

INSPECTION REPORT

ESTOVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Plymouth

LEA area: Plymouth

Unique reference number: 113543

Headteacher: Mr Graham Browne

Reporting inspector: Dr R G Wallace
1050

Dates of inspection: 14th-18th October 2002

Inspection number: 249569

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Miller Way
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Plymouth

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Paul Davies

Date of previous inspection: 13th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1050	Dr R G Wallace	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? Results and the pupils' achievements Teaching Leadership and management Improvement
14066	Mrs G Hoggard	Lay inspector		Attitudes, values and personal development How the school cares for pupils Partnership with parents
23588	Mrs C Ajitsingh	Team inspector	English 11-16	
12607	Mr S Relf	Team inspector	Mathematics	
15079	Mr A Boys	Team inspector	Science	
18261	Mr A Hill	Team inspector	Art and design	Enhanced speech and language unit
32089	Mrs A Likeman	Team inspector	Design and technology	
23324	Mrs S Greenland	Team inspector	Geography	
1795	Mrs J Sanderson	Team inspector	History 11-16; English 16-18	
8052	Mr K McKenzie	Team inspector	Information & communication technology	
12408	Mr A Frith	Team inspector	Modern languages	
23308	Mr J Morrell	Team inspector	Music; equal opportunities	Curriculum
25748	Mr R Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education	
24713	Mrs J Pestridge	Team inspector	Religious education; citizenship	
23268	Mr K Corrigan	Team inspector	Special educational needs; Business studies 16-18	
22513	Mr J Morey	Team inspector	Media studies 16-18	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

This community college is larger than most secondary schools, with 1,202 pupils (including 175 in the sixth form), and attracts pupils from a wide area. The pupils have a wide range of attainment, but the overall attainment of pupils admitted is below average because there are selective schools in the city. There are fewer pupils with special educational needs than usual, but an average number of those with statements of special educational needs. The college has a unit for enhanced speech and language; the pupils are entirely integrated into classes. Free school meals entitlement is similar to the national average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minorities and none requiring support to learn English. The college is both a community and an arts college.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

Estover is a good and effective college that continues to improve under strong and very able leadership. The curriculum provides wide opportunities to meet the needs of all pupils and these are extended by the community aspect of the college. Examination results are improving and standards of work match those of similar schools. A quarter of teaching is very good or excellent with most of the rest good or satisfactory, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7-9. Behaviour in the college is good. The college gives good value for money.

What the college does well

- The 2002 test and examination results were an improvement on previous years, continuing an upward trend.
- GCSE results in English literature, art, geography and religious education, with large entries, are above the national average. Those for history, design and technology, drama and music match those of non-selective schools.
- There is a high proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching in Years 10-13.
- The college benefits from very strong and effective leadership by the principal, well supported by governors, senior management and staff.
- The pupils behave well and relationships in the college are good.
- The college assesses its pupils' work well and sets targets for improvement as the basis for raising standards.
- The community aspect of the college, its Arts College status and its sixth form consortium with other schools all widen the pupils' opportunities. The college serves its community well.

What could be improved

- Standards of literacy at Key Stage 3 need to be improved.
- Standards and teaching in modern languages and music are unsatisfactory.
- Whilst standards in information and communication technology (ICT) lessons are good, there is insufficient use of ICT in subjects and no teaching of ICT skills in Year 8.
- School policies and practices in relation to homework, marking, monitoring pupils' planners and the use of tutorial time are not implemented consistently by all staff.

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

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in January 1997 and has improved substantially since then. It is now popular, morale is high and the college works well with the local community. Gaining Arts College status in the last four years has significantly enriched the pupils' experiences. It has by its own efforts attracted huge additional funding to increase the opportunities that it offers to its pupils and other learners in the community. It has successfully tackled the faults noted in the previous report. Its strong management has the vigour, understanding and skills to ensure continuing improvement.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	D	D	C	B
A Levels/AS Levels	N/A	E	N/A	

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

Test and examination results are adversely affected by the impact of the city's grammar schools. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 (Key Stage 3 SATs) the results were higher in 2002 than in the previous year, with results in mathematics and science close to the national average, although those in English remained below. The college's GCSE results improved significantly in 2002, with an increase of 13 percentage points in the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades in five or more subjects. There were considerable improvements in the three core subjects, although results in English were below average and they were well below average in mathematics and science. In English literature, art, geography and religious education the pupils achieved results that were above the national average, with the pupils making considerable progress from previous levels. As in previous years, results in French and Spanish were poor. When compared with similar schools (non-selective schools whose pupils have a similar entitlement to free school meals) the college's results in 2001 were average. The 2002 comparison is not yet available to reflect the big increase in the college's results. At GCE A Level in 2002 93% of results were passes and 37% were at the highest A-B grades. Results in the Advanced VCE (Vocational Certificate of Education) were similar with all students passing and 30% achieving A-B grades.

The trend in results was in line with that achieved nationally until 2001, with a spurt at the college in 2002. The targets set in agreement with the local authority for Key Stage 3 SATs were achieved in science, just missed in mathematics but badly missed in English in 2002. At GCSE the school exceeded its targets. Parents express satisfaction with their children's achievement at the college.

Work seen during the inspection in Years 7-11 was in line with the most recent results and below average, with higher attainment in geography, mathematics, religious education and art in the older years and in taught GCSE ICT classes throughout the school. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, who are supported well, make good progress in lessons. This progress is not sustained over longer periods because of inadequate retention of knowledge by many pupils and continuing weaknesses in literacy. There is no significant difference in the standards of boys and girls. In the sixth form, most students make good progress as a result of good teaching. Some high level work is being done in English literature and art.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Pupils have good attitudes and wish to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good, although learning in some of the younger classes is reduced by unsatisfactory behaviour.

Personal development and relationships	The college is friendly and inclusive. Most pupils develop well personally and relationships are good.
Attendance	The attendance rate is improving but is below the national average.

The college has already made considerable efforts to improve attendance, which are bearing fruit slowly. Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	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 teaching overall is good. The very good and excellent teaching in about a quarter of lessons was mostly from Year 10 upwards. The best teaching was seen in English (Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form), art, design technology, geography, physical education and religious education. Teaching in English is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. In science it is satisfactory at both stages. There are weaknesses in keeping discipline in Years 7-9 in some mathematics and music classes. The modern language teachers do not demand from the pupils the standards of which they are capable. The teaching of literacy does not sufficiently emphasise the development of listening, and most pupils need a wider vocabulary to improve their speaking skills; these aspects are not sufficiently promoted by all teachers. Number skills are not widely taught outside mathematics lessons. ICT is taught well in discrete lessons but skills are not being systematically developed in Year 8 or used in several subjects, although art and music are developing them well.

Lesson planning generally ensures that pupils of different levels of attainment make progress. Those with special educational needs are well taught by various methods. Higher-attaining pupils have opportunities to make rapid progress with additional work in accelerated classes. Most pupils learn well in a large majority of lessons. Their retention of knowledge from their most recent lessons is good but is not sustained over longer periods. Homework, using textbooks of good quality and other demanding sources, is not making a sufficient contribution to the pupils' sustained progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A satisfactory curriculum is provided for the main school, with strengths in art and physical education. The sixth form curriculum is good with a variety of routes by which the students can succeed.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good provision is made for these pupils, with a variety of approaches that enable them to make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good provision is made for the pupils' moral, social and spiritual development. Their cultural development is satisfactory; the impact of its strong features (art, percussion, dance and drama) is reduced by the insufficient attention given to diversity in a multicultural society.
How well the school cares	This supportive, caring and inclusive college guides and monitors the

for its pupils	academic progress and personal development of its pupils well.
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There is a very constructive partnership with parents, who are pleased at the way the college works with them to promote their children's progress and welfare. There is some imbalance in the allocation of time to subjects in Years 7-9, with insufficient time for geography, history and religious education.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The college is strongly and very ably led by its principal, well supported by an effective senior team and other staff and by the governors.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors know the school and hold it to account, particularly in relation to academic standards.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Data analysis as the basis for self-evaluation is well developed in the college and used to ensure accountability.
The strategic use of resources	The use of resources is well planned. The acquisition of additional resources is a strong feature of this enterprising and imaginative college.

The college has sufficient resources to provide a good education for its pupils. Although some aspects could be improved, the accommodation is very good overall and, for the performing arts, excellent. There are sufficient teachers, administrative and other staff. Resources for learning are generally satisfactory. The college has shrewd and expert methods to ensure that it achieves good value for money when purchasing goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school and make good progress. • Teaching and behaviour are good. • Expectations are high. • Out-of-school opportunities are good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small minority of parents felt that they did not know enough about their child's progress. • There were criticisms from about one in five parents about homework.

Inspectors endorse the generally favourable views of parents, but did find some unsatisfactory teaching in the younger years. They do not endorse the concerns about the quality of reporting to parents, but do share the concern of parents that homework is not always used effectively.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

ESTOVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 175 students in the sixth form, which is housed in a compact suite of rooms and is increasing in size. About 70% of students in Year 11 continue their studies into Year 12. The college provides a very wide range of courses, including key skills. Its participation in a consortium of three schools enables it to meet the needs of its students.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Most students in subjects achieve at least their targets based on GCSE results and many exceed them. In 2002, 37% of results at GCE A Level were at the highest levels, A-B, and were a significant improvement on the previous year. Teaching in the sixth form is good with much that is very good or excellent. The sixth form is well led with a good range of courses to meet the students' varied needs and a successful emphasis on raising standards. It is cost effective.

Strengths

- Students achieve well in a majority of subjects in GCE A/AS Level, VCE and GNVQ examinations, making good progress from their GCSE results.
- Standards are high in art and English literature as a result of very good and excellent teaching.
- The consortium arrangements with two other schools widen opportunities for Estover students and provide classes that are educationally and financially viable.
- The leadership of the sixth form is strong; it reflects the entire college's commitment to raising standards and promotes good relations between staff and students, who value the support of their teachers.

What could be improved

- Some students would benefit from earlier counselling about the suitability of their chosen courses and the alternatives on offer.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Small numbers of A Level students have all passed in the last two years, with one achieving an A grade in 2002. Teaching is satisfactory, but progress is slow in the present Year 13 group.
Biology	Satisfactory. Only very small numbers of students have taken the A and AS examinations, with mixed results. Good teaching is resulting in satisfactory work and progress by current students.
Design and technology	Satisfactory. Very good teaching is enabling current students to reach satisfactory standards. Past entries for examinations have been too small to allow national comparisons.

Business education	Satisfactory. A Level results for 2002 showed significant improvement on previous years, and current students have a positive attitude to the subject.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Physical education	Good. General provision and standards are high. The first A Level candidates will be presented in 2003; they are making good progress.
Art and design	Very good. Good, often excellent teaching has enabled the students in most recent years to achieve above average results.
Media studies	Satisfactory. The small number of students in 2002 all passed, but with the lower grades. The oral skills of the students are unsatisfactory and the teaching is not developing these.
Geography	Good. In 2002 all eight students passed at A Level, with two achieving A-B grades. Teaching and learning are good.
English	Good. Results at A Level have been below average (with some in 2002 still subject to appeal). Current teaching is good overall with some that is excellent. Current students are making good progress.

Lessons from other courses were also seen and all were satisfactory or better. Lessons in key skills, where young employees with a variety of backgrounds indicated the key skills that they used at work, and general studies, where the nature of knowledge, opinion and faith were explored, were effective and helpful to the students.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The students receive good guidance and are well supported, although some do continue on courses longer than they should.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is well led, with an emphasis on raising standards and nurturing the students' abilities. It is open and inclusive, giving all students chances to succeed.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their courses are suited to their needs. • Course advice and induction are good. • Teaching is good and teachers are readily available to provide help when needed. • The college is responsive to students' views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small minority considered that their work was not assessed in a way that enabled them to improve. • Advice on post-college routes was considered unsatisfactory by about one in five students.

The students' views are corroborated by the inspection.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Test and examination results at the college are affected by the impact of the city grammar schools.
2. Results in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 (Key Stage 3 Standard Assessment Tests) in 2002 were higher than in 2001, and were close to the national average. The results in mathematics and science were close to the national average in 2002, although those in English were below. The mathematics and science results matched or were close to the targets agreed with the local education authority, but those for English remained well below the agreed target. The college's results have been going up at the same rate as the national results and in 2002 the gap between the college and the national results was narrower than previously.
3. In the GCSE examinations in 2002 there was a big increase to 42% in the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more subjects, although these results were still below average. The overall results, taking all pupils into account, also improved considerably and were close to the national average. There were differences in the results of subjects. In spite of big improvements in the three core subjects of English language, mathematics and science, results in English language were below average and in mathematics and science were well below average. Results in art were outstandingly good, with 80% of a very large entry achieving the higher grades A*-C. Pupils did well in geography, achieving more of the higher grades than the national average. Results in religious education were also very good with three-quarters of those entered for the full course achieving the higher grades and half those taking the short GCSE course achieving the same. Pupils entered for French, Spanish and business studies did poorly. Of the 18 candidates in GNVQ at Intermediate Level 14 passed, five of those with merit.
4. The latest available analysis (that for 2001) of how the pupils achieved in the different subjects at GCSE, compared with their performance in the average of all their other subjects, shows that art, English literature, geography, history and religious education were the most effective subjects in helping their pupils to succeed. The subjects where the pupils did significantly less well than they did in the average of all the other subjects that they studied were English language, mathematics, business education, French, Spanish and physical education.
5. The college's results have been improving in recent years. Until 2001 this improvement was taking place only at the same rate as the national upward trend in results. The sharp improvement in 2002 was at a considerably more rapid rate than nationally. These results also represented well above average progress for the pupils from their earlier Year 9 test results.
6. The difference in standards achieved by boys and girls is mostly similar to that found nationally, despite the fact that there are more places for boys than for girls at selective grammar schools in the city. In 2002 the college reached the target for Key Stage 3 SATs that it had agreed with the local education authority in science, just missed the target for mathematics, but was well short of the target for English. At GCSE the school exceeded its targets. There is a high level of satisfaction amongst parents with the standards that their children reach and the progress that they make, including pupils who arrived lacking confidence and previous academic success but have gone on to achieve good examination results.
7. The overall standards being reached by the pupils at present are below the national average, in line with the most recent examination results. The unsatisfactory standards of literacy at Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) are an important obstacle to raising standards. There are some subjects that are enabling the pupils to match or exceed the national average. Standards are generally high in physical education. The above-average GCSE results in geography and religious education and average results in history are the more remarkable because of the inadequate time given to these

subjects at Key Stage 3. Standards in art are high overall and in some groups exceptional. Standards in modern languages are low and this inspection identifies the weaknesses that the senior managers must tackle before improvement can take place. Insufficient attention is given in subjects to the development and use of number skills. Coupled with some weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics, this is an obstacle to further improvement in numeracy. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are average, reflecting the good teaching in most discrete lessons.

8. Most pupils make at least satisfactory progress in a large majority of lessons in Years 7-9 and the pace of learning in the majority of lessons from Year 10 upwards is good. The school needs to consider why this good rate of progress is not sustained over a longer period and realised in better test and examination results. The inspection identifies these important factors that are limiting the rate at which test and examination results are improving: writing skills are too low; there is insufficient time for the humanities subjects, where writing skills could be developed, in Years 7-9; homework is not sufficiently used to consolidate learning; in several subjects there is an over-reliance by pupils on teachers, with pupils given insufficient opportunities to learn independently; the pupils' short-term recall is good but the long-term recall of many is weak, indicating the need for frequent revision and consolidation. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is monitored as part of the school's very effective departmental reviews. These pupils generally learn well and make good progress at the school.

Sixth form

9. 37% of the results in GCE A Level in 2002 were at the highest grades of A-B and 93% of all results were passes. Some A-B grades were achieved by students in most subjects. Some of the examination groups were quite small, although those in art, English literature and psychology were of reasonable size. The school provides A Level courses in a consortium with other schools and this ensures that the total number of pupils in some subjects is large enough to provide a satisfactory learning environment efficiently. Year 13 students also achieved a large number of AS Level passes, although 30% of results were ungraded, mostly in general studies. All Year 13 students entered for the Advanced VCE in art, health and social care and performing arts passed, with almost 30% achieving A-B grades.
10. The evidence on how pupils taking each subject performed, shows considerable variation at A Level in comparison with the average of their results in the other subjects that they took (the most recent figures are for 2001). In 2001 the large number of students entered for art did less well than in their other subjects; this was a temporary and abnormal phenomenon, rectified in 2002. The students taking English literature and geography did better overall than in their other subjects.
11. As in the lower part of the school, the students make good progress in lessons as a result of good teaching but it does not always result in high performance in examinations. The key skills course now followed by most students is contributing to the improvement of study skills and most students have good oral and listening skills. Nonetheless, many students go on to university courses and several parents have commented on how the college has enabled their sons and daughters to reach standards that seemed unlikely when they entered the college.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. The pupils have good attitudes. Most pupils are enthusiastic about their work. The college has maintained the standards found at the last inspection. Parents and carers appreciate the emphasis that the college places on personal development and almost all say that their children enjoy coming to college. Pupils attend extra-curricular activities, such as sport and music, enthusiastically.
13. The pupils' behaviour and attitudes in the classroom are usually good and often very good when strong teaching captures interest. For example, Year 10 pupils in a design technology lesson, designing and making clocks, worked well together and had a mature approach to their work; Year

11 pupils in an ICT lesson producing brochures concentrated well and tried hard. Behaviour and confidence improve significantly as the pupils progress through the college. Around the college behaviour is good overall. Large numbers of pupils move sensibly in and out of assembly, sometimes holding doors open for others and giving way on the stairs.

14. Relationships at all levels are mostly good. This is a friendly and inclusive college. For example, a Year 11 class with some potentially difficult pupils was won over to a serious consideration of the effects of alcohol by the very good rapport with their teacher, and a pleasant atmosphere ensued. The pupils themselves report that they have made good friends here. Those with special educational needs, and the very few who speak English as an additional language or come from ethnic minorities, are fully integrated into the life of the college. There is some evidence of petty bullying - a few pupils report low-level name-calling or fighting - but any incidents are quickly picked up by staff and effectively tackled.
15. In some subjects such as art and physical education, pupils are used to working in groups and pairs, which helps their learning and social development. In a Year 9 music class, the pupils worked well practising their performances, both with the teacher and unsupervised. Some pupils in the lower years, especially Year 7, are quite immature and find it hard to listen well to each other, although they are better at listening to teachers and other adults. The college is working well to develop better habits in these newly-arrived pupils.
16. The pupils have opportunities to reflect on their learning and the impact of their actions on others. Teachers usually share learning objectives with the class and ask them to consider how far these have been met at the end of the lesson. Personal development is reinforced through the programme for personal, social and health education; for example, in a religious education lesson on Buddhism, Year 9 pupils began to consider how their lives were different from that of a Buddhist monk or nun. Pupils are willing to take on responsibilities such as raising money for charity or being prefects in Year 11, for which there is a competitive interview. The school council has made some sensible suggestions such as the provision of seats for assemblies. There are some good opportunities for more independent work, such as projects or Internet research. In physical education pupils willingly take up the challenge to plan, perform and evaluate their work.
17. Attendance is still lower than the national average, despite sterling efforts by the college; however, the rate has slowly improved over the last few years. Pupils are mostly punctual to college and to lessons. The number of exclusions is very low, reflecting the college's determination to persevere with those who do not immediately conform to its expectations. The range of support services, alternative curriculum and the work-related programme for disaffected pupils in Years 10 and 11 have helped significantly to keep them within the education system.

Sixth form

18. Attitudes to the college are very positive. The students report that they are largely on appropriate courses and are being challenged to do their best and study independently. An overwhelming majority feel that they are being treated as young adults and their views taken seriously. They participate well in a range of extra-curricular activities. A few felt they had not had the support they should have had, particularly on careers. The college accepts that this is the case, because of staff absence through illness. Their attitude to study is nearly always good and often very good: students want to be here, enjoy what they do and are sensible about daily routines. They do not abuse the dress code and treat the common room with respect; the students themselves recently decorated it. They are also active in seeking help or advice from tutors when needed. Although staff feel that it takes some students a good while to settle into sixth form work and study habits, most eventually do well. In lessons the students are attentive; for example, Year 12 students in a geography lesson looking at coastal processes had excellent attitudes and relationships; the lesson was characterised by humour and respect. In Year 13 students in design technology were looking at new technology for product development; they discussed and valued each other's work, demonstrating mature attitudes.

19. There is a proper emphasis on personal development. The elected sixth form committee runs the common room, kitchen and tuckshop. Other students support the committee on particular occasions such as the leavers' party, organising refreshments for parents' evenings, or running events in the lower school; for example, two girls confidently performed a song to a backing tape with a dance routine in a Year 9 assembly. The opportunity to meet and work with students from outside, including the other schools in the consortium, helps students to develop the capacity to work well with others in different ways. Outside speakers, assemblies and citizenship lessons all contribute to personal development.
20. Attendance is satisfactory and students are responsible about signing themselves in and out of college and managing their own private study periods.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The quality of teaching is good overall. A quarter of teaching seen was very good or excellent and most of the rest was good or satisfactory. Some of the best teaching, and no unsatisfactory teaching, was seen in English (Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form), art, design technology, geography, physical education and religious education. Almost a tenth of teaching was unsatisfactory and this was concentrated in modern languages, music and mathematics. In modern languages the chief weaknesses are the methods used and the lack of demand made on the pupils. In music and mathematics the main weakness is the failure to control some pupils who do not misbehave when in the classes of other teachers. The work of classroom assistants is satisfactory overall and sometimes very effective in enabling pupils to make more progress than they would otherwise make. The quality of visiting music teachers varies, with some good teaching in percussion.
22. Learning support assistants are much valued by staff for their contribution when present in class, and the support provided by the specific computer programme used with the pupils is effective and well liked by them.
23. The best teaching challenged the pupils. They knew that the work was difficult but it stimulated them, and the relationship that they had with the teachers made them want to succeed. This was the case in a Year 13 English lesson on imagery in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, where the students' good preparation and the teacher's questioning and pace led to very good learning. Similarly in a Year 9 art lesson on portraiture, the pupils rose to the demands made by the teacher as they explored various media and processes (incorporating digital photographs) undertook left-right brain exercises and built on their knowledge of Freud and Picasso. Most lessons are well planned, consolidate and build on the pupils' previous knowledge and maintain a brisk pace. In a lesson based on a field trip to Dartmoor, the teacher began a Year 10 geography lesson with a question and answer session that rehearsed all the pupils' existing knowledge and ensured that new understanding and knowledge were acquired at a fast pace, resulting in above-average standards of work. On many occasions the teachers are skilful at mixing good teaching of the class as a whole with guidance given to individual pupils. This was seen, for example, in a Year 10 GCSE dance lesson in the excellent, well-equipped new dance studio. Whilst not all group work by pupils is well handled, focused and productive, much of it is. In a very well-taught Year 11 lesson on alcohol, the teacher ensured that serious discussion was being maintained in all groups whilst challenging some of the views being expressed in particular groups. Some imaginative ways of recalling and consolidating previous learning at the start of lessons were seen, for example short and brisk quizzes and team competitions. Many were well done, and those that were effectively established a common and solid base of knowledge before the new learning began.

Sixth form

24. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall with a high proportion of very good and excellent teaching. Very good relationships between the teachers and students, based on a good balance between understanding and expectations, are an important factor in this. The students find their teachers very supportive, with help freely given when they encounter difficulties with their studies. Some high level work by students, resulting from very good and excellent teaching, was seen in English, art, design and technology, geography and physical education. The successful participation in sport in the sixth form is higher than in most schools and colleges and reflects the students' response to good teaching.
25. As in the main school, students in the sixth form with special educational needs are known to teachers and information on their particular learning needs is readily accessible. Support is available from the special needs department, although teachers are expected to provide a range of differentiated activities and support within their own subject areas. This they do well, and as a consequence the achievement of sixth form students with SEN meets expectations.

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

26. The college teaches all required subjects of the National Curriculum and offers an appropriate mix of experiences that meet the needs of its pupils. The greatest strengths of the curriculum are in art and physical education. The wide range of pupils' needs in art, requiring many carefully graded targets to enable them to make the necessary progress, are well met. This is fulfilled by a curriculum that offers learning opportunities for all pupils including the adults who come from a local centre. The strengths of the physical education curriculum are to be found in the breadth and balance of the provision that offers opportunities to pupils beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum and in the good range of extra-curricular activities.
27. The school provides the recommended 25 hours of curriculum time but this is not distributed appropriately between subjects. There is insufficient time in Years 7-9 for geography, history and religious education for the pupils to make good progress. Design and technology are experiencing difficulties in meeting National Curriculum requirements because some mandatory activities requiring computers and software cannot be included in the planned learning activities. The curriculum for modern languages does not provide sufficient learning experiences for pupils in Years 7-9 or use of appropriate resources, although this is a question of teaching and planning within the department, not of the school's curriculum provision. ICT skills are not taught in Year 8, and insufficient use is made of ICT to support learning in subjects. A curriculum enrichment week is held every July for Years 7-9, offering pupils the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities not available in the normal curriculum. Feedback to staff indicates that this is a very successful venture.
28. The curriculum for Years 10-11 (Key Stage 4) is augmented by several work-related courses provided in association with Plymouth College for Art and Design and the College of Further Education. The pupils study courses within a normal working environment, ranging from hairdressing to motor vehicle maintenance, on the completion of which they receive a recognised certificate of achievement or award.
29. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good. It is excellent in physical education and music. The physical education department offers a wide range of options to over half the pupils and students in the college and there is an impressive list of sports fixtures in which the pupils excel, particularly in football and basketball where teams have reached national finals. Whilst there are limitations in the more traditional extra-curricular activities offered by the music department, *Real Steel*, *Weapons of Sound* and other percussion groups are very popular with all age ranges. Both groups played at the recent Queen's Jubilee celebrations at Buckingham Palace and *Real Steel* played in the celebrations in Plymouth. *Real Steel* were also awarded third prize in the 2002 Notting Hill Carnival Panorama contest, competing against international steel bands and judged by a jury from Jamaica.

30. Provision for personal and social education is satisfactory. The course is run by an enthusiastic co-ordinator who has been in post since January 2001. The subject is taught in tutor groups throughout the college with the regular teaching undertaken by a specialist team comprising senior teachers, the Principal and Vice Principal and numerous visiting speakers. This academic year will see the third occurrence of Health Awareness Day – a focus on Year 8 with information about sex, drugs, and general health matters. The *Culture, Citizenship and Ethics* course in Year 10 is an integration of religious education and personal and social education, and follows an examination course that gives the opportunity for taking a GCSE. The entire course appears to be of much benefit to all the pupils but it is too new for its effectiveness to be judged.
31. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. The guidance issued to individual teachers is clear and authoritative. Every department has a link teacher with responsibility for identifying needs, monitoring progress, providing appropriate differentiated lesson activities and ensuring that all pupils have access to the excellent support, guidance and the dedicated facilities available at the school. The school is aware of its revised responsibilities under the new *SEN Code of Practice*, including the need to ensure that pupils and parents are always involved in the setting of learning targets for pupils.
32. The college's contribution to careers and vocational education is satisfactory. There is a careers library in which there are computers and literature to enable pupils to seek advice. This facility is enhanced by weekly visits from a Connexions personal adviser, who supports the personal and social education programme.
33. Over the last few years the college has sought to build up links with partner institutions. Mathematics, English and science staff hold regular meetings with colleagues in primary schools to discuss the academic requirements for pupils on entering Year 7, and art staff and pupils go to primary schools to assist with their productions. The art staff teach in the primary schools and provide training for their teachers. Parents of children in Year 6 view these links favourably as they consider the future of their own children's education.
34. The provision for the pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural development is good. By April 1999, all staff had participated in a major initiative on *The Development of Children's Spirituality across the Curriculum*, arriving at a whole school definition of spirituality. Departments were audited to identify opportunities for spiritual development within their programmes of study. This excellent initiative now needs to be co-ordinated in order to provide more explicit opportunities within schemes of work. The draft policy needs to be formally adopted with a process for annual evaluation. Tutor groups consider the *Thought for the Week*, but there are no daily acts of collective worship.
35. The college provides a good moral context for learning and personal growth. Pupils treat each other and staff with respect, which is a reflection of the good relationships engendered by staff. They are given good opportunities within personal and social education at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form to increase their understanding and develop their personal values and attitudes. In Year 10 citizenship lessons, the pupils are given opportunities to consider questions on human rights and racism, and are then challenged to justify their opinions. In subjects such as art, geography and religious education, moral questions are discussed. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop social skills. There are strong links with the community through a well-organised vocational programme. The citizenship programme and personal and social education lessons are helping to extend these. Pupils in Year 11 express their appreciation of the level of pastoral care offered by staff throughout the school, and they feel valued and respected.
36. The college is providing a satisfactory level of opportunity for cultural development overall, within which there are examples of excellence. Its strengths lie within art, citizenship, geography, music, dance and drama and religious education. Despite some cross-curricular events, such as focusing on Christianity and Judaism in religious education and art, and a multi-cultural experiential day, most pupils have insufficient opportunities to consider the implications of life in a multi-cultural society.

Sixth form

37. The college has a very good sixth form curriculum, with opportunities for students to gain qualifications at different levels and in a good range of subjects. Strong provision is made for the promotion of key skills. A general studies course, taken by the majority of students, includes aspects of cultural development, philosophical and religious understanding, career planning and other ingredients important for the personal development of the age group. The college also participates in the Tamar Valley Consortium of over 20 schools and colleges. This extends the range of courses available, as training providers from across the city and neighbouring areas teach courses from retailing to motor vehicle maintenance.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

38. The college provides a caring environment in which pupils feel safe. The staff know their pupils well and they in return are confident that there is always someone to whom they can talk. The college has maintained the standards found at the last inspection.
39. Medical records and accident books are maintained and updated as appropriate. The building is well adapted for disabled users. Safe working practices are observed in practical subjects. The lunchtime youth club for Year 11 pupils is a valuable facility. Child protection procedures are good. The Vice-Principal as designated officer has several years' experience and undergoes regular refresher training. An assistant principal with wide experience shares the role and this partnership is valuable in finding creative solutions to the various levels of concern that occur. Year heads and tutors are updated through regular pastoral meetings.
40. Procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment and progress are good. Assessment information is well used to guide curriculum planning. The new assessment policy provides clear guidelines and is already making a positive impact. Subject areas receive information on the pupils' attainment in National Curriculum tests taken in Years 6 and 9 and they record and monitor the pupils' progress. Most subjects, particularly science, business studies and design and technology, are making good use of this information to set pupils' targets. Data is used in art to identify high-attaining Year 9 pupils for the one-year GCSE course, and in physical education to plan appropriate work for all groups of pupils. Assessment data is well used to predict grades and to calculate any value-added factor. Departments are developing computerised record-keeping systems; these will allow much quicker access to data than at present, particularly for tracking an individual pupil's progress. Procedures for assessment in departments are generally good, but there are some areas for improvement. Marking procedures in modern languages are not consistent. Insufficient use is made of assessment data in music. The teaching and use of ICT in subjects is not rigorously assessed. The pupils' self-assessment will be an important part of the new academic review system but has yet to be implemented.
41. The pupils are given adequate guidance on how to raise the standard of their work and most parents are pleased with this aspect of the college. They are often given specific guidance in lessons to help them to improve. For example, Year 10 and 11 pupils identified as under-achieving are offered mentoring, and there are regular homework clubs after school and at lunchtime. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified and are often but not always given work that challenges them. Good careers advice is readily available to older pupils.
42. The enthusiastic and committed co-ordinator for special educational needs has made significant changes to the school's arrangements and these have ensured that support and guidance is better co-ordinated, particularly in the deployment of learning support assistants and day-to-day administration. Pupils have been given individual action plans (IEPs) which include general targets in terms of literacy, numeracy and personal skills. The pupils would benefit from having at least one target which is subject-specific, particularly where they show an aptitude, in order to build their self-esteem and confidence. Information on individual pupil needs and planned support is readily available to all departments to assist staff when planning their schemes of work and differentiated activities. Nonetheless, many teachers seem unaware of their individual responsibilities and the arrangements for these pupils in their classes; as a consequence they do not make adequate provision for pupils who are withdrawn for additional support to make up lost time and subject coverage. There is particularly good practice in physical education where the department uses a range of adapted resources to make lesson activities accessible to all. The art department ensures that all pupils make good progress by having stimulating, differentiated lessons.
43. The promotion of good discipline is mostly effective. There is a comprehensive range of positive strategies and rewards such as letters of commendation sent home and special Celebration Evenings, notably at Plymouth Guild Hall, where parents appreciate the range of successes that are recognised. There is also a clear and escalating series of sanctions that is fully understood by all, such as ten-minute or thirty-minute deductions from the pupils' free time. Some pupils on the

special needs register have specific behaviour difficulties. The variety of options offered at the Tamar Centre (the college's learning support centre) and the opportunity to learn through the alternative work-related curriculum have kept several disaffected young people within education. Good links with a variety of outside agencies, such as the police and Connexions service, contribute to this. The programme for personal, social and health education also contributes to good behaviour, for example when pupils attend workshop sessions on relationships and getting along with the opposite sex. In interviews, pupils were confident that they could talk to someone if they felt troubled and Year 7 especially reported favourably on their thorough induction to the college.

44. Attendance is satisfactorily monitored. Registers are completed according to statutory guidelines using a computerised system. The attendance officer telephones targeted pupils whose absence remains unexplained. Latecomers are channelled through reception and recorded. Registers are monitored on a regular basis by the heads of year and by the education welfare officer. These measures have caused the attendance figures to improve slowly over the last few years.

Sixth form

Assessment

45. The college's new procedures for assessing and monitoring the students' academic performance are good and make positive contributions to the students' achievement. The college makes a thorough analysis of the students' GCSE performance and other assessment data to estimate predicted grades at A Level. This information is used well in most subjects. Targets are set, monitored and discussed with students, in order to raise expectations. A few subjects, such as art and business studies, use self-assessment as part of the target-setting process; students identify their own strengths and weaknesses and take necessary action. The students' work is marked regularly and provides good feedback that helps them to improve. Art and English are particularly good at relating marking to examination grades. Termly reviews provide opportunities for students to evaluate and discuss their progress.

Advice, support and guidance

46. There is a good level of pastoral support and help for sixth form students. A good proportion of those in Year 11 stay on, and they are carefully assessed not only for relevant academic ability but also for an appropriate attitude to higher education. Those who are considered to fall short in some way are given only provisional offers until work or attitudes improve, thus ensuring that entry to the sixth form is not seen as automatic. Tutors are on hand when examination results come out to offer advice on whether to choose sixth form courses or further education. The students themselves comment very favourably about the advice and support that they are given throughout their time in the sixth form.
47. Although only about 10% of students enter the sixth form from other schools, care is taken to ensure that they are welcomed and integrated. All students have a thorough induction in the summer term, with an emphasis on team building, co-operation and developing sound study skills. Key skills sessions are well planned and students have some flexibility about where they undertake private study. Expectations evenings for both students and parents in Year 12 and 13 clearly communicate the college's requirements. The arrangement of tutor groups is such that all students have regular interviews and discussions with staff to ensure that they are coping adequately with the change of approach and workload, but in some cases students are allowed to stay too long on unsuitable courses.
48. Academic progress is carefully tracked, both through formal subject monitoring and more informal communications such as a round robin sent to relevant staff to check on a particular student. Twice a year there are organised days when students and their parents come in to discuss progress. Some careers advice is offered through a referral system for interviews; there are also

drop-in sessions for different year groups. About 20% of students were dissatisfied with this aspect of support, which is partly explained by recent staff illness.

49. Attendance and movement between the different institutions in the consortium is closely tracked, although students are given a degree of independence in negotiating where they will spend their study time. Lessons are sometimes shortened by a quarter of an hour as students have to leave to catch transport. There is a strong emphasis on students developing responsibility for managing their time and informing the college of their movements.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

50. Parents have a very favourable view of the college overall, with just a few concerns. Almost all who responded to the questionnaire say that their children like college and 94% feel that they are making good progress. The majority also recognises the good teaching, citing in particular the high expectations of teachers and the strong support for personal development. They praise the leadership and management. Both in their questionnaire responses and at the pre-inspection meeting, parents were satisfied with behaviour. Several took the trouble to write to say how impressed they were with the support and help given to their children. About 12% of parents who replied felt the college did not work closely with them, but the inspection found no evidence at all to support this view. A minority of parents (19%) were unhappy about homework, and this is supported in the findings of the inspection that there is variation in practice about setting and marking homework.
51. The college provides a good range of information for its parents. The college prospectus is professionally produced and very attractive. The sixth form prospectus is well targeted to offer the right type of information to those considering staying on. There is also an informative governors' annual report to parents but again it lacks some required information such as an agenda for the parents' meeting or information on the next election of parent governors.
52. The induction process into the college at Year 7 is very well handled: a comprehensive booklet is provided and also one that explains the new citizenship courses. There are expectations evenings for each year group in the early part of term that are well attended, and informal contact with staff on matters of attendance, work or behaviour. Parents and carers of sixth formers are offered several opportunities to come in to discuss progress, and there is a special session on dealing with university entrance forms. Most parents agree that teachers are very friendly and approachable. Annual reports to parents about pupils' progress are mostly good: they explain what pupils know, understand and can do in each subject, and there are some suggestions as to how pupils can improve their performance.
53. The college puts great effort into its links with parents and carers, and has maintained the high standards found at the time of the last inspection. Attendance is monitored and parents may be telephoned if their children are absent without explanation. Planners may be used for such home-college communication, but this is not consistent throughout the college. Parents may be asked to contribute to personal support plans for behaviour or individual education plans for those with special needs. Pupils are given certificates and commendations for good work or behaviour, which are sent home and are very much appreciated. Parents have also been consulted over recent changes in assessment and the timing of the college day. They are keen supporters of their children in musical or sporting performances such as football matches outside college hours, and many help; for example, with donations for the harvest festival celebration.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

54. The college is strongly and very ably led by the principal, to whom governors and parents attribute the college's improvement and increasing popularity in recent years. The college is rightly confident and morale is high. Senior and other staff and the governing body are at one in their

determination to continue to raise standards and to build on success. The analysis of data and the setting of school and pupil targets for improvement are a well-established part of the college's approach, and the procedures are applied with vigour. Accountability and monitoring are well-established aspects of management at the college.

55. The management of most subjects, notably English, science, art, design and technology, geography, physical education and religious education, is strong and effective. The leadership of mathematics is satisfactory, although there are other weaknesses in the department that the curriculum leader and principal need to tackle together. The college needs to take urgent action to improve standards in modern languages and music.
56. The local education authority has not yet issued its statement on provision for special educational needs, which was required by April 2002. Nonetheless the college works effectively with a number of external agencies including Connexions and local authority agencies to make caring, comprehensive and effective provision for pupils with special educational needs.
57. The governing body has benefited from stable leadership. Its chairman has vast management experience at a high level. His thinking and that of the principal are attuned, and business approaches are firmly established. The college has attracted about £2 million of additional funding in recent years. It is an exemplar of the way in which a school can adopt business and entrepreneurial approaches for its pupils' benefit, without diluting its focus on its academic goals and the community that it serves. Decisions on spending are taken with great care in relation to the college's educational goals, and the principles of best value are applied rigorously, for example in the decision by the college to run its own catering facilities.
58. The college is well staffed with both teachers, classroom support assistants and administrative and maintenance staff. As a community college, open long hours and at the weekend, it has a large and effective staff. Staff training, particularly for newly qualified teachers, is good, although the considerable training given in ICT is not being used much in several subjects; unused, the benefits of this training are unlikely to be retained.
59. The accommodation is good overall, with exceptional facilities in the Sound House for music, dance and drama. The library is spacious, well designed and welcoming. There is a good range of sports facilities and the art accommodation is spacious with good study areas. The facilities for pupils with special educational needs are excellent. The sixth form suite of rooms is spacious and fosters a good spirit amongst the students. Displays of pupils' activities abound throughout the school. The buildings are well maintained and encourage a good response from pupils.
60. The college is well provided overall with learning materials. These are excellent in music, dance, drama and art. There are good teacher-produced materials in several subjects, including those for ICT that are available via the school intranet and on CD for homework. A weakness is that pupils do not have textbooks to keep and use for homework, and this limits the quality of what they can produce.
61. The college's pupils benefit greatly from its community designation. The facilities available to the pupils and to other learners of all ages give each pupil much more than they could expect in an ordinary 11-18 school. The arts college status, together with the college's own formidable fund-raising ability, has also increased the opportunities available for pupils at the college as well as the community.
62. The financial affairs of the college are well managed and it provides good value for money.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

63. The sixth form benefits from the strong and able leadership of the head of sixth form. There is a good balance between promoting academic success, fostering good relationships and building confidence. The college acknowledges that there has been a lack of rigour in counselling marginal candidates who have been given a chance on courses that they should change, but the strong pastoral provision is often enabling these students to succeed. Assessment data is used well to set individual targets and to predict future examination success.

Resources

64. As in the main college, sixth form students have access to a suitable range of learning resources although there are inadequate ICT resources in design and technology. Accommodation for the sixth form is good. There is a spacious, well appointed social area which all students make use of. There are also classrooms available on a rota basis which students can use for private study.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

65. To maintain its improvement the college should:
- (1) raise standards of literacy at Key Stage 3 by: (paragraphs 7, 8 and 27)
 - constantly reinforcing basic language and number skills, both in English and mathematics and in all other subjects
 - increasing the amount of time allowed for the study of geography, history and religious education, both to allow adequate coverage of National Curriculum requirements and to provide more opportunities for pupils to read, write, speak and listen.
 - (2) raise the quality of teaching and the standards of pupils' work in modern languages and music by: (paragraphs 21 and 131-151)
 - the implementation of demanding subject development plans
 - improving discipline in some music lessons
 - raising expectations of what the pupils can achieve in modern languages
 - rigorous monitoring by senior staff of teaching, lesson planning, homework-setting and marking
 - widening the range of music taught and the instrumental and choral groups
 - (3) ensure that pupils are provided with consistently planned opportunities to use and develop their ICT skills in subjects by: (paragraphs 27, 127 and 129)
 - ensuring that the decision not to provide discrete ICT lessons in Year 8 is accompanied by a centrally determined plan in which specific ICT skills will be developed in subjects
 - increase the use of ICT in some subjects as a learning method.
 - (4) monitor more rigorously the implementation of school policies and procedures, particularly in relation to: (paragraphs 40, 50, 53, 77, 118 and 135)
 - homework, using textbooks and other books of high quality
 - marking, which is excellent by many teachers but not by all, with variable practice by teachers in the same department
 - the monitoring of pupils' planners
 - the use of tutorial time which takes up more than an hour and a half each week.

In addition to these key issues, the governing body should also consider:

- the lack of opportunities for pupils to understand other cultures and to prepare for life in a multi-cultural society (paragraph 36)
- the below-average attendance rates. (paragraph 17)

Sixth form

- (1) The college's procedures for admission to courses are being tightened, without damage to its commitment to foster its students' opportunities to succeed; however, there remains a need for the college to provide counselling earlier to some students to ensure that their chosen courses are within their capacity and for students to transfer early to other courses if this proves not to be so.

THE WORK OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS UNIT

66. The enhanced special provision for up to ten pupils and students who are statemented for speech and language communication difficulties (SpLD) is funded as a unit by the local education authority, with a small supplement from the school. There are ten such units in the authority. The specialist teacher in charge of the unit uses her very good qualifications and extensive experience to manage the provision of two schools. The five learning support assistants (LSAs) employed by the authority are well trained and experienced and they manage the provision in the absence of the teacher in charge. The link between the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and the SpLD provision has improved since the arrival of the new co-ordinator for special needs (SENCo). She and the specialist teacher work together to ensure that the overall learning support timetables do not clash, and to organise the efficient deployment of teacher assistants in support of pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion, where it is deemed appropriate. The work of both the enhanced special provision and the special needs department is overseen by the same senior member of staff responsible for the implementation of the school's inclusion policy.
67. There are currently nine pupils on the SpLD register and they benefit from the support of LSAs in their mainstream classes. They work to the individual education plans (IEPs) drawn up by the specialist teacher using information from the statement and annual review. The IEPs are reviewed with the pupils twice a year. Parents are kept well informed about their progress. They attend the annual review of their child's statement and contribute their own views. The specialist teacher has known several of the pupils for many years, sometimes from the primary school. She does outreach work with other schools and parents, especially at the time of transition from primary to secondary schools. She also gives model lessons to staff who wish to know more about the day-to-day management of SpLD pupils. Much of her work is focused on improving strategies that LSAs and teachers use in their work with those pupils.
68. Although most support is given in mainstream classes, there is a need to withdraw students from time to time on a one-to-one basis, to check on their progress in lessons and to offer personal pastoral support where necessary. This is also a critical time during which to challenge their communication skills. The use of 'mind mapping' is often the very good starting point for these sessions. The success of 'mind mapping' has extended into the main school through in-service training given to special needs staff by the specialist teacher. Good use is made of dyslexia software programmes to accelerate the progress pupils make in communication.
69. From the very good records kept, it is clear that the provision adds significant value to the education of SpLD pupils. The majority taking GCSE examinations exceed the target grade predicted by the end of Key Stage 3 standard assessment tests.
70. The provision is very well managed by the specialist teacher in charge. Support from the speech and language therapist, the educational psychologist and the medical service is called in where the statement requires it, or the individual situation indicates a need for such specialised support. The teacher meets with her LSA team weekly and attends the three admission panel meetings held each year, when new referrals are discussed. Very good records are kept of all work done with the SpLD pupils at all stages of their schooling. The teacher has recorded a set of special language tapes for Spanish and French lessons and all SpLD pupils have a set to use. As the unit increases its work in local schools, the level of clerical support will need to be reviewed to maintain an efficient system.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	155
	Sixth form	38
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	5	32	53	49	16	0	0
Percentage	3	21	34	32	10	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	2	11	13	12	0	0	0
Percentage	5	29	34	32	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1027	175
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	156	14

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	37	3
Number of other pupils with school's special educational needs (school action and school action plus)	146	9

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29

Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving
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61

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	111	109	220

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	72	68
	Girls	68	66	64
	Total	112	138	132
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	51 (48)	63 (59)	60 (55)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (18)	32 (30)	20 (19)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	72	69
	Girls	74	75	74
	Total	127	147	143
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	58 (47)	67 (40)	65 (52)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (16)	29 (24)	30 (19)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	33 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	90	83	173

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	37	82	85
	Girls	36	75	77
	Total	73	157	162
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	42 (28)	91 (94)	94 (95)
	National	51 (48)	89 (91)	95 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	38.5 (34.4)
	National	39.0 (39.0)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	17	27	44
	Average point score per candidate	231.2 (11.3)	194.8 (12.4)	208.9 (12)
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a (16.9)	n/a (18)	n/a (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	16	26	42	5	10	15
	Average point score per candidate	198.1	146.2	166	152	146	148
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1018	18	1
White – Irish	0		
White – any other White background	23		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0		
Mixed – White and Black African	0		
Mixed – White and Asian	0		
Mixed – any other mixed background	0		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0		
Black or Black British – African	1		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0		
Chinese	0		
Any other ethnic group	2		
No ethnic group recorded	40	1	1

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	418.99

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.8
Key Stage 4	23.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	3,185,494
Total expenditure	3,186,988
Expenditure per pupil	2,830
Balance brought forward from previous year	129,989
Balance carried forward to next year	128,495

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	29.38
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	35.33
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1201
Number of questionnaires returned	230

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	50	4	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	39	55	2	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	53	9	2	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	52	14	5	3
The teaching is good.	41	55	1	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	49	14	2	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	42	3	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	33	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	29	53	11	1	6
The school is well led and managed.	45	45	4	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	46	4	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	40	5	1	4

Other issues raised by parents

The 24 parents at the meeting expressed a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the college. There were some criticisms about inadequate homework in Year 8, the behaviour of pupils outside the school and short class detentions, all of which were expressed by parents who were very happy otherwise that their children attend the college.

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good at Key Stage 4, helping pupils to achieve well.
- GCSE results in English literature have improved and are good.
- The department is well led and managed.
- The pupils' work is well marked and assessed.

Areas for improvement

- Standards, including examination results, of English language need to be raised.
- Higher standards of literacy throughout the school in all subjects should be promoted.
- Greater use should be made of information and communication technology.

71. On entry to the college, the standards of the pupils' speaking, listening, reading and writing are well below the national average. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 (Key Stage 3 Standard Assessment Tests) in 2002 the pupils achieved results that were below the national average and well below results in similar schools. They were also lower than those in mathematics and science. In the GCSE examinations in 2002, there were big increases in the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades in both English language and English literature. The results were still below the national averages, but this improving trend is the result of good teaching, and the English results were better than those in mathematics and science. The English literature results, with a very high proportion of the Year 11 pupils entered, were an impressive achievement, with 55% achieving A*-C grades. In the 2001 GCSE examinations (the most recent for which this analysis is available), the pupils entered for English language did similarly in this subject than in the average of all their other subjects, whilst those entered for English literature did better. Both boys and girls are improving in the subject, although boys are further below their national average than girls.
72. In Years 7-9, the pupils' writing is unsatisfactory, because standards of organisation and sentence construction are often weak. The department is aware of this problem and is taking steps to tackle it. A scheme of work linked to the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy has been produced for Year 7 and is being extended to Years 8 and 9 to help to give pupils more explicit instruction in their basic skills work. It is too early to assess the impact of this. Younger pupils often lack fluency when reading aloud, reflecting the large number of pupils who enter the school with a low reading age. Opportunities for pupils to read in class and to understand the meaning of the text enable them to learn well. The more able Year 7 pupils understand what similes are and use them correctly and imaginatively when writing, for example, "The desert was as hot as the molten lava" and "The desert was like a never ending rocky planet." In Year 8, the pupils read Greek myths and legends with interest. They understand the common points in them such as a hero, a villain, a monster or creature, the gods or goddesses and the type of adventure or journey. They are also developing a sound understanding of moral issues by discussing the rights and wrongs of Medea saving Jason or Laius and Jocasta giving up Oedipus.
73. The standard of work in Year 9 is below average overall, although pupils in the top sets produce work of average quality. They showed an increasing ability to analyse the text by looking at evidence in Roald Dahl's story *Lamb to the Slaughter* and discussed well the state of mind of Mrs Maloney when the police arrived on the scene. When the pupils with low attainment and those with special needs have the opportunity to read what is of interest to them, such as *Get Rich Tips*, they focus better and contribute well to discussions.
74. In Years 10 and 11, the higher ability pupils are attaining in line with expected standards in all the key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. They use English effectively in a range of

situations and for a variety of objectives and audiences. Their writing is confident and demonstrates appropriate choices of style, and in their narrative writing they can create characters and settings. They sometimes use computers to produce longer pieces of work. They write with increasing maturity; even less able pupils achieve sensitive personal and reflective writing. Most pupils respond well to literary texts as well as to non-fiction. Their work is usually well presented and readable but this is not consistent throughout the key stage. Many have problems with spelling and grammatical accuracy. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs do not receive enough support in lessons; for example, in a lesson with a lower-attaining group, there was little purposeful discussion as their listening was immature, reading was below standard and writing was very limited, even though the poem being discussed was something with which they could show some empathy. There is still too high a proportion of pupils, and particularly boys, who lose the incentive to do well in their GCSE courses.

75. Throughout the college, the pupils' listening skills are underdeveloped. They do not always concentrate well on their listening activities, and their standards in speaking, though better, are often restricted by a narrow range of vocabulary. In some lessons boys speak more than girls but the language used is more informal and the vocabulary is also less imaginative.
76. Pupils on the whole show positive attitudes to learning, responding to a valued system of rewards. They are generally willing to contribute ideas when given the opportunity to do so. There are harmonious relations between boys and girls and adults. Behaviour is usually good. Occasionally the boisterousness of some boys and sometimes also girls reduces the pace of learning; however, the maintenance of a well-ordered learning environment is more usual and this makes a valuable contribution to the pupils' learning.
77. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory at Key Stage 3. Overall there is much good teaching. It is sometimes very good, with a core of experienced and very able teachers and some promising beginners. The teachers demonstrate their good subject knowledge and engage pupils well. They try to promote and celebrate success by inspiring the pupils and by displaying their work in their classrooms. Objectives are made clear at the beginning of lessons and checks for achievement are made at the end. Marking is good with advice on how to improve and the teachers set targets for pupils. Formal assessments are done and the analysis of results is used well to monitor past performance and for future planning of lessons, but this is not consistent in the department. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and generally manage them well. They use effective methods to balance speaking and listening, reading and writing and make use of assessment to ensure that pupils understand. They regularly set homework. In lessons where unsatisfactory teaching was seen, there was usually a slower pace, coupled with ineffective class control. Furthermore, the intermittent withdrawal of pupils for additional support outside the class did not help either the withdrawn pupils or others to settle back into learning and caused disruption in several classes. The work done outside did not link with learning in the main class. There was also no use of ICT seen in lessons, though some of the homework and assignments seen showed some use of it by pupils. Pupils, however, benefit from the broadening of the curriculum that enriches their experience through visits to theatres and cinemas linked to the study of texts and by having visitors in school to support their learning both in English and drama. The subject contributes well to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship by discussing moral issues through the study of texts such as Greek myths, JB Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* and Roald Dahl stories.
78. The English department is well led and managed. There is a clear vision and action plan of priorities for the subject. The subject team works well together, is supported very well by senior management and is committed to the continuous improvement of standards. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are regularly done and the newly qualified teachers are given good support. The library provides a pleasant learning environment, used by all pupils for homework and for personal study by older pupils. The book stock is adequate but pupils are not allowed to take books home for personal study and homework. This restricts their opportunities for learning. The accommodation, though adequate, does not provide a clearly defined English department area.

79. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Good improvements have been made to the organisation of teaching and to assessment procedures, and examination results have also shown improvement; however, results in both key stages continue to remain below national standards.

Drama

80. The small number of pupils entered for GCSE drama in 2002 all passed and the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in GCSE in 2002 was close to the national average. The attainment of current pupils in Years 10 and 11 also matches the national average. The work seen in classes in Years 7-9 indicates that standards are below average but are improving. Most pupils achieve well, including those pupils with special educational needs. In Year 7, pupils learn the skills of working collaboratively in mixed-ability groups and how to focus. They know about still image and mime, but they are easily distracted and they find it difficult to take personal responsibility as independent learners. Year 9 pupils are learning the rehearsal technique of off-text improvisation and know and understand technical vocabulary such as still image, freeze communication and scenario planning. By the end of the lesson pupils demonstrate, by using their imagination to create new scenes and by using their own words instead of the text, that they know what improvisation is. Exploratory strategies such as narration, forum, hot seating, role-play, flash-backs and thought tracking are developing well in Years 10 and 11. For example, in a lesson observed in Year 11, pupils worked well together in their groups planning their own scenes for presentation about debt and its effects on different groups of people for presentation. One group particularly picked up the point about the universality of the issue of debt and began thinking about presenting it in an imaginative way. The pupils have good attitudes to learning and join in well. Drama helps their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and raises their self-esteem.
81. Teaching is good, particularly in the upper years. Relationships and support for pupils of different abilities are very good, and consequently pupils are willing to take risks, showing confidence as learners. Planning is also good, linked to shared objectives so that pupils know exactly where they are going and how successful they are being. The teachers use their subject knowledge well to help pupils to extend their learning and to ensure that pupils understand that drama is not just play but has a deeper meaning to convey feelings and express ideas and opinions. Questioning is effective: reinforcing, probing and extending learning. The drama department provides an exciting learning environment for all. Occasional problems with behaviour slow the pace of learning for pupils who find it difficult to cooperate and share with others or take personal responsibility. The department is well led, often inspirational and full of ideas, and there is a good development plan for performing arts. The staff work well together and they maintain a good link with English. The curriculum is enhanced by performances, visits to theatres and the cinema. Visits by theatre groups provide a good extension to the taught curriculum for many pupils. Extra-curricular productions such as *Grease* last year and a Christmas show planned for the end of the term enrich the curriculum. The new Sound House is an excellent facility for the development of drama.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Most teachers make clear links between mathematics topics to help pupils' learning.
- Most teachers require pupils to choose appropriate methods and share good ideas with the class.
- Where used, the nationally recommended three-part lesson enables the pupils to learn well.
- The pupils are given extensive opportunities to practise and consolidate new learning.
- Most lessons cater for the different learning needs of individual pupils.

Areas for improvement

- Pace and challenