultation encourages students to contribute ideas towards the further improvement of their college and also to set high standards for themselves. For example, during the October meeting of the Council, the representatives decided to report every incident of litter dropping to tutors, so that it can be picked up by the students concerned.

34. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. The rate of attendance, 92 percent, for 1999-2000 shows a slight improvement of 0.29 per cent over the preceding year. For the last academic year, the rate of unauthorised absence was 1.05 per cent, an improvement of 0.85 per cent over the year 1998-1999 figure and close to the most recently published national average figure. Targets are in place to improve attendance further to 95 per cent.

35. Punctuality has improved since the last inspection. There is now a system of reporting to a member of the staff by the small number of students who arrive in their

classroom after the completion of the register by the form tutor. They are required to report to the member of staff in the college reception area and explain the reason for the late arrival. If they are persistently late arriving at school, their parents are contacted.

36. There were three permanent exclusions and 108 fixed term exclusions during the year 1999-2000, a high figure. The college has set a target to reduce this by 25 per cent during the current school year. There have been seven fixed term exclusions so far this term. The pattern indicates that the college is on course to achieve a 50 per cent reduction, ahead of the governors' target. During the current academic year, there has been no permanent exclusion. The college actively pursues a policy of social inclusion but will rightly not accept gross breaches of the school's standards of behaviour, particularly when these involve students' health and safety. For example, a number were excluded last year for climbing the school perimeter fence and activating the fire alarm without due cause. Parents and students are advised very carefully in the parents' handbook about both the nature and the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

37. The quality of teaching is good. The proportion of good and very good teaching has further increased since the previous inspection. Nearly all students are now well challenged. As a result gifted and talented students make very good progress in art, satisfactory progress in religious education, mathematics, music and history, but there was insufficient evidence to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning in English, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages, physical education and geography. Homework is now set much more consistently in nearly all subjects. There is much greater use of information and communication technology.

38. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons seen, of which 61 per cent were good or better. The quality of teaching was very good or better in 29 per cent of lessons, of which eight per cent were excellent. Teaching was unsatisfactory in five per cent of lessons, of which one per cent was poor or very poor.

39. The quality of teaching is very good in English and art. It is good in mathematics, design and technology, geography, history, music, business studies and in the sixth form vocational courses. It was satisfactory in science, information technology, modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. It is of a broadly consistent quality in most subjects between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the sixth form. In science, the best teaching was seen in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 14. Excellent teaching was seen in art in the sixth form. It was much better in information technology in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 14 than in those for students between the ages of 14 and 16. It was also better up to the age of 14 and in the sixth form than between the ages of 14 and 16 in modern foreign languages. Teaching was better in the sixth form than before the age of 16 in physical education.

40. There are many strengths that characterise the good teaching across the college. In particular, the level of specialist knowledge is very good. As a result the subject matter is very well explained and enthusiastic teaching, for example in art, gives the students confidence to succeed. In mathematics and history, specialist knowledge is well used when asking questions, giving clear explanations and encouraging students to think. In the very best teaching they learn particularly well when enthusiastic and creative teaching challenges them to think for themselves and take an active part in

the lesson. These were strong features of the teaching in English and drama, mathematics and art. However, it was less evident in the teaching of history in the sixth form where, as a result, lower attaining students relied too heavily on the teacher to provide them with the answer.

41. Nearly all students learn well because their teachers have high expectations, communicate these clearly and establish good relationships within the classroom. This is a recurring feature in nearly all subjects. The good learning that results is founded on a shared commitment to succeed. Where this feature was strongest, for example in art, the students and their teacher worked as a team to develop ideas imaginatively and explore different approaches.

42. Many teachers demonstrate a high degree of skill in using the teaching methods that will best help pupils of different levels of attainment to learn successfully. In nearly all lessons the use of time is well organised to provide a good range of different activities. This was a strong feature of the good teaching of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3. Nearly all students learn well because the sections of the lesson are well linked and they understand how they will use their skills and knowledge to make further progress. Their interest is sustained because each section of the lesson matches well their span of concentration and a good pace is maintained throughout.

43. Basic skills are generally well taught but weaknesses in literacy sometimes affect adversely the quality of learning in history. There is excellent provision within art where students' oral skills are frequently well developed through discussion and the technical vocabulary of the subject is well taught. These features are also frequently seen in lessons for pupils between the ages of 11 and 14 in design and technology and in geography and modern foreign languages, where these skills are also well taught. Following a recent revision of its schemes of work, there is now much greater emphasis on teaching the technical aspects of language in English, and grammar is well taught in modern foreign languages. Pupils are encouraged to use standard English. Most subjects provide a good range of opportunities for students to read widely and undertake research. For example, in physical education, students use reference books and CD-Roms to research aspects of their GCSE and GCE A-level courses. Sometimes these opportunities are not pursued, for example by students of history in the sixth form.

44. The teaching of numeracy is generally satisfactory. These skills are well taught in mathematics but there is no policy to guide their co-ordinated teaching in each subject. As a result there is no systematic approach that builds on the numeracy strategy within the partner primary schools. Mathematical skills and understanding are developed satisfactorily in geography where students learn how to display their results pictorially in the form of pie-charts, bar charts and graphs.

45. Since the college achieved technology college status provision for information technology has improved significantly. This is not yet fully co-ordinated but there are many occasions in a wide range of subjects where information technology is well used, particularly in promoting more effective communication. This is a developing strength in teaching across the college and much has been gained from the new opportunities funding to develop teachers' skills in information technology.

46. Many students learn particularly well when enthusiastic and creative teaching challenges them to think for themselves and take an active part in the lesson. This is a strong feature of the teaching in art. Because individual lessons and sequences of

lessons are well planned they immediately have a clear picture of what they are going to learn. This was a strong feature in the teaching of English and music, and the very good scheme of work in design and technology ensures a consistent approach with which students and teachers are very familiar. It provides a very thorough foundation for good learning in this subject.

47. The quality of marking is generally good. It is particularly helpful and encouraging in design and technology. As a result, students of all abilities make good progress. Many teachers are highly skilled in knowing when to intervene in order to help students overcome difficulties and make progress. For example in a successful music lesson seen during the inspection they were given the opportunity to develop a short rhythmic motif for themselves but the teacher timed her intervention skilfully to help them make further progress with their work.

48. Within many of the most successful lessons seen during the inspection, and particularly in English, mathematics, art, modern foreign languages` design and technology, geography and music, teachers use questions very well to involve the students in the lesson. As a result they think about what they are doing and often show a high degree of enthusiasm. This feature is less evident in science where there is sometimes too much emphasis on giving information to the pupils, as a result of which they remain passive listeners and do not have an opportunity to extend or apply their understanding.

49. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, weaknesses in subject knowledge led to an insufficient degree of challenge, as a result of which most students lost interest and made limited progress. Occasionally, in science, the students rely too heavily on receiving information from the teacher and there are missed opportunities to encourage them to think for themselves and find alternative solutions to problems. These skills and ways of working are particularly required if students are to develop experimental and investigative skills. Insufficient emphasis on such skills was a weakness in some of the sixth form teaching in science.

50. The quality of teaching of students with special educational needs is good. It enables them to take a full part in all the lessons. Subject teachers are aware of their difficulties and learning needs through information provided in their individual education plans. They monitor their progress carefully in lessons, responding quickly and sensitively to potential problems. As a result, students work hard and make good progress.

51. In lessons where extra support is available, good team work between subject teachers and learning support staff ensures that students are able to complete the tasks successfully and participate fully in group work. In lessons where work is adapted to meet their individual needs, many students work more independently. In lessons where they are withdrawn for extra support in basic skills, very good teaching and their excellent relationships with teachers and learning support assistants give them confidence to succeed.

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

52. The quality and range of the curriculum are generally satisfactory. In many subjects there is increasingly very good use made of information technology to support and extend students' learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are generally well covered in the different subjects of the National Curriculum but there is no formalised planning

for when, how and why they need to be taught between the ages of 11 and 16. In the sixth form there is well-planned provision for all students to learn the key skills of communication, number and information technology, but the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education are still not fully met beyond the age of 16.

53. There has been a satisfactory response to the evaluation of the curriculum at the time of the previous inspection including a general review leading to increased teaching time that is helping to raise standards. The college has made significant links with the local industry and business community, which are enhancing students' experiences, general careers' awareness and vocational education. The very good use of information technology is a strong feature in the teaching of many subjects but the provision has not yet been analysed and documented in order to confirm its breadth, balance and continuity.

54. The organisation of the curriculum for students between the ages of 11 and 14 provides a satisfactory degree of breadth and balance. The time allowed for art, geography, history, religious education and physical education is slightly lower than the pattern nationally. For music in Year 9 it is insufficient. Students in Year 7 and Year 9 have information technology lessons, but in Year 8 the provision for this is planned to occur in other subjects of the curriculum. There is good provision in art, particularly in Year 7 where students are able to experience both two and three-dimensional work.

55. The quality and range of the curriculum is satisfactory for all students between the ages of 14 and 16. All students in Year 10 take information technology and a GCSE short course in religious education in addition to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They are also able to select from a wide range of GCSE subjects. These courses are well matched to the needs of individual students. There are GNVQ courses and a specific work related course in Years 10 and 11 for lower attaining students who are disapplied and do not study a modern foreign language.

56. There are good opportunities for sixth form students to select courses appropriate to their needs. These include AS/A2-levels in a wide range of subjects previously studied at GCSE level as well as new subjects such as psychology, philosophy, performing arts and a range of GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced level. All students study the key skills of communication, number and information technology but there is no timetabled provision for religious education.

57. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. All are fully integrated into mainstream classes, and take a full part in every aspect of school life. Care is taken to ensure that arrangements for additional support avoid their missing work in other lessons. Those who require such extra help are also offered it at lunchtimes and after school, as well as for any difficulties they may have in social relationships. Between the ages of 14 and 16 the opportunity to follow work-related courses at the local college provides a good extension of the curriculum. The college is seeking to extend the range of accreditation for this aspect of its work.

58. For talented and gifted students, extra-curricular opportunities in art, English, modern foreign languages, music and sport provide experiences designed to extend and challenge them. In Years 12 and 13, students can opt to study philosophy. In Year 9, a group of gifted and talented students has been identified and the college is working with outside support to develop a programme of enrichment activities. The long-term strategy to develop further this provision is good.

59. The quality of provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory. Pupils are taught during form time and in one lesson per week. There is a planned programme that includes provision for sex education, health education, drugs awareness, relationships, citizenship and careers. Lessons are taught by form tutors. They are supported by heads of school who monitor the programme. The form time is not always well used as part of this programme and its effectiveness is insufficiently monitored.

60. Careers education is well organised, particularly industry days where very effective use is made of the very good links the college has established with local industry, commerce and other institutions. In Year 9, the ACE day is supported by students from Durham University (Stockton Campus), providing a good insight into higher education opportunities. A full 'industrial day' involves representatives of local industry and commerce who work alongside students in problem solving activities related to business. In Year 10, the extension programme provides them with vocational experience. In Year 11, there is a skills workshop with a significant input from local employers which helps them to understand the world of work. All students in the sixth form take part in a work experience week. These links are a particularly strong feature in the provision made within design and technology and help the college to fulfil its aim to prepare its students to contribute and find success within a technological society.

61. The college has established good links with partner institutions including local schools and a nearby college. There are very good arrangements for pupils transferring to the college at the age of 11. Subject links with primary schools are strengthened through cluster groups and the college makes good use of the information provided by the local education authority about pupils' attainment levels in primary schools. The induction day for Year 6 pupils gives them the opportunity to have lessons in a number of different subjects and get a taste of student life at the college. The well established link with a college at Bishop Auckland provides opportunities for Year 10 and 11 students to take work related courses such as hairdressing and in building and construction skills.

62. There is a very good range of extra curricular activities and events. The college has developed very good links with a school in Germany that enriches students' work in languages, art and music. There are activity weeks in the Lake District, an annual ski trip to Italy and Year 8 study visits to France and Germany.

63. Many subjects make provision with extra help in all key stages. In mathematics, as in many other subjects, there are lunchtime clubs that give students the opportunity to improve their work and further develop their interests. The new computer rooms are extensively used at lunchtimes. There are also lessons at lunchtime and at the end of the day. These provide opportunities to take a second language in Year 10 as well as GCSE 'resit' courses in English and mathematics in Year 12. In physical education, there are many opportunities for higher attainers in school teams, with high standards in swimming, water polo, soccer, netball, athletics and cross-country running. Students are involved with the Durham Maths Challenge, Science Fair and in a good range of musical activities such as choirs, brass and jazz groups.

64. The very good curriculum policy emphasises the importance of personal development. Provision for students' moral development is very good. For their spiritual, social and cultural development it is good. It fulfils well the college's aim to equip pupils to function not only successfully but also responsibly in a technological

society. The awareness of the majority of staff of their responsibility in this area is now a strong feature of the curricular provision and of the college's ethos. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The senior management team provides very good leadership by including consideration of these aspects of pupils' development in their curriculum review, but lack of monitoring means that the quality of provision is inconsistent across the different subjects.

65. Provision for students' spiritual development is good. The impressive standard of display throughout the college opens pupils' eyes to the wider world and draws their attention to subject-specific sources of information including useful website addresses. In English, through literature and discussion, students are encouraged to think about spiritual dimensions of human life and important human problems. In Science, a sense of wonder and excitement is fostered through the handling of fossils and the growth of living things, whilst the study of history increases students' awareness of and interest in their past. In modern foreign languages, they learn to accept difference, and understand the role language plays in people's perception of the world, while appreciating what is precious about each person as an individual in their own right. In geography, pupils studying the tropical rainforest learn about the spiritual values of its original inhabitants, and they wonder at the devastation of natural catastrophes. In religious education, students develop good skills in balancing different points of view about fundamental questions in life and ethical choices. In art, discussion about paintings and sculpture focuses on the human condition. The most recent sixth form conference successfully integrated a cross-curricular approach to values and beliefs on a millennium theme about the future of the planet

66. The legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met. Students meet weekly in year assemblies for an act of collective worship, and on other days there is no recognition of the need for a formal act of collective worship in tutor group time. Where collective worship was seen in a year group, opportunities were missed to link the annual festivals to their personal experience or to provide for student participation. Their attention was engaged for a limited time through brief questions, and poems. Collective worship does not take place in most tutor groups. When older students are presented with relevant material to provoke thoughtfulness they listen but are not expected to take part nor given time to reflect.

67. The college promotes moral values very well. The government-sponsored award for 'Investing in Children' recognises a commitment to promoting the involvement of young people in decision-making. In many lessons the principles of right and wrong are very well promoted: in English and drama through the moral choices faced by literary characters and in science when considering the moral issues surrounding scientific progress. In design and technology, students are made aware of the scarcity of resources and the need to renew and recycle them. In drama, they explore social and moral issues related to violence and abuse. The work of artists is used to highlight the horror of war and the use and abuse of power. History shows how studying the past highlights right and wrong actions, ideas and purposes. Members of the very effective school council are given the opportunity to appreciate the rights and responsibilities of others.

68. The college makes very good provision to support its students' social development, particularly through special events that give them the opportunity to work together on a specific task. Recent examples have included an outdoor trip to Howtown involving river activities and rock climbing, experiencing army discipline and exercises for a day and involvement in a landscaping project in the college grounds.

69. The successful integration of students with special educational needs around the college provides good opportunities for mutual support. 'Investing in Children' activities provide regular opportunities to show leadership, confidence and resourcefulness at conferences. Outside groups visit the college to run a rugby workshop, and students contribute to the life of the local community by performing music or displaying works of art in local primary schools, a local hospital, a Learning Centre and a local church. In physical education teamwork and leadership are well developed and in the Year 9 Industry Day teamwork is very well promoted by local managers and engineers in the design and construction of the infrastructure of an imaginary island. Students provide help and funds for Help the Aged. The college community successfully sponsored a former pupil to go to Tanzania to work with poor rural communities with the Health Projects Abroad Charity

70. The provision for cultural development provides good opportunities for students to participate in dramatic performances, a Christmas concert with the Town Band, and Remembrance Day. Religious education takes a lead in teaching students effectively about prejudice and discrimination and the multi-ethnic nature of Great Britain. Music includes black music, with links to Gospel, slavery and ragtime, featuring the work of well-known black artists. Students study world music and have been on visits to an African drum workshop and a multi-ethnic percussion recital. They learn from African art that artefacts can give clues to people's work and feelings. They also study Asian and Japanese art, Native American Art and art by women artists. There is an established link with a German school, and the school choir performs in Germany. All students are taught to recognise the contribution of many cultures to their subjects. In

design and technology, for example, they learn that the tradition of design and use of technology can be found in ancient Egyptian tomb locks and in mathematics they are taught about mathematicians such as Pythagoras before being introduced to his theorem.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

71. The college cares well for all its students. It fulfils well its aim to promote their academic, physical, social, cultural and creative development. These positive, and unambiguous objectives for their development and preparation for adult life are well defined in the published aims of the college and rooted in its distinctive philosophy of 'Achievement for All'. There are many opportunities for students to become self-assured and to make the best use of their talents by raising their self-esteem and self-knowledge.

72. The college has successfully established a policy of rewarding students for their positive behaviour. At the same time it does not hesitate to apply appropriate sanctions in the case of unacceptable behaviour. It takes meticulous care to ensure that the incidents of unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying, and any other kind of unacceptable behaviour, particularly if it affects the health, safety and well-being of others, is dealt with effectively and with care and sensitivity. Teachers and other adults in the school provide good role models by demonstrating the ways of working in harmony in classrooms and by establishing good working relationships.

73. The school cares well for students with special educational needs. As a Resource Centre for South Durham, the school offers a high level of support, both in lessons and through small group teaching to improve basic skills. There are appropriate arrangements for gathering information about students' needs, writing individual education plans, ensuring all staff are well-informed and for monitoring progress. Effective relationships have been established with external agencies and their advice and support contributes to the arrangements for teaching and supporting students. Annual reviews are carried out in accordance with statutory requirements, and parents are appropriately involved in planning and reviewing their child's progress and development.

74. Attendance and punctuality are monitored carefully. Registers are marked efficiently. The college applies appropriate action in the case of absences that have not been explained by parents or carers. Difficult cases are referred to the education welfare officer who works closely with the college.

75. There are good arrangements for child protection. For students' welfare, health and safety the college works closely with the education welfare officer and educational psychologist. Good support for individuals is provided by outside counsellors. Meticulous pastoral records are maintained from Year 7, so that students' personal development is well monitored. The college makes use of appropriate strategies, helping the students to develop a mature and positive outlook so that they can look forward with confidence to adulthood.

76. There are very good systems in place to monitor students' academic performance and personal development. Statutory assessment arrangements are good. A range of assessment procedures is in use including end of topic tests, internal and external examinations and coursework.

77. Assessment data is well used to identify students' current levels of attainment at the start of Year 7. Results from Year 7 examinations and other assessment information are used to set a target level in English, mathematics and science for each student to reach by the end of Year 9. GCSE targets for students to reach by the age of 16 are also set using commercially produced statistics and indicators. All students also complete the National Record of Achievement at the age of 16. This includes a record of personal development. In the sixth form academic monitoring takes place twice each term when subject performance is reviewed by tutors.

78. Good use is made of assessment information to inform curriculum planning in all subjects except religious education. The use of assessment information to guide option choices at the end of Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. The monitoring review, which is used to set individual targets for all pupils at the ages of 14, 16 and 18 is also used to allocate them to teaching groups based on their previous attainment between the ages of 11 and 16. The college is starting to use the monitoring review to improve curriculum organisation, identify trends and weaknesses and provide additional support, for example by targeting boys' underachievement. All teachers and governors are made aware of examination performance data. Procedures have started to identify gifted and talented students, initially in Year 9. The monitoring review gives students a clear understanding of their progress towards their targets and identifies areas of strength and weakness in their work, effort and homework. Between the ages of 14 and 16 they contribute to the compilation of a monitoring review through discussion with their teachers. Those needing support are given extra teaching and there is a reward system for those making good progress.

79. The monitoring of academic progress is very good. It is a developing strength. There are two monitoring reviews each academic year in addition to the annual report produced towards the end of the each academic year. This recently developed system will be fully implemented from the current academic year. One of the two deputy heads is responsible for co-ordinating the review procedures with heads of year, tutors and heads of department. All curriculum areas have established the statutory assessment arrangements at the end of each key stage, using a variety of methods. These include Cognitive Ability Tests for Year 7 students, commercially produced assessment analysis for Year 10, the internal tests and external examinations results, coursework and regular marking of homework. Satisfactory recording procedures are also in place.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

80. The building of an effective partnership with parents is an important strand of the college development plan. It is committed to maintaining and further developing a strong, positive and purposeful relationship with parents. They value its 'open door' policy. It listens well to parents, invites regularly their comments and observations, considers their views carefully and responds promptly to their concerns and suggestions. It formally seeks their opinions about its work through a termly questionnaire. There is a strong commitment to consulting parents about how the college might improve its service to them, for example how the organisation of parents' evenings might be further improved.

81. Parents are always welcome to consult the head teacher, head of year, subject teachers and the year group tutor about any issue that causes concern. Those who attended the pre-inspection meeting indicated that they feel comfortable about approaching the college with a question or a problem. Nearly all agree that the college has high expectations of its students. They also recognise that the college is very well led and managed. However, some parents are dissatisfied with the arrangements to keep them informed about students' progress and achievements. Parents would also like to know more about the additional activities available at the college.

82. The college has established a home-school agreement requiring the college, the parents as well as the students to fulfil its conditions. Much thought has been given to developing good systems of communication between home and college. The student planner is an important feature. In it, parents can bring minor issues to the attention of the college. Every half term, the college sends a 'brown envelope' containing a variety of information useful to parents. There is an annual 'Parents' Handbook'. This provides useful information and guidelines to parents, for example by informing them about the school shop.

83. The college is keen to play a positive role in the community it serves by providing study opportunities to parents and other adults in the evenings and the weekends. It runs evening classes in information technology for parents and the community. A family learning day is held each term and on Saturday mornings. Courses include design and technology, information technology, science and mathematics.

84. The college prospectus is a clear and informative document. The governors' annual report is unsatisfactory because it does not contain all of the required information, for example, an evaluation of the policy for special educational needs.

85. The college conducts good induction meetings for parents and their Year 6 children. One such evening meeting was held during the inspection week. In addition to receiving information about the college, parents were able to tour the subject areas where students were working.

86. The college is well supported by an active parent-teachers association [PTA]. Regular social events raise additional funding to support the work of the college.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

87. The headteacher provides very good leadership. His vision for the future development of the college is very clear and great care has been taken to build a shared understanding and commitment to its values and future direction through effective consultation. The clarity of the college's aims, which embrace both the personal development and academic achievement of all pupils, is one of the reasons why it has shown such a good degree of progress over the last three years, leading to its successful application for technology college status.

88. The senior management team work well together. The two deputy headteachers have been appointed within the last year and are already making a significant contribution to the development of the college. The team has developed quickly because time has been taken to build a shared understanding. As a result, roles and responsibilities are clear. There is a good level of technical understanding and strategic thinking within the team. Increasingly effective use of the new technology is being made to provide accurate statistical information to assist the analysis of academic performance and to support effective decision-making. Above all, there is a strong and increasingly shared commitment to raising standards and setting clear targets for improvement. Well-defined delegation leading to a wider involvement of staff in the development of the college is well illustrated in the work currently being undertaken by the newly qualified teachers to analyse issues relating to the under-achievement of boys.

89. The day-to-day management and organisation of the college is very good. This was well illustrated when students were unavoidably required to remain at home for two days because of severe weather conditions during the week of the inspection.

90. Effective consultation is a further strength of the leadership and management of the college. It was a strong feature in the preparation of the college policy for performance management. The draft policy was reviewed and improved as a result of comments from all members of staff. This increased the degree of a shared understanding about a major area of development in the management of the college. A start has been made to the revision of job descriptions. This needs to be completed as a matter of some urgency given the requirements of performance management.

91. As a result of all these features there is a strongly held and shared commitment to improve and the college has a very good capacity to succeed.

92. There is one major weakness currently in the overall management of the college. Although some subject departments have arrangements to monitor teaching there is no co-ordinated approach across the college. The headteacher and senior managers are fully aware of this omission and have a well-considered strategy for its introduction.

93. Planning for college development is very good. The long-term plan, 1999-2005, is excellent. Its major strengths are the very clear descriptions of targets and levels of provision. This gives all those associated with the college a very clear picture not only of the direction in which the college is travelling but also the destination it is heading for in six years' time. Challenging targets are included for national test and public examination results, attendance and exclusions.

94. The current college development plan reflects the contribution of governors, staff and students and follows from a wide consultation of individuals and groups who have a stake in the direction it will take in the future. The aims of the college define its priorities clearly and these are well linked to the objectives of the plan. Costings, targets and responsibilities for action are carefully defined and the link between development planning and financial planning is very good.

95. Both financial and development planning are closely aligned to the annual budgetary cycle and to specific grants resulting from the college's successful application for specialist status and additional government funding. These grants have been used

very effectively to provide high quality resources for teaching and learning. For example, this year there has been excellent provision of specialist accommodation, equipment and materials for the use of information technology within the curriculum.

96. The recent appointment of a deputy head with responsibilities for financial monitoring and evaluation has strengthened further the quality of information and advice available to the senior management team and governing body. The local authority financial audit of May 1998 confirms the school's efficient and effective use of resources, and minor administrative issues reported at the time have been dealt with. The college regularly applies the principles of best value to inform its expenditure decisions at the planning, review and evaluation stages within the annual management planning cycle. Daily financial administration involves close and effective attention to the procedures for purchasing books, materials and equipment that give the best value for money. Contracts are monitored closely and a range of quotations is sought before major expenditure decisions are made.

97. The governing body supports the work of the college well and contributes much to its development and financial planning. Its committees meet regularly and communications are good. The headteacher keeps governors very well informed. A meeting of the governing body, scheduled during the inspection, had to be cancelled because of very severe weather conditions. At that meeting a full analysis of national test and public examination results was to have been given. The very good quality of reports provided to the governing body ensures that they are kept very well informed of the college's strengths and weaknesses.

98. Despite these many strong features in their contribution to the success of the college, the governing body has not ensured that legal requirements are fully met for religious education in the sixth form and for the provision of a daily act of collective worship. The annual report to parents is unsatisfactory because it does not include details of the college address, its security arrangements, the destination of college leavers and an evaluation of the policy for pupils with special educational needs.

99. Since the last inspection, the governing body has improved its practice in development planning, the provision for information and communication technology and procedures to improve the overall cost effectiveness of the college but not in so far as the sixth form is concerned. Arrangements to monitor the use and effectiveness of information and communication technology are not yet fully in place.

100. The leadership and management of subject departments are generally good and improving. Heads of subject are increasingly aware of their responsibility to monitor standards but do not currently possess sufficient expertise in the analysis of data. The most significant strength is their developing expertise in curricular planning in order to provide stimulating learning. Leadership and management are very good in English, art, design and technology and good in geography, history, modern foreign languages, information technology, business studies, vocational courses and religious education. They are satisfactory in mathematics, science and physical education. Although some subject departments have introduced arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching there are no consistent, co-ordinated arrangements across the college.

101. Most subject departments have produced helpful departmental development plans but these are neither sufficiently detailed nor linked coherently to the college development plan. Methods of allocating finance to departments are presently under discussion and the school has made well-considered preliminary arrangements to move from

allocation of resources by formula to a more equitable method of allocating resources based upon needs and priorities within the college development plan.

102. The leadership and management of pastoral care are satisfactory. Tutors know their students well and heads of year make a highly committed contribution to the consistent application of expectations concerning attitudes and standards of behaviour. However, progress in developing a behaviour policy has been slow and the monitoring of form time is unsatisfactory.

103. Overall, the college makes efficient use of the resources available including staff, accommodation, books, materials and equipment. However, sixth form provision is not cost-effective and expenditure exceeds income by almost four per cent. The use of time within the form period each day is unsatisfactory because tutors do not organise it effectively.

104. Learning resources have improved considerably since the last inspection, except in music. The overall provision is good. The governing body has increased capitation to departments by a third in this academic year. The college is spending almost twice the national average on books and equipment. Additional funding linked to technology college status increased significantly the level of information technology resources. One hundred and twenty personal computers and peripherals in three dedicated computer suites have recently replaced outdated hardware. There are 8 personal computers placed in the resource centre especially for those students who have special educational needs. The library and resource centre is a well-run and well-supported facility. The librarian monitors the effectiveness of the library and occasionally stages book fairs to raise money to supplement allocated funds. Careers resources are also housed in the resources centre

105. The governing body has increased capitation to subject departments by a third in the current financial year. Resources are very good in English, geography and information technology and good in information technology, art, business studies, vocational courses and physical education. In geography there is a very good range of ordnance survey maps. The department also enjoys very good equipment for activities such as weather measuring. The music department is seriously under-resourced as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Instrument provision is low and has an adverse effect on standards.

106. The management of provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory. The governors and senior managers are committed to the continual improvement of the support they receive and to ensuring they make progress and achieve well. There is full access for wheelchair users, with a range of lifts, ramps and toilets at strategic points around building. The funds for ‘resourced’ students and those with other special educational needs are appropriately targeted and monitored.

107. There is a good range of new equipment, including information technology resources that is helpful for students who have difficulties with their learning. The management and organisation of the learning support department is under review. Whilst the current arrangements for supporting students are satisfactory, there are appropriate plans for the coming year to address the lack of systematic procedures for collating information on their progress and for evaluating the effectiveness and value for money of the different kinds of support.

108. The college is developing its provision for gifted and talented students. As a result the awareness of the issues has increased but provision to meet their needs is only just starting.

109. Accommodation is adequate for the size of the college. It is very good for information technology and good in history and geography, modern foreign languages and in physical education in terms of space but variable in quality. There are good facilities in design and technology with the exception of electronics where space and services are unsatisfactory. It is generally unsatisfactory in mathematics, music and for students with special educational needs and poor in art. The layout of accommodation in the science department does not always support effective learning. Students are sometimes distracted because access to the preparation room is via the laboratories. Although sections of the flat-roof have been replaced it is generally unsatisfactory.

110. The students respect the fabric of the building and many classrooms and corridors are brightened up by displayed work. The site maintenance, cleaning and grounds staff work hard to improve and maintain the school environment. There is very little evidence of litter, vandalism, or graffiti. However, uneven paving results in numerous puddles in the immediate external areas, a very noticeable feature during the very wet weather throughout the inspection week.

111. There is sufficient appropriately qualified and experienced teaching staff to meet the needs of the curriculum. In mathematics, a lack of specialist knowledge occasionally results in unsatisfactory teaching and achievement. The non-specialist teaching in geography at Key Stage 3 does not have an adverse effect on standards. Staff are clear about their roles. The amount of technician support in science is unsatisfactory.

112. There is an excellent induction programme for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school. Provision for the continuing professional development of teachers is very good. The training plan has evolved from the college development plan and is linked to the monitoring of teaching led by the senior management team. The planning and preparation for the introduction of performance management is very good.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

113. In order to bring about further improvements in pupils' education and the standards they achieve, the governors, senior management team and staff of the school should:

1. Raise standards in modern foreign languages at the age of sixteen by:

    - identifying and responding to the reasons why boys do less well after the age of 14;
    - reviewing the range and relevance of topics studied between the ages of 14 and 16;
    - setting targets for improvement within the departmental development plan;
    - defining staff development requirements;
    - identifying within the region where schools and colleges have successfully addressed this issue. Paragraphs: 15,16,240,241,244,246.

2. Introduce systematic arrangements to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching across the college by:

    - establishing agreed criteria to inform the monitoring programme;
    - confirming the strategy;
    - developing the role of heads of subject and providing the necessary staff development;
    - identifying within the region where schools and colleges have successfully addressed this issue. Paragraphs: 92,100,130,183,194,218,257

3. Set targets in all subjects to raise standards and improve cost-effectiveness in the sixth form by:

    - including a three year programme for improvement within the college development plan;
    - reviewing the range and costs of all courses offered;
    - using details of prior attainment to set challenging but realistic targets for all students;
    - developing a system of individual mentoring; Paragraphs: 17,103

4. Improve the quality of development planning in subject departments, linking it more clearly to the college development plan by:

    - using the format of the college plan to establish a common approach to development planning in subject departments;
    - setting long term targets for standards, curriculum development and the quality of teaching and learning in each subject area.
    - providing guidance and staff development to increase understanding of monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to raise standards further. Paragraphs: 101,163,194

5. Ensure that the legal requirements are fully met for religious education in the sixth form and for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all students by:

    - considering the range of options to make provision for religious education in the sixth form that meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus;
    - identifying within the region where schools and colleges have successfully addressed this issue.

The inspection team also recommends that the governors, senior management team and staff should:

6. Monitor more closely the very good use of information technology that is developing in many subject departments to assure its efficient use and to confirm that legal requirements are fully met across the full range of required skills. Paragraphs: 24,99,237

7. Monitor the use of form time more rigorously to ensure the efficient use of time. Paragraphs: 59,102,254

8. Ensure that the governors' annual report to parents includes all the required information. Paragraph: 98

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	153
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	71

Owing to severe weather conditions during the week of the inspection the college was closed to pupils for two days. The inspection team undertook additional analysis of pupils' and students' work during this time to confirm its judgements on standards in each subject. Additional discussions concerning standards were also held with many teachers during this time and the planned period of lesson observation was extended on the final day of the inspection..

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8	20	35	31	5	1	0

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

Information about the college's students

Students on the college's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the college's roll	1210	108
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	191	0

Special educational needs	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	58	2
Number of students on the college's special educational needs register	175	2

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	0

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	42
Students who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	33

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
College data	8.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	2.2
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 students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	128	110	238

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	83	93
	Girls	72	78	73
	Total	143	161	166
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	71 (40)	73 (63)	62 (56)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	26 (9)	42 (37)	22 (23)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30(23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	83	93
	Girls	72	78	73
	Total	143	161	166
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	61 (53)	69 (40)	70 (53)
	National	63 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	12 (13)	35 (26)	29 (22)
	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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	125	91	216

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	45	122	124
	Girls	48	88	89
	Total	93	210	213
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	College	43 (42)	97 (91)	99 (94)
	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 student	College	41 (38.4)
	National	38.7([38)

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	14	25	39

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
College	11.9	10.3	10.9 (13.2)	N/A	1.0	1.0 (1.0)
National				2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1204
Any other minority ethnic group	6

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	108	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	72.6
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	67

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.2

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.9
Key Stage 4	21.2

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000

	£
Total income	3252088
Total expenditure	3307624
Expenditure per pupil	2603
Balance brought forward from previous year	83234
Balance carried forward to next year	27698

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1210
Number of questionnaires returned	330

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	52	9	1	2
My child is making good progress in school.	38	51	6	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	55	6	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	54	12	2	3
The teaching is good.	34	55	5	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	43	16	2	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	55	39	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	38	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	35	46	13	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	42	48	2	1	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	50	6	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	42	13	4	18

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

ENGLISH

114. Standards on entry to the college have, in recent years, been close to the national average. This year they are above average.

115. Standards generally are very good. They are good at the age of 14 and very good at the age of 16 and in the sixth form.

116. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests at the age of 14, results in English were above the national average for all schools. Seven out of ten pupils reached the national expectation, level 5, or above. A third of pupils reached standards above it. These proportions were above the average for similar schools. Girls performed better than boys. Over the period 1998 to 2000 pupils' performance has improved greatly. In 2000, the proportion of pupils who gained Level 5 or above in the National Curriculum tests increased by nearly 30 per cent.

117. The 2000 GCSE results in both English and English Literature were broadly in line with the average for all schools. They were well above the average for similar schools. The results of girls have been significantly higher than those of boys. Over the last three years, the performance of pupils has been above average in comparison with all schools nationally. In 2000, there was a significant increase in the number of pupils gaining A* and A grades in English literature. There has been an improvement in both English and English literature.

118. In the sixth form standards are very good. In 2000 all candidates passed the GCE A-level English examination. One in five pupils achieved an A or B grade. The standards achieved by girls are higher than those achieved by boys. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were good at the age of 14 and very good at the age of 16 and in the sixth form.

119. At the age of 14 students are capable speakers and listeners. Their responses to the texts they read are good. Handwriting is satisfactory. Most students are able to spell monosyllabic and common polysyllabic words accurately. In lessons there is a strong emphasis on the need to improve punctuation and spelling. All, including those with special needs, make satisfactory progress between the ages of 11 and 14.

120. Between the ages of 14 and 16, students achieve standards above the national average. At the age of 16, the girls achieve higher standards than the boys. The students' ability to work independently and take leading roles of their own accord is satisfactory. Standards in speaking and listening are good. The majority listen attentively. Most are keen to answer questions. Where students are well prepared for discussions, they can make sophisticated contributions and maintain discussion at a high level.

121. Reading standards are satisfactory. A majority of students can read aloud with confidence and fluency. Lower attaining students are encouraged to improve the quality of their reading aloud. Standards in writing are good. The writing of the girls is of a higher standard than that of the boys. Most students write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce a wide and varied range of extended writing. Good oral work prior to writing often helps them to write at greater length. Most are able to

improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Many are able to improve the quality of their final drafts by using word processing and desktop publishing packages. Handwriting is generally good. Most students are able to spell and punctuate accurately. In many lessons there is a strong emphasis on the need to improve punctuation and spelling.

122. In the sixth form, students studying GCE A-level English show good understanding of the social context and themes of classic novels, poetry and Shakespeare's plays. They build on the critical skills acquired between the ages of 11 and 16.

123. Throughout the school, well-targeted work, combined with high expectations of learning and behaviour, result in a majority of pupils making good progress. The progress made by students with special educational needs and with low prior attainment is good between the ages of 11 and 14 and very good at the age of 16.

124. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The ability of most students to speak clearly and with confidence in more formal situations has improved greatly. Many contribute enthusiastically to class discussion. The quality of teaching is usually very good and often excellent.

125. The English department has raised standards by: developing initiatives to improve the achievement of boys; putting greater emphasis on teaching the use of language skills; monitoring pupil performance; setting challenging targets; integrating drama into the schemes of work for Years 7,8 and 9 and developing a GCSE media studies course

126. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. It is often excellent. All of the teachers have a very good specialist knowledge of both English language and English literature. Lessons are very well managed for students between the ages of 11 and 18.

127. The effectiveness of teachers' planning at all key stages is good. Planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons is very good. Teachers consistently identify the learning objectives for lessons and make them clear to their students. In a Year 7 lesson designed to introduce the use of persuasive language in the media the teacher made sure that learning objectives were clear and that everyone appreciated how pictures and words could be used to persuade an audience. As a result nearly all the students could make a written analysis of a letter before feeding back to the whole class in clear, confident, standard English.

128. There is very good use of constructive oral comments in lessons to help students to improve. The marking of written work is very supportive. The use of homework is very good at all key stages. Structured schemes of work are being developed for all key stages. These provide a stimulating range of experiences. The quality and use of ongoing assessment is good.

129. The English department is very well led and managed. The Head of Department provides a clear sense of direction for colleagues by her example and through a number of key initiatives; for example, mentoring underachieving pupils and providing a revision club.

130. Arrangements for monitoring teaching are being developed. Documentation is comprehensive and clear. The identification of priorities is good. All members of the department share a very strong commitment to the school's aims. Schemes of work are carefully structured and cover very well the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses. Resources for teaching, books in particular, are plentiful and well cared for. Accommodation for pupils in all Key Stages is good and is enhanced by stimulating displays that are well organised and of good quality. All these features contribute to an overall picture of rising standards.

Literacy in other subjects of the curriculum

131. The curricular aims of the college place a strong emphasis upon personal development and its broader aims identify the need to prepare its students to succeed within an increasingly technological society. The English department's literacy policy interprets these aims by emphasising that they need the ability to recognise, understand, use and manipulate the conventions of language. It recognises that the knowledge, skills and understanding of literacy are the foundation for successful learning and that all teachers share responsibility for its promotion. The English department believes that the development of literacy skills is fundamental to the development of the whole pupil, and is the key to their success in the world and their perception of themselves. The department, therefore, aims to ensure consistent approaches to speaking, listening, reading and writing across the various subjects of the planned curriculum.

132. The department has established a successful partnership with the local primary schools to develop continuity and progression as part of the Durham County literacy initiative. A timetabled series of visits has taken place and these will continue to help bridge the gap between primary and secondary teaching styles. English teachers have worked closely with the County Literacy Co-ordinator to develop materials and teaching strategies and to raise awareness of literacy standards and expectations.

133. The English department has provided a strong lead by encouraging students of all ages to read widely. They are also encouraged to use Standard English in formal speaking and writing. English teachers have started to help them to develop a clear understanding of the effectiveness of the language that they use in a variety of situations.

134. In line with the college's action plan for literacy, the English department has introduced schemes of work to ensure that all students understand key subject specific vocabulary, spell these words accurately and use them with confidence. In general, there is a focus on ensuring that they know and understand key vocabulary in subjects. For example, in art rooms there are displays of technical words and vocabulary lists.

135. Students' confidence in speaking and listening is good in most subjects. Oral work in several subjects has helped to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills. For example, very good opportunities for discussion are provided in art where they are encouraged to exchange and develop ideas.

136. Students are encouraged to read from a range of texts, use reference texts and read aloud. For example, in French and German they are provided with opportunities to read aloud from selected foreign language material. In mathematics they are able to read sheets of computer-produced data with ease. In physical education there are opportunities to use reference books and CD-ROMs to research aspects of their GCSE and A-Level courses.

137. In many subjects students are provided with opportunities for different kinds of writing. For example, in physical education, they make notes and write at length in coursework projects after the age of 14. In music, there are opportunities for them to write extensively in all years up to the age of 16. In mathematics, they write extensively to explain in words how a problem can be solved. Overall, their level of competence is good at the age of 14 and satisfactory at the age of 16.

Drama

138. Drama is a strong feature of the school's provision. It makes a very positive contribution to the overall ethos of the school. The subject is growing in popularity. Standards are high. Students work well together showing a high level of commitment. Their improvisation work is impressive. Individual, pair and small group presentations are constructed carefully. Their use of language and voice projection are very good.

139. The quality of teaching in drama is excellent. The teachers' excellent subject knowledge is used to develop a wide range of performance skills. Their enthusiasm inspires their students whose motivation, determination to succeed through honest self-criticism and teamwork are of the highest order.

140. Teachers are aware of individual pupil needs. For example, each student has a set of negotiated targets. Those with special educational needs are fully integrated into all activities. Lessons are well structured and develop at a good pace.

141. The subject has been integrated into English in Years 7,8 and 9. It has adequate time in Years 10 and 11. There is a good assessment procedure closely linked to individual targets. Informal assessment by the students takes place in lessons.

142. The management of drama is very good. Many drama topics contribute immensely to students' personal development. As a result the subject makes a significant contribution to the curriculum aims of the college. Delicate issues are addressed sensitively and respectfully. For example, a Year 11 class used improvisation to explore the theme *An Abandoned Baby*. The ensuing mature discussion explored violence, abuse and responsibility.

MATHEMATICS

143. Standards on entry to the college, based on end of Key Stage 2 results and other nationally standardised tests, show that approximately one pupil in four does not reach national expectations. Some students in Year 7 are receiving remedial teaching in mathematics to improve their learning in an attempt to raise their attainment to national expectations.

144. Standards in mathematics are generally satisfactory. They are good at the end of Year 9. In the 2000 national tests at the age of 14, standards were in line with the national average for all schools and above it for similar schools. Nearly three-quarters of the students reached or exceeded the standard expected nationally, whilst slightly more than two in five reached levels of higher attainment. Approximately one in eight reached the highest levels of attainment. The boys and the girls reached similar standards.

145. Since 1996, standards generally in mathematics at the age of 14 have shown a rising trend when set against national trends, with a significant improvement over the last two years. In 2000, standards in mathematics are comparable with those in English and better than in science. The performances of boys and girls have shown no significant differences since the last inspection and standards reached by pupils of differing levels of attainment match closely the levels found for similar students nationally. Teachers' assessments, which were much lower than the test results in 1999, showed a marked improvement in 2000. These assessments now provide a more realistic and accurate expectation.

146. At the age of 16, all except 4 students in 2000 were entered for GCSE mathematics. Those 4 students entered the certificate of achievement examination. The number achieving grades A*-C was below the national average. Standards were similar to those in science but much lower than those in English. Students did less well in mathematics than in their other subjects. There was a significant decline in standards from the previous year and standards were lower than those in similar schools This was because a new examination scheme barring the use of calculators had been introduced, staff absence had been high and a small but significant number of students were disaffected and underachieved. For the full range of grades, A*-G, results were in line with the national average.

147. The results of the boys and the girls have fluctuated in recent years. In 2000, the girls performed better than the boys, reversing their performance in the preceding year. The girls have performed marginally better than the boys, obtaining more grades A*-G in recent years. Overall, performance in mathematics has fluctuated in recent years but has never exceeded the national average for A*-C grades. In 2000, very few obtained the highest A*-A grades.

148. The school is alert to the differences in annual performances between the boys and the girls and the possible under-achievement of some higher attaining pupils. It is monitoring performance carefully.

149. The number of students following GCE-A level and AS level courses in the sixth form is too low to make valid comparisons with the performance of similar groups nationally. Since 1996, 39 students have completed GCE A-level mathematics courses and all but one has been successful in obtaining a grade in the range A-E. Over this period, two fifths of the students have obtained the higher grades A and B, whilst approximately a quarter of them have obtained the highest grade. At the age of

16, many pupils with higher qualifications in GCSE mathematics leave to continue their studies in mathematics at a local sixth form college.

150. The achievement of nearly all students, including those with special educational needs, is generally satisfactory. They achieve well and make good progress between the ages of 11 and 14. This is confirmed by analysing their work, observing their performance in the classroom and in discussion. Their achievement and progress are satisfactory between the ages of 14 and 16. The good results in 2000 at GCE A-level indicate that the small number of students in the sixth form achieved well.

151. Achievement and progress are currently greater by the age of 14 because the national numeracy strategy is now being used. Extended staff absence resulting in some discontinuity of teaching has resulted in less progress being made by many students at between the ages of 14 and 16. The satisfactory progress and achievement made in the sixth form owes much to the teachers' close attention to students' individual needs, the good relationships which help to give the students confidence and the high levels of motivation that result from this.

152. Most higher attaining students between the ages of 11 and 16 reach good standards because they take care with their work and are very industrious. Middle attaining students reach expected levels because teachers structure their lessons well and give opportunity for mental activity in each lesson. Most students take pride in their presentation and errors in their working are carefully corrected. Nearly all benefit from good teaching and the care and interest shown by teachers who have clear expectations that are shared and understood. Lower attaining students make good progress because the work is closely matched to their needs.

153. Between the ages of 11 and 14, the factors influencing standards are the positive attitudes to learning closely coupled with teachers' very good classroom management. At the age of 16 higher-attaining students reach good standards because they are self-disciplined and take pride in the neatness and accuracy of their work.

154. Most students generally make good progress in lessons between the age of 11 and 14. Where progress is occasionally unsatisfactory it stems from poor attitudes. In one unsatisfactory lesson, the teacher's careful planning was reduced in value because the behaviour of some students was disruptive. Learning for the majority was affected adversely by the attitudes and behaviour of a significant minority.

155. Most students also make satisfactory progress in lessons between the ages of 14 and 16. In a lesson where good progress was made students were shown how to use, a graphical calculator. The skill of the teacher, the very good use of resources and the enthusiasm of the students combined to ensure effective learning. In a lesson with average-attaining students in Year 10, progress was unsatisfactory and learning was slow because their recall of previous work was weak and they did not have a good understanding of basic mathematical ideas

156. Students with special educational needs make good progress by the age of 14 in basic number work because experienced teachers support the work of the class teacher within the classroom. Higher-attaining students make satisfactory progress at both key stages. At present insufficient additional work is provided for gifted and talented students.

157. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. It was satisfactory or better in 90 per cent of lessons, with one lesson in three being very good or better. Two lessons were unsatisfactory, both at Key Stage 3. In one lesson the planning did not make clear the lesson objectives. This reduced the effectiveness and pace of the students' learning. In the other, weak classroom management skills resulted in unsatisfactory pace and progress. An excellent lesson at Key Stage 3 resulted from the teachers' complete command of the topic, the use of highly effective teaching methods and a full understanding of the students' needs.

158. Strengths in teaching which contribute to effective learning include: a good level of teachers' knowledge and understanding which provides the foundations for high expectations; effective classroom management and good assessment procedures. In lessons involving those with special educational needs, the good quality of additional support gains much from the good teamwork between the teacher and the support assistant. This promotes effective learning because the students are fully involved in the lesson.

159. Teachers' expectations of students in the sixth form contribute greatly to their effective learning. Generally, teachers' secure knowledge and understanding is used to good effect when asking questions, giving clear explanations and developing students' thinking skills. The majority of lessons are well managed. Most students respond by being attentive, concentrating and showing a willingness to learn whilst enjoying the teaching and the rapport with their teachers. These teaching strengths give students confidence in their own skills.

160. Teachers' are skilled in controlling the pace of a lesson by carefully evaluating the progress being made by the class and individuals. They present appropriate challenges and most have high expectations and make reasonable demands of their students. In one lesson at Key Stage 3, good teamwork between the class teacher and learning support teacher meant that nearly all the students with special educational needs were given a high level of supervision and support. This effective teaching ensured that difficulties and misunderstandings were quickly identified and correct strategies for learning adopted. Teachers' effective use of individual education plans for students with special education needs is limited because the targets set are imprecise. At both key stages homework is set consistently and in accordance with the school timetable.

161. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection in 1995. The quality of teaching has improved overall. Standards at the age of 14 have improved. Special educational needs students are making satisfactory progress overall and all students are placed in sets of similar levels of attainment. Underachievement in Year 11 has largely been addressed and students are more responsive between the ages of 14 and 16. The frequency and consistency of homework has improved and the excellent, recently commissioned information and communication technology facilities are beginning to have a significant impact on the quality of learning.

162. Some issues have still to be addressed. Investigative work by students between the ages of 11 and 14 lacks a consistent approach and in some top sets at both key stages the gifted and talented students are insufficiently challenged. Accommodation remains an area of concern with some classrooms too small to provide opportunities for a range of activities or methods within a lesson.

163. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Standards are monitored well. However, the monitoring of teaching, including marking, lacks rigour and a systematic approach. The assessment of students' work and its use to give parents and students regular feedback and to set specific and attainable targets for individual improvement are strong features. Schemes of work for students between the ages of 11 and 14 are complete and are being developed for those between the ages of 14 and 16. The department has yet to match its development plan closely to the college development plan

Numeracy in other subjects of the curriculum

164. The college has no policy for the development of numeracy in the different subjects of the curriculum. This means that the properties, use and language of number are taught within the school curriculum without the benefits of a systematic and structured approach to support the continued development of numeracy from the contributory primary schools across all subjects. Key skills in numeracy are taught in the sixth form to all students not taking mathematics as part of their studies.

165. During the inspection, students were observed using numeracy in most subjects except music, art and religious education. In modern foreign languages in German, they used number effectively when carrying out addition and subtraction in the target language. In English they used number patterns when considering rhythm in poetry.

166. Most students can use, manipulate, interpret and display data when solving problems at levels that are in line with their age and attainment. In design and technology between the ages of 11 and 16 most of them can draw and measure dimensions with a good level of precision. By the age of 14 in science they can calculate volumes and speeds correctly, whilst by the age of 16 they understand proportionate values that they use appropriately and successfully.

167. Computers are being increasingly well used to help students to develop numeracy skills, particularly within science and design and technology. In mathematics lower attaining students consolidate classroom work to help them understand fractions better and, in physical education and geography, spreadsheets are used to analyse data and display the results pictorially in the form of pie-charts, bar charts and graphs. In geography students at the age of 16 can set up an hypothesis and seek numerical data to support or disprove their ideas, for example when investigating the relationship between temperature and wind speed at distances from a building. In many subjects most students can interpret correctly pie charts, bar charts, graphs and scattergrams. By the age of 16 many understand negative and positive correlation between two variables.

SCIENCE

168. Standards on entry are not as high as the above average results in the national tests at the age of 11 would indicate. They are broadly in line with national expectations. There has been an improvement in the students' knowledge and understanding of

science on entry to the college over the last three years from just below to just above average.

169. Standards are generally satisfactory between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the sixth form. National test results at the age of 14 are in line with the national average for all schools and also for similar schools. The proportion of students reaching the national expectation, level 5, or above in the 2000 national tests was close to the national average, as was the proportion reaching level 6 and above. Results have risen over the last three years. Boys and girls reach similar standards. The results of teacher assessments show that most students' theoretical knowledge and practical skills develop at a similar rate. Standards were higher in English and mathematics than in science, but the science results exceeded the target set by the college.

170. At the age of 16, students are entered for the double award GCSE in science. In 2000 just over one third obtained grades A*-C, a proportion below the national average for all schools and also for similar schools. The trend has been downward over the last three years. Girls outperformed boys in 2000 although the reverse was true in the previous two years. The proportion of students obtaining grades A*-G has increased over the last three years to 99 per cent.

171. Results in the sixth form at GCE A-level in physics, chemistry and biology are broadly in line with the national average and have shown significant improvement over the last four years. In 1996, half the students entered for the A level examinations gained a graded pass whereas in 2000 more than four fifths did so and over half of these passes were at the grades A and B. Results in physics were particularly good.

172. Standards in work seen are satisfactory at the age of 14. Progress is satisfactory. A comparison between standards at the start of Year 7 and students' current work in Year 9 shows a satisfactory level of achievement. High attaining students know how planetary rotations affect the length of the day and nearly all have made compounds from elements. Some can use word equations to explain what has happened. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs have a simple understanding of the process of digestion and how food provides the energy we need.

173. Standards are also satisfactory at the age of 16. Most students make satisfactory progress and their achievement is satisfactory. They have gained a broad understanding of a wide variety of topics in biology, physics and chemistry. A significant number find difficulty in expressing their ideas about science clearly. Many lack an understanding of the scientific concepts and they are not able to apply their ideas to new situations. Higher attaining students can use models, such as the wave model, to explain ideas about light and sound. A group of middle attaining students had difficulty in explaining why leaves lose water from the underside although they had studied the structure of the leaf. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs currently follow a single science course together with a non GCSE course in science. They are gaining knowledge and understanding of science at a basic level and have developed their practical skills sufficiently to be able to compare the efficiency of fuels experimentally. Some of these students have gained grade C in the examinations taken at the end of year 10, showing that this system is improving motivation.

174. Standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. Most students achieve well in meeting the much higher standards required in the separate science courses at GCE A-level. They make good progress. In all three sciences they take more responsibility for their own learning. They are able to cope with more complex practical situations and show

improving accuracy. They can find the factors affecting the oscillation of a spring and in biology can investigate the effect of acidity on the activity of pepsin, obtain valid results and analyse them effectively. At the beginning of the AS courses some students lack confidence and have difficulty in expressing their own ideas or formulating questions.

175. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The standards achieved at Key Stage 3 have improved, but at Key Stage 4 they have declined. In the sixth form more students are gaining a pass at GCE A-level and more of the passes are at the higher grades. There has been a move towards providing more challenge for high attainers and the introduction of the Science plus course for low attainers has improved their motivation. Good staff development has led to increased use of information and communication technology to provide simulations of scientific ideas, the use of CD Roms and the Internet in research and improved preparation for examinations through revision packages. There has been a reduction in the level of technical support and it is currently insufficient to service the needs of the department.

176. The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory overall. Students are well taught between the ages of 11 and 14. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. All teachers understand their subjects well. This enables them to teach confidently and provide illustration of their ideas from everyday life.

177. From Year 8, students are grouped according to their prior attainment and this enables teachers to match the tasks set more closely to their needs. There is some evidence of teachers introducing work of an inappropriately high standard to students who have weak understanding of basic concepts.

178. Teachers use a wide range of different approaches to maintain students' interest including video clips to explain the use of the mass spectrometer, question and answer sessions and practical tasks. Classroom management is good and students are well-behaved in lessons. In all lessons they work safely and sensibly in the laboratories and persist until tasks set are completed.

179. Learning is most effective when teaching methods encourage students' active involvement, either when taking part in discussion, collaborating in practical tasks or solving problems for themselves. In some lessons students rely too heavily on the teacher and are given limited opportunities to express their own ideas or explore alternative ways of solving problems. This is particularly noticeable in the sixth form where there is lack of discussion.

180. In the lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 16 seen during the inspection, teachers had appropriate expectations and some challenging tasks were provided. In Year 8, a class showed interest and excitement in discussing healthy lifestyles in small groups. Many students, including those with special educational needs, were keen to present their ideas to the class and all pupils enjoyed their learning. Between the ages of 14 and 16 poor prior attainment and poor basic skills resulted in some middle attainers having difficulty in developing their understanding of scientific ideas in sufficient depth. They also experienced difficulties in applying their understanding ideas to new situations.

181. Lessons generally proceed at a brisk pace, but some of the younger students find the double lessons tiring. As a result they lose interest and distract others. Some lower attaining pupils have a lot of incomplete notes, which weakens their examination

preparation. By the age of 16 nearly all students have developed good practical skills of planning and predicting outcomes, but their ability to analyse results and evaluate their work is unsatisfactory.

182. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress due partly to the support provided in the classroom, but also because the courses provided are designed to meet their needs. Homework is regularly set and marked, but the degree of challenge is variable and some tasks are too simple. Marking is detailed in some classes giving students the information they need to improve their standard, but this is not always the case. However, they are made aware of the level they are expected to reach by the end of the key stage and this gives them a target at which to aim.

183. The leadership and management of science are satisfactory. Strategies and targets are in place to improve standards. Revised schemes of work, effective monitoring and evaluation of students' progress towards agreed targets are having a positive impact on raising standards between the ages of 11 and 14 and in the sixth form, but have not yet led to improvement between the ages of 14 and 16. The monitoring of teaching is unsatisfactory. It is currently on an informal basis and there is no formal record kept. Discussions in departmental meetings do result in some sharing of best practice. Since the last inspection, line management has improved and the departmental development plan has prioritised raising standards in all key stages. Since the award of technology college status there has been a drive towards increasing the use of information and communication technology to improve understanding in science. There is better access to hardware and the range of software has been extended.

ART

184. When pupils enter the school their skills in art are unsatisfactory. They make very good progress and achieve very well at the age of 14. Standards in the art department are generally very good. At the age of 16 they are excellent.

185. The 2000 statutory teacher assessments of students' work at the age of 14 were slightly below the national average. Despite very good progress these results reflect the below average standards on entry to the college. Examination results at the age of 16 and in the sixth form are very high. In the 2000 GCSE examination 90 per cent obtained grades A*-C and all obtained a grade in the range A*-G. Every candidate was successful at GCE A-level. The students regularly exceed the national average and approximately half gain grade A passes each year. Standards have improved since the last inspection. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

186. The standard of students' work at the age of 14 is good. It is excellent at the age of 16 when most students can draw and interpret information from direct observation, adapting their drawings into compositions in painting, print, sculpture or textiles. Much of their work is sculpture in clay, wood and mixed media. This is small scale due to lack of storage space. The students recognise the great themes in art history and have the ability to make a personal response. They are able to assess paintings and make informed comment about the work of artists such as Rogier van der Weyden, Toulouse Lautrec, Constable and Picasso. Interesting, innovative use is made of images taken from the Internet by enlarging pixels to create cubist-like images.

187. Achievement is generally very good as students make good progress by the age of 14, excellent progress by the age of 16 and very good progress in the sixth form. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Those with special educational needs make very good progress. They enjoy their work and have confidence in their teachers who are particularly familiar with their needs. The imaginative, challenging work allows the gifted and talented many opportunities to make good progress and set their own pace.

188. Teamwork is very good indeed. This is also a strong feature of the teaching in the many very good and occasionally excellent lessons because teachers and students work together very successfully. Ideas are shared and imaginations stimulated as a result. The students respect their teachers, the subject and the fabric of the department and are able to discuss and explain their work clearly and sensibly to each other, their teachers and also to visitors. Surprisingly, a smaller than average proportion of the year group opts to study art beyond the age of 14.

189. Teaching in the department is very good and has improved since the last inspection. Lessons begin with a firm, often dynamic start; usually including some revision of previous learning. The teachers' genuine love of their subject has a very strong impact on the students' attitudes. The best teaching occurs in lessons for students between the ages of 14 and 16 where it is very good and occasionally excellent, and in the sixth form where it is excellent. The teaching of students between the ages of 11 and 14, where some of the classes are taught by non-specialist staff, is good and occasionally excellent. The only unsatisfactory lesson seen was in Year 8 when a small number of students slowed the learning of others despite the best efforts of their teacher.

190. The teachers' understanding of art is excellent and has a strong impact on the quality of learning in GCSE lessons and in the sixth form where, as students grow older, methods are tailored to individuals. In a particularly good Year 11 lesson they were encouraged to use the complete range of two and three-dimensional processes to develop high quality, personal work. A very good level of challenge is a recurring feature in many lessons. Teachers regularly offer praise, comment and guidance. This promotes very good motivation and high standards.

191. Many students use their skills of objective drawing as a starting point and confidently develop ideas using an increasing number of processes. A variety of scale of work is adapted to provide a good degree of challenge. Illustrations and photographs provide further information. Experimental work occupies a large part of the department's work. The teachers' methods of managing their classes ensure all make progress. Their enthusiasm inspires ambition and encourages individual responses.

192. Very occasionally, planning is weak and lessons are ended by the clock rather than by the teacher. Homework is regular and appropriate. Between the ages of 11 and 14 students look at tone and proportion through portraiture and proceed to abstract compositions through experimentation. They often use cubism to develop still-life painting and textile work. The recently acquired digital camera introduces new ways to develop images in paint and clay.

193. The very good teaching places a strong emphasis on students' personal development, including their spiritual and cultural development. There are regular opportunities to reflect. Critical studies often focus on the human condition and some make significant progress through illustrating emotions in portraits. They gain increasing awareness of the environment through drawings and photographs of the area. The department plays host to students from Denmark, Taiwan, Japan, Switzerland and Germany who occasionally follow examination courses while bringing a different work ethic as well as cultural differences. Many references are made to multi-cultural art and emphasis is placed on the decorative features of native Americans. There is a policy to look at work by women artists. The students have completed murals in hospitals, churches, company offices and primary schools in the surrounding towns.

194. Leadership and management are very good. This has contributed to the good degree of improvement since the previous inspection, including an improved level of resources. There is a precise indication of expected standards for both students and teachers. Teamwork is a significant factor in this very successful department. The head of department involves his team in pilot schemes for developments in art education. There is a need to monitor teaching and learning formally so that good practice might be shared and less experienced teachers might better cope with challenging behaviour. Development planning lacks detail in its costing and is not clearly linked to the priorities of the college plan.

195. The accommodation is unsatisfactory and the leaking roof and resultant slippery floors cause dangerous conditions in wet weather as well as restricting the teaching area. A lack of storage space is slowing development of sculpture in the early years. The decorative order of the rooms is very poor and is in marked contrast to the department's display in and around the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

196. When students enter the college they have a very limited appreciation of the principles of design and their practical skills are unsatisfactory. By the age of 16 standards in design and technology are good overall. The standards of the girls are very good. In the 2000 statutory teacher assessments, four-fifths of the students at the age of 14 reached the national expectation, level 5 or above. This was well above the national average. Girls reached slightly higher standards than boys. However, the boys' results were well above those of their age group nationally. The 2000 GCSE results at the age of 16 in design and technology resistant materials, electronics and

graphics were well above the national average. The results of the girls were very high. There has been a steady improvement in these subjects during the last three years. This pattern of results indicates that nearly all students achieve well and make good progress by the ages of 14 and 16. Only a small number of students study design and technology in the sixth form at GCE A-level. This makes unreliable any comparison with national averages. One pupil obtained a grade B and the other a grade D.

197. The standards of work seen were good at the age of 14 and 16 and in the sixth form, In the work seen during the inspection, standards were at least similar to, but more often above national expectations. At the age of 14, most students can apply appropriate knowledge and skills to design and make good quality products from a very broad range of materials and components. For example, some Year 9 students produced a good range of design ideas for their steady-hand game and successfully soldered the electronic components together. Many make good progress, for example, when designing and making containers in Year 8 and a mechanical device in Year 9. They manage individual projects well using a variety of materials, but do not always evaluate their work as they proceed, but rather, at the end, test their projects against original specification. Their graphical skills are often above average and well developed through a range of designing and making activities. Most students' skills in electronics and Computer-Assisted Design (CAD) are developing well. They also demonstrate good practice in relation to health and safety, using a range of resistant materials, tools and equipment responsibly.

198. Standards are good at the age of 16. Many students use sound methods of investigation, research and modelling. The good quality skills learnt in formal graphics lessons are evident in many of their major projects. For example, those studying GCSE had produced a very good range of well-conceived solutions in response to their resource-pack project. They show a thorough knowledge of the theory, for example in the design and making of an electronics alarm. Their analysis of commercial designs, in relation to storage and or garden furniture, is comprehensive.

199. Good standards were also evident in the work seen in sixth form. In Years 12 and 13 those studying A/AS level produce a good variety of original designs. Graphicacy is well developed in relation to design analysis.

200. Links with local industries and further education are a strength of the department and together make a significant contribution to the good standards. Visitors to the college and visits by students to local businesses widen students' understanding and stimulate them to develop their own ideas.

201. Students' achieve well and make good progress at both key stages and in the sixth form because they are very well taught, well motivated, give their full attention to the task and gain a very good range of skills which they apply effectively in both designing and making products. Those with special educational needs make very good progress, particularly between the ages of 14 and 16 because they receive high levels of skilful individual support.

202. Between the ages of 14 and 16 many students increasingly take responsibility for the organisation their own work. In some lessons, for example, they were seen to organise themselves with only occasional intervention by the teacher. Such mature attitudes reflect a high degree of personal development and indicate how successfully the subject fulfils the curriculum aims of the college.

203. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have risen. The quality of accommodation has been improved. There is much better provision of information technology equipment to support learning and to meet the requirements of control technology.

204. The quality of teaching is good in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the sixth form. Its quality owes much to the consistent use of a very comprehensive and detailed scheme of work. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and their expertise and experience is well deployed. Classroom management is generally based on good relationships and mutual respect. Teachers are generally aware of the needs of their students and set appropriately high expectations. Marking and assessment of their work are regular, encouraging and helpful.

205. Where lessons are just sound they do not match up to the quality of the planning or original intentions. There is insufficient formal monitoring of the quality of teaching and therefore any variations in standards have yet to be successfully addressed.

206. The department is very well led and managed. There is a good balance between experience within the team of teachers and the technician makes a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the provision. Documentation is very detailed and purposeful, and the teachers share a strong commitment to the school's aims. Departmental procedures for assessment recording and reporting are strengths of the department.

GEOGRAPHY

207. The standards of students' geographical knowledge, understanding and skills on entry to the college are generally unsatisfactory. Standards are generally good at the end at the age of 14 and at the age of 16. They are satisfactory in the sixth form.

208. In the Year 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14, standards were broadly in line with the national average. The boys and girls achieved similar standards although those of the boys were above their age group nationally. In the Year 2000 GCSE examination more than half of the candidates obtained grades A*-C, a proportion broadly in line with the national average. 99 per cent obtained grades A*-G, a proportion broadly in line with the national average. Although the girls did slightly better than the boys, the standards achieved by the boys and the girls were broadly in line with their respective age groups nationally.

209. Over the previous three years results have improved by approximately 10 per cent and more students are choosing to continue to study this subject beyond the age of 14. There is no consistent pattern in the results of the boys and girls over this period. Small numbers of students take GCE A-Level. There are considerable fluctuations from year to year. The trend over the past three years is approximately one-quarter gaining the higher grades of A-B and three-quarters gaining grades A- E. In 2000, a smaller proportion gained grades A-B.

210. In the work seen of students between the ages of 11 and 14 standards were good because they develop good mapping skills; they draw and annotate diagrams well and write fluently when, in Year 9 for example, describing a volcanic eruption. They acquire knowledge and understanding of processes such as weather and climate in Year 7, global population distributions in Year 8 and aspects of tourism in Year 9.

211. Standards at the age of 16 are also good. During the key stage they further develop their knowledge, understanding and skills through project work, fieldwork and exploration of geographical issues such as industrial decline in the coal industry.

212. The standard of work seen in the sixth form is broadly in line with national expectations. Individually students achieve a good understanding of complex geographical issues through data analysis, discussion, debate and written tasks.

213. Nearly all students achieve well. The do so by the age of 14 because geographical skills are very well taught. Between the ages of 11-16 nearly all take great care with the presentation of their work. Its quality reflects the high expectations of their teachers. There is strong evidence of information technology skills being used to extend geographical knowledge and understanding. Challenging tasks with clear guidance give pupils opportunities to use information, pictures and diagrams from Internet sources as evidence. For example, Year 8 students prepared an information leaflet on Niagara Falls using a mix of Internet pictures, information written from their perspective and hand drawn diagrams. Students and teachers know the individual targets and work towards them in lessons.

214. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection. Standards have risen at the age of 16 but the proportion of sixth form students obtaining the higher grades at GCE A-level has remained in line with the national average. The quality of teaching has improved with a higher proportion of good or better lessons. As a result, the quality of learning has improved from good to very good. The recent developments in the use of information technology are having a dramatic impact on students' learning skills because it has widened the range of opportunities by which they can gather information.

215. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. There is some non-specialist teaching of students between the ages of 11 and 14 but this has no adverse effect on standards. Teaching was very good or excellent in two out of every five lessons seen. Learning was very good in lessons for students up to the age of 14, and good in those for students up to the age of 16. It was also good in the sixth form. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject. They generally teach the basic skills of literacy and numeracy well and do so very well at Key Stage 3. Lessons are enriched with role-play and poetry, for example writing limericks about geographical events such as earthquakes. As a result nearly all students learn well, make very good progress and achieve very well by the age of 14 because they systematically built up their subject vocabulary and skills in reading graphs. They achieve well beyond the age of 14 and in the sixth form.

216. Teachers' classroom organisation is good and the students are managed very well. The expectation is that they will work hard and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Teachers use a wide range of methods. For example, a lower ability group watched a video clip of the effects of an earthquake followed by a group activity to sort the causes, effects and human responses to an earthquake in Japan. As a result their interest was engaged and they maintained a good level of concentration. Teachers use the school grounds to very good effect: students measure the impact of buildings on micro-climates; they study river formation as flood water enlarges a gully and creates a delta.

217. Students with special educational needs are well taught. Support staff work in partnership with geography teachers in some lessons. They design appropriate worksheets to complement the existing good range of resources available. All students know the quality and quantities of work expected and stay motivated and on task during lessons. The excellent lessons have a range of methods supported by a mix of appropriate resources, practical activities and written tasks.

218. Leadership and management are good. The subject is given clear educational direction by the head of department working closely with a team of five teachers, only three of whom are subject specialists. The monitoring of teaching is good within the department with a policy of focused observations twice yearly.

HISTORY

219. Standards on entry are now broadly average. By the ages of 14 and 16 and in the sixth form standards are generally satisfactory.

220. In the 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14 the proportion of students who reached the national expectation, level 5, or above was broadly in line with the national average. The boys and the girls reached similar standards. However, the boys' results were above the average for their age group nationally.

221. In the 2000 GCSE examination at the age of 16 approximately two-fifths of the students obtained grades A*-C, a proportion below the national average and lower than the broadly average results obtained in the previous three years. The boys achieved better results than the girls. Nearly all the students obtained a grade in the range A*-G, a proportion broadly in line with the national average.

222. A small number of students took this subject at GCE A-level in 2000. Results were below the national average. Achievement is generally satisfactory in lessons at the ages of 14 and 16 and in the sixth form.

223. Standards in students work at the age of 14 are satisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory and students make sound progress. Most have a satisfactory understanding of historical periods. They can refer to specific dates such as 1066 and broader periods of time such as the reign of the Stuarts. Their knowledge of major events such as the Field of the Cloth of Gold and the Spanish Armada are secure but they are less certain of theories as to why Elizabeth I feared Mary Queen of Scots and her alliance with the French. Higher attaining students can explain changes, such as the social consequences of the First World War with confidence. They have a clearer understanding about the bias that creeps into historical evidence and how to discount the various misrepresentations of events. The lower attaining students struggle to extend their writing beyond the description of events. They have

a tendency to list things and this needs to be challenged. While higher attaining students can evaluate their evidence, those of average attainment state reasons for change and list causes. For some the ability to develop ideas in writing has improved since the last inspection. Writing on recent events in Northern Ireland was mature and carried conviction.

224. Standards in students' work at the age of 16 are satisfactory. Most students in Year 11 have a sound base of knowledge but in lessons they do not voice their opinions frequently enough and their writing is too descriptive. Their achievements are generally satisfactory. Higher attaining students can review the reliability of evidence. Most can undertake local studies or research topics with reasonable skill and confidence. The lower attaining students produce narratives many of which rely upon copied evidence. However, local studies in Darlington were carefully and imaginatively written.

225. Standards are broadly satisfactory in the sixth form. Most students achieve a grade in the range A-E at GCE A-level but the highest grades are rarely gained. The overall performance at GCE A-level over time has been below average. Many do not start the course with the highest grades at GCSE. Their achievement at GCE A-level is satisfactory. The majority of students generally show a satisfactory knowledge of important events and personalities within the period studied and a satisfactory understanding of important historical concepts. Many do try to extend their writing, much of which is of satisfactory quality. The majority of their work is carefully presented. Students make good use of information technology to improve the quality of their presentations.

226. Progress in lessons, by the ages of 14 and 16 as well as in the sixth form, is satisfactory. As a result, students' achievement is satisfactory when compared with the standards they had reached by the start of each key stage. By the age of 14, nearly all of them develop their use of historical terms. By the age of 16, they make appropriate references to sources of information, and the organisation of written work improves further in the sixth form. Teachers place an emphasis on skill development in promoting chronological awareness. This starts in Year 7 and works its way through to Year 13. In Year 8 students wrestle with the puzzle of why events change and they sharpen their enquiry skills in Year 9. The lower attaining students in Years 7 and 8 struggle to display their knowledge even though they are fully engaged in their work. The problem is whether they are writing their own work or directly copying from a textbook. The standard of spelling, punctuation and understanding of grammar is just satisfactory.

227. Teachers work well with classroom support assistants at both key stages to support the satisfactory progress of students with special educational needs. The main reason why most make satisfactory progress by the age of 16 is because they show a good level of interest in their work. Information is well presented by the teacher in a way that engages and sustains their attention. Most learn to consider historical questions carefully and higher attaining students can develop and test a few simple hypotheses and undertake investigations. Study skills are increasingly taught and developed as students work towards their GCSE examination in Year 11. As a result, their notes are better organised and this improves the quality of their learning. Some extended writing is planned but it remains the Achilles' heel of many.

228. Achievement is satisfactory in the sixth form. In the past, Year 12 students have had difficulty adjusting to the higher demands of the GCE A-level course, particularly the requirement to write analytically. In Year 13 most students can play an active part in

informed discussion, applying their historical knowledge in order to develop hypotheses. Their weakness is in structured essay writing. Too few read with purpose beyond the notes supplied by their teacher. The challenging range of texts they should be consulting is ignored. The less determined students are passive and their main activities are restricted to listening and uncritical note making.

229. The general quality of teaching is good. It is good in lessons for students between the ages of 14 and 16 and in the sixth form. It is satisfactory in lessons for students up to the age of 14. Students learn well. They gain a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of life in the past because teachers' knowledge is good and used effectively, for example, when conveying the way of life in medieval England to Year 7 students. This arouses their interest and curiosity and encourages them to use their imagination and express their feelings. Teaching is more effective with the higher attaining students between the ages of 11 and 14. Generally, teaching has a clear purpose. Good use is made of a range of different methods and there was a good balance in Years 8 and 9 of lively exposition and challenging tasks.

230. Students are well taught between the ages of 14 and 16. Good subject knowledge enables teachers to present clear explanations. This helps many students to gain a satisfactory understanding of both events and issues and why they happened. Expectations are high and the few instances of inattention are challenged. Weaknesses in a few lessons centre on the insufficient attention given to the collection of historical evidence by the students themselves.

231. In the sixth form the quality of teaching is good. Objectives are stated clearly and lessons are conducted with a sense of purpose to meet examination requirements explicitly. Explanations are skilful and knowledgeable. A particular strength of the teaching is the way in which tasks are carefully planned to develop understanding and exercise historical skills. There is appropriate emphasis on strengthening the students' examination technique. The marking of work is good. Teachers make detailed comments and set targets. Examples were seen of students improving their work by meeting the targets set.

232. Leadership and management are good. Improvement generally since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and inquiry skills have been improved through better schemes of work. Assessments are now more closely linked to the levels of the National Curriculum at the age of 14 and to the public examination requirements at the age of 16 and in the sixth form.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

233. Standards in information technology are currently unsatisfactory but improving rapidly. In the 2000 statutory teacher assessments one third of the students at the age of 14 reached the national expectation, level 5 or above. Twice as many as this achieved level 5 nationally. The girls' results were slightly better than the boys'. Standards are unsatisfactory because, until this year, provision for students between the ages of 11 and 14 had been inadequate and they had too few opportunities to learn the full range of IT skills. Departmental documents outlining policy for teaching and learning were unsatisfactory. They are now being developed. The introduction, this year, of a short GCSE course in Year 10 for all students and a key skills course for all sixth form students in Year 12 are also helping to raise standards.

234. Because of the previously insufficient time for the teaching of this subject, achievement is currently unsatisfactory between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the

sixth form. However, following several recent improvements, standards of achievement in Year 7 are getting better and are now satisfactory. At the age of 16 the standard of work is still unsatisfactory. Tasks are not yet sufficiently challenging to raise standards to meet national expectations. Some students use software applications with confidence and thoughtfulness. Other students lack the ability to be critical of the content of their work.

235. Teaching is satisfactory in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the sixth form. Teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subject. Planning in lessons seen was effective and lesson objectives clear but thinly documented. The content of lessons was appropriate to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum programmes of study. However, expectations need to be raised if teachers wish to match national expectations. The tasks set for students between the ages of 14 and 16 are too simplistic and are presented with insufficient pace to challenge or inspire. The students are generally very well managed and information technology resources effectively used to support learning. On the one occasion when teaching was very poor there was a lack of organisation, poor use of time and inappropriate content to the lesson. As a result the students learned very little

236. At all key stages learning is generally satisfactory. Nearly all students enjoy lessons and readily attempt all tasks set. They are able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of information technology concepts and show ability to use information technology skills with varying degrees of confidence. Presentation skills are good and pupils are beginning to make good use of the Internet to support learning. Many seek the opportunity to practice and develop their information technology skills beyond their timetabled lessons.

237. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the college acquired specialist status, computer resources have been improved and there is now a good ratio of computers to students. This is the major area of improvement since the previous inspection. This, in turn, has led to another major improvement as computers are being used with increasing effectiveness throughout the curriculum to support learning. Teachers also have access to scanners, digital cameras, CAD/CAM equipment and MIDI interfaces to improve further the quality of teaching and learning. However, there are still no resources to support the measurement and control aspects of information technology. There are no arrangements currently to confirm the overall breadth, balance and continuity of provision of information technology across the curriculum.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

238. Most students have no knowledge of a modern foreign language when they enter the college. Their literacy standards are generally satisfactory and have risen recently. French and German are taught throughout the school. Standards are generally satisfactory but unsatisfactory at the age of 16.

239. In the 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14, standards were broadly in line with the national average. Almost three-quarters of the students reached the national expectation, level 4, or better. Almost half exceeded it. The proportion of the girls achieving the national expectation or better was higher than the proportion of boys; the proportion of girls achieving the higher levels was well above that of boys.

240. In the 2000 GCSE examination at the age of 16, standards in French were well below the national average for grades A* - C. One in ten boys and fewer than one in four girls obtained a higher grade in the range A*-C. The proportion achieving the highest

grades at GCSE was well below the national average. All students obtained grades A* - G. During the last three years attainment in GCSE has remained consistently well below national averages for both boys and girls. In the last three years boys and girls have attained lower GCSE levels in French than in most other subjects in the school. Standards in French have been consistently well below average in recent years and are not high enough at the end of Key Stage 4.

241. In the 2000 GCSE examination, standards in German were below the national average for grades A* - C. One third of the boys and two-fifths of the girls obtained grades in this range. Nearly half of the candidates achieved grades A*-C nationally. The proportion achieving the highest grades at GCSE was well below national averages. All achieved grades A* - G. Attainment in German has been consistently well below the national average for both boys and girls in recent years. The standards of both the boys and the girls improved slightly in 1999 in German to an average level when compared with other subjects. Standards in German show an improvement overall in 2000 but remain unsatisfactory.

242. The numbers of students taking French or German at GCE A-level are too small to make reliable national comparisons. Students generally achieve a grade commensurate with average progress based on their previous GCSE standard.

243. Nearly all students make good progress and achieve well at the age of 14. Achievement is unsatisfactory at the age of 16 and many pupils make insufficient progress. The achievements of the small number of students who take GCE A-level courses in a modern foreign language are generally satisfactory.

244. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm the national test results at the age of 14, the GCSE results at the age of 16 and the GCE A-level results in the sixth form. At the age of 14 standards are satisfactory. Most students begin to understand the way the foreign language works grammatically. For example, in a Year 9 German class which consisted of a high proportion of students with special educational needs, most selected the appropriate word order when constructing sentences about the weather using ‘wenn’. At the age of 16 standards are unsatisfactory. Students are less confident about the way the foreign language is constructed. They are less fluent in the spoken language and their paragraphs, written without support, tend to be linguistically simple and contain errors that often prevent accurate communication of what they want to say.

245. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. In order to achieve more highly, students should, between the ages of 11 and 14, increase their readiness to take part in longer spoken exchanges; between the ages of 14 and 16 they should improve their oral fluency and the accuracy and variety of what they write.

246. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Since the last inspection the department has taken a number of steps to improve standards. Guidance is now available about learning to read in the foreign language, dictionary skills are better taught and schemes of work have been revised to include grammatical progression. Taped assignments are used to reinforce speaking skills that were a previously identified weakness in learning. Use of the foreign language in the classroom has been extended: the department is aiming to make its use more consistent. Responsibilities for different aspects of the department's work are now clearly defined and result in good teamwork committed to further improvement. These measures have contributed significantly to the improvement in standards by the age of 14; they have not yet had a similar impact on standards at the age of 16. The issue of two foreign languages is not satisfactorily resolved. Linguistic experiences for higher attaining students between the ages of 14 and 16 remain insufficiently broad and challenging.

247. Overall, the quality of teaching seen is satisfactory. Between the ages of 11 and 14 and in the sixth form students are well taught. In lessons seen two-thirds of the teaching was good or better. A greater proportion of the better teaching was in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 14. Only one sixth form lesson was observed because of timetabling arrangements during the inspection and the severe weather conditions that resulted in students not attending school for two days.

248. Lessons which lead to good progress are characterised by a range of activities carried out in the foreign language at a good pace that present challenging tasks to pupils, concluding with a short session at the end of the lesson to review the learning objectives. For example, a Year 7 mixed ability German class started with brisk oral revision of common phrases, then moved on to further challenging oral and written work on sentences to develop the practised model. German was used for almost the whole lesson; the students' active involvement, the varied activities, some of which were open-ended and of increasing difficulty, led to high levels of motivation and good linguistic progress in listening, speaking and writing. A short review session at the end confirmed students' understanding and developing skills.

249. Leadership and management are good. Systems are now in place to monitor and evaluate the standards achieved by pupils and to evaluate the quality of teaching. Standards between the ages of 11 and 14 are rising and a series of actions have been taken to support this improvement. An 'extension' week was organised for students between the ages of 14 and 16, incorporating an industry-related visit to Lille. An exchange visit to France is now organised in addition to the one to Germany, each in alternate years, for students between the ages of 14 and 16. A greater emphasis is placed on the teaching of grammar. Higher attaining students have been involved in constructing the departmental web-site. Despite these improvements, work remains insufficiently challenging for some students between the ages of 14 and 16 and very few choose to study two modern foreign languages beyond the age of 14.

MUSIC

250. Standards in music are generally good. They are satisfactory at the age of 14 and good at the age of 16 and in the sixth form. Approximately three-quarters of the students reached the national expectation in the 2000 statutory teacher assessments, a proportion just above the national average. In the 2000 GCSE examination, nearly two-thirds of students obtained grades A*-C, a proportion just below the national average. The girls' reach higher standards than the boys. Standards in Year 12 are high in relation to the length of time spent on the new course.

251. Nearly all students enter the school with a limited range of experience in music, and very few have instrumental lessons. However, as a result of very good specialist teaching they enjoy music lessons, are keen to succeed and achieve well. Because teachers have carefully considered how to develop students' musical abilities, and encourage them to use their voices readily, they make good progress in internalising sound and relating this to different types of notation, including staff notation. In a Year 8 composing lesson, higher attaining students who were confident in using their voices, created a Rock and Roll melody with a good sense of style. Those in Year 9 developed original ideas well. Their "Blues" arrangements incorporated all the important characteristic features, including stylish improvisation. However the progress of middle and lower attaining students is restricted because of insufficient access to classroom instruments, particularly tuned percussion. They also do not easily connect vocal sound to played pitch. Their critical listening skills and musical memory are insufficiently well developed and they have difficulty in inventing an original idea or devising a range of ways of modifying it. Their knowledge and understanding of subject vocabulary is unsatisfactory.

252. Students who choose to study the subject between the ages of 14 and 16 achieve very well. They make rapid progress because classes are smaller and they have access both to classroom instruments and to computer software. By the end of their first year of the course their completed work showed that they had worked individually and collaboratively to produce a concert-length version of a musical based on "Romeo and Juliet". Melodies were attractive and memorable, harmonies were interesting and appropriate and instrumentation was imaginatively used to create a variety of different moods. Particularly good use is made of computer technology to experiment and refine their ideas, and to store and retrieve them conveniently. However, their critical listening skills and general musical knowledge are insecure, continuing to reflect the lack of breadth of their early experience in music. Students with special educational needs make good progress in music between the ages of 11 and 16.

253. The small number of students in the Performing Arts course in the sixth form have made impressive progress in a short time, completing a song which was not only attractive and well structured but also successfully included the demanding challenge of free vocal improvisation.

254. Since the previous inspection the impact of the department on the life of the school has considerably increased, with greater numbers choosing to study the subject at GCSE and many more pupils becoming involved in extra-curricular activities. However, key issues from the previous inspection relating to poor resources, particularly the number of tuned percussion instruments, and insufficient provision for information technology have not been addressed and this has an adverse effect on standards at Key Stage 3.

255. The quality of teaching is good in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the sixth form. It was never less than satisfactory in lessons seen; most teaching was good and in one lesson it was very good. The most successful teaching was seen when students developed an idea from a short rhythmic motif. Good "brain-storming" techniques ensured that all students knew how to proceed, information was systematically presented, and they were able to work independently and imaginatively, using the available time purposefully. By careful observation of the activities, the teacher was able to intervene to help them overcome any obstacles to progress. Where there was insufficient preliminary explanation before students were set tasks, learning was less successful and they did not work with a clear sense of purpose.

256. Approximately 70 students who have instrumental and voice lessons make very good progress. However approximately only 50 learn to play instruments, a relatively small proportion of the college. Extra-curricular vocal work is very good. Girls, and an increasing number of boys, take part in a wide range of local, regional and national events and have travelled to Breisach in Germany to share music making with other students.

257. Leadership and management are good. Long-term planning is good; new schemes of work ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum in music although there is insufficient attention to the contribution of music to the college's provision for spiritual development. The monitoring of teaching has not yet been formalised and the links with other music departments beyond the college are limited. The assessment system is well-established but there need to be closer links to national criteria to define standards and more planned provision for gifted and talented pupils. The department's development plan is insufficiently closely linked to the school's development plan.

258. Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory. Frequently, two classes are taught at the same time and spaces for group work are too few, particularly when instrumental teachers are in college. The scattered nature of accommodation then used means less effective supervision, sometimes resulting in slower progress. Resources for music are poor. There are only three tuned percussion instruments, and the condition of several pieces of untuned percussion is deteriorating. Electronic keyboards are of good quality but there are only sufficient to equip one classroom. Although students between the ages of 14 and 16 are highly competent in using information technology, there are insufficient opportunities to develop these skills between the ages of 11 and 14.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

259. Standards in physical education are satisfactory and similar to those found in most schools nationally. In the 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14, approximately four-fifths of the students reached the national expectation, a proportion slightly above the national average. The girls reached standards similar to the boys. In the 2000 GCSE examination, all those entered gained a pass in the A*-G range, and over two fifths gained A*-C grades, just below the national average. Girls performed slightly better than boys. In the sixth form, GCE A-level results were slightly lower than those achieved by students in the previous three years which were above the national average. The very small number of candidates is insufficient to make a reliable comparison with standards nationally.

260. The standards of work seen during the inspection were satisfactory between the ages of 11 and 16 and in the sixth form. The majority are working at expected levels of skilled performance, knowledge and understanding. In Year 7, gymnastics students are able to perform a satisfactory range of movements, and a few higher attainers can perform cartwheels as well as backward and forward walkovers. In basketball they are able to pass and receive the ball at a satisfactory level and use these skills in games. In Year 8 hockey, many students are working at and above expected levels but in Year 9 most girls are working below expected levels in hockey, lacking control when dribbling and making little use of the reverse stick.

261. At the age of 16, the majority of GCSE students have a satisfactory knowledge of basic tactics in badminton but often are unable to make use of the correct strokes. In their theory work most have a satisfactory understanding of factors such as age and gender and how these affect participation in sport. Many Year 11 students have completed most of their work for their individual studies, making use of good information and communication technology skills to produce attractive and well-presented files.

262. Those students who do not take physical education as an examination subject generally achieve satisfactory standards but these vary between the different sports. There are high levels of performance in basketball, good standards in badminton and satisfactory standards in netball and soccer.

263. In the sixth form GCE A-level, students produce work of good quality, with comprehensive notes as they develop their understanding of the factors such as advanced physiology and society and its impact on physical education and sport. Students in Year 13 have a good understanding of cultural influences on sport and physical education in U.S.A, France, Australia and the U.K.

264. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have been maintained between the ages of 11 and 16. GCE A-level physical education has been successfully introduced with above average results in 1997,1998 and 1999. The positive attitudes evident during the last inspection remain a key feature of the many successful lessons seen.

265. The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory. In lessons seen, it ranged from unsatisfactory to very good in lessons for students between the ages of 11 and 16. It was good in the sixth form. All teachers have good subject knowledge and their clear explanations help students to learn skills and increase their knowledge. In GCSE theory lessons, the teachers' good subject knowledge and exam board requirements helped the students to understand what they needed to do to gain good marks in examinations. Lessons were usually well planned using a range of teaching styles that encouraged students to take responsibility and demonstrate self-discipline in developing their skills. The effective deployment of learning assistants supported the good progress made by students with special educational needs. Where teaching was unsatisfactory there was insufficient challenge in the work. Students in a Year 9 hockey, lesson were set tasks that were more appropriate for younger students. Good lessons provide the challenge of increasingly difficult tasks that are well matched to students needs. In a good Year 8 hockey lesson the students were set a sequence of new and more demanding tasks at a good pace as the lesson developed from simple practices to more complex games

266. In the majority of lessons, nearly all students learned new skills and refined existing ones because they were keen to get involved. Their eagerness to participate and

readiness to work hard supported good progress. They were enthusiastic and worked well at tasks set by teachers. This helped them consolidate their skills. Nearly all co-operated well with each other in dance and gymnastics in Year 7. This helped them develop good quality paired work. In dance they have made significant progress in choreographic skills and the understanding of technical language such as 'canon' and 'gesture'. Clear explanations in a Year 9 lesson helped the boys learn how to conserve energy in personal survival swimming. There was good progress in GCSE netball because students were encouraged to evaluate tactics, building on their good levels of understanding and the very good questioning by the teacher. The good subject knowledge of examination physical education courses is a significant factor contributing to the good results.

267. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The specialist skills of the teachers are well deployed. The planned provision is good including games, dance, gymnastics, athletics and swimming, although the poor condition of the extensive hard play areas and lack of stop netting mean that the students are unable to play tennis. Assessment is being well developed through the use of the Durham County scheme. Preparation for the introduction of National Curriculum 2000 is unsatisfactory and curriculum documentation currently includes no identification of key strands. There is a very good range of extra curricular activities for higher attaining students. There are very high standards in soccer, swimming, water polo, netball, athletics and cross-country.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

268. On entry to the college, in relation to their awareness of the practices of religions today and how believers apply the teachings of religions to their daily lives, students' standards are below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.

269. Standards are generally good. They are satisfactory at the age of 14 and good at the age of 16. GCSE results for the full course in 2000 were well above the national average. Three-quarters of the students gained grades A*-C compared with nearly three-fifths nationally, and all gained grades A*-G, a proportion above the national average. Although five times more girls than boys entered the examination, both groups performed to an equally high standard, with one in eight gaining the highest grades of A*-A. Results in the GCSE short course, completed in less time, are broadly in line with the national average. Approximately half of the students gained grades A*-C, seven out of eight gained grades A*-G, and one in eight gained A*-A. Boys did less well than girls although twice as many boys as girls entered.

270. In the sixth form, standards at GCE A-level are broadly in line with the national average for A-E grades, although only one student entered in 2000. Since the last inspection, good standards at the age of 16 have been maintained. The standards in the sixth form have improved.

271. In lessons and work seen, higher attaining students at the age of 14 achieve very good standards. Many can reflect in depth on the religious and moral issues being studied, while not balancing this with gains in the required knowledge and understanding of the similarities and difference between and within religions in Great Britain today. Some demonstrate very good understanding of particular contemporary religious and moral activities while considering them from different viewpoints, and are able to explain the circumstances where they occur. Most students organise and present their work well, using relevant examples to support a point of view.

272. The gap between higher and lower attaining students, the majority of whom are boys, increases significantly between the ages of 11 and 14. Lower attaining students understand the need to think about what influences people's values and beliefs and how they relate to others, but are unable to suggest how they might go about searching for and evaluating the range of answers to fundamental questions of belief.

273. In Year 7, there is too much work at a low level of literal description about religious events in the past. This is not required by the locally agreed syllabus. It limits the opportunity for higher attaining students to begin to use the skills necessary for understanding how religions are practised today, and for lower attaining students to experience religions today through artefacts and evidence they can see and touch. Between the ages of 11 and 14, students give their views on topics at too early a stage, without having acquired the necessary knowledge and understanding to identify the principal beliefs and practices in the religions studied. Many lower attaining students leave written work unfinished because it is insufficiently matched to their needs. Between the ages of 14 and 16, students' level of knowledge and understanding of the distinctive features of religions do not keep pace with their introduction to aspects of adult life which highlight diversity in the attitudes and behaviour of members of all faith communities.

274. There is sufficient curriculum time for students between the ages of 11 and 14. Between the ages of 14 and 16 curriculum time has increased to 4 per cent from 2.5 per cent for all. Good standards are being maintained and the introduction of the GCSE short course means more students, particularly boys, are able to gain a recognised qualification. In 2000 two-thirds of the year group entered. There is currently no taught religious education in the sixth form, either to continue general provision or to provide examination classes.

275. The quality of teaching for students between the ages of 11 and 16 is satisfactory. Up to the age of 14, teaching in four-fifths of lessons seen was satisfactory, with teaching in two fifths good and in a fifth very good. Teaching in a fifth of lessons was unsatisfactory. Between the ages of 14 and 16, teaching in all lessons was at least satisfactory, and in three-quarters of lessons seen it was good. Lesson objectives are nearly always shared with the students. Contemporary examples of religions are studied, and teaching is effective because students do not depend solely on the teacher for information and understanding. Topics are well related to the local and wider area, linking to students' experiences and encouraging them to contribute from their own experiences and to take responsibility for their learning.

276. The purpose of tasks in lessons and for homework is understood by nearly all students. Good use of open questions helps many students to gain a good level of understanding as well as knowledge by promoting a good level of discussion in lessons.

277. Students with special education needs make good progress in religious education, responding well to excellent management and relationships, where teachers check progress, probe ideas and praise progress. The standard of classroom display and the quality of resources, including the use of the Internet, now enhances their learning.

278. Where teaching does not make the aims of the lesson clear, students sometimes become confused and do not understand what is expected from them, completing tasks without appreciating how it links to previous work or prepares for what they are to do next.

279. The leadership and management of religious education is good. There is a comprehensive handbook, relevant policies and detailed schemes of work. Good educational direction is given through the use of display and there is a good range of contemporary resources that engage students' interest in the subject. The department makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the college and produces good results within the time constraints at Key Stage 4.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

Health and Social Care

280. Standards in GNVQ Health and Social Care are good. Although only a small number of students study this course in the sixth form, a significant proportion of them attain a merit or distinction. A GNVQ option is now offered at KS4 extending the learning opportunity to more pupils. There was insufficient evidence to evaluate standards.

281. The standard of teaching and learning is good although students need to manage their time more efficiently in order to meet the deadlines for coursework. Well-documented schemes of work exist for each course. Teachers have a good knowledge of the course requirements. Lessons are well planned and students' work demonstrates effective learning. The range of teaching methods used helps to stimulate learning, and students enjoy developing their ideas in lively class discussions. They are able to present their work using a range of skills including use of information and communication technology.

Media Studies

282. Standards are very good. Media studies has been integrated into English for students between the ages of 14 and 16. It is taught as a separate GCE A-level subject in the sixth form. By the age of 16, students learn to decode the various signs used by the media. There are well-planned opportunities for them to analyse intention and bias. Through their studies, they learn to recognise the ways that media industries function and interrelate. In the sixth form the media studies course is taught using a set of key concepts.

283. At the age of 16 GCSE results are very good. In 2000, more than half of the candidates gained A* to C grades. Over one in five pupils achieved an A or B grade. The standards achieved by the girls were higher than those achieved by the boys.

284. In work seen during the inspection, standards were very high. The practical element of the course encourages students to display a variety of production skills. For example, a Year 11 group produced newspaper front pages with alliterative headlines. These demonstrated high order graphical and word processing skills. Students in the sixth form are self-disciplined and ambitious.

285. The quality of teaching is very good. The teachers' excellent knowledge is used to develop a wide range of analytical, critical and presentational skills. Lessons are well structured. They proceed at a good pace. There is a good assessment procedure closely linked to individual targets. The management of media studies is very good. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

OTHER SIXTH FORM COURSES

Performance Studies

286. Performance studies is a new GCE A-level course in the sixth form. Its introduction has been welcomed and supported by both staff and students. The course began in September 2000. The three disciplines of dance, drama and music are studied both individually and as a unit. Students are assessed on performances, written coursework and an external examination.

287. Standards of attainment are high. Students are self-disciplined and ambitious. They work well together, showing a high level of commitment.

288. The quality of teaching is very good. The teachers' excellent knowledge is used to develop a wide range of analytical and performance skills. Their enthusiasm inspires the students, whose motivation and determination to succeed is strong. A range of teaching methods and learning styles is used to guide the students through the different assessment strands. The performance studies team provides a supportive framework to facilitate the enhancement of existing expertise and the acquisition of new skills. Lessons are well structured. They flow at a good pace. Good assessment procedures are being developed. Informal assessment by students takes place in lessons. The management of performance studies is very good. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Psychology

289. Psychology was not inspected in 1995. Results in the GCE A-level examinations have been below average for the last three years and lower than in other sixth form subjects. However the number of students taking the course is too small to give real significance to this comparison. The girls do better than the boys.

290. Standards are satisfactory in Year 12 and slightly better in Year 13. Students are able to speak fluently but their writing is variable. The major problems are spelling and grammar. The higher attaining students have a good command of a wide vocabulary and write clearly. The factor holding back achievement is the students' unwillingness to take some responsibility for their own learning. They rely on their teacher because they have not acquired the skills needed to organise their own work, in particular the ability to plan, prioritise and evaluate their own learning. Higher attaining students show a good degree of interest and are able to link what they are doing to what they have learnt previously. Their computer skills are good.

291. Progress is satisfactory. Students are well motivated and listen carefully to the good guidance that is given about answering examination questions successfully. Most make gains in learning because they are able to look at the material they are studying from a range of angles. This helps them to understand and remember it. Most students also take opportunities to apply the theories they have just learnt.

292. The teaching of psychology is good. Explanations are clear and help students to understand the links between theory and practice. Good use of discussion encourages many students to develop their own views. A particular strength is the effective use of plain English to explain the frequently complex, technical vocabulary. As a result the students gain a good grasp of the issues without over simplifying the issues. This they did well in a lesson on depression.

Sociology

293. Results in the GCE A-level examinations have been below average over the last three years and lower than in other subjects in the sixth form. The numbers studying the subject are small, limiting the validity of national comparisons and comparisons with other subjects at the college. Standards in work seen were broadly satisfactory.

294. Most students develop a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of sociological theories and methods. They frequently struggle to present ideas, explanations and arguments in a coherent and logical manner because their essay skills are weak. They give insufficient attention to the clarity of their expression, the structure of their arguments and the details of presentation, grammar and spelling.

295. Some students can write clearly and directly about the comparative and historical examples from other societies. The majority show a knowledge of sociological theory that includes the relationship of theory to methods of enquiry and to published research. Their understanding of comparative and historical material reflects national, regional and cultural diversity within British society.

296. Most make satisfactory progress in lessons and during the course. They are aware that sociology is a reasoned and rigorous study of social life, structure and process. Higher attaining students can show clearly their understanding of the link between theory and sociological method. They can express this well in writing.

297. The quality of teaching is good. The teacher has a good knowledge of sociology, effectively questions students to assess their understanding and has high expectations. There are constructive relationships in class and most students are actively involved in learning. The missing factor is a literacy standard. Students are required to instigate, design investigations and demonstrate the ability to identify facts, opinions and value judgements. The teacher gives guidance and support, helping students to structure essays, practise writing skills and spell accurately.

298. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The pace of work is better. Schemes of work are also better and more students are able to use computers both to word-process their work and retrieve data.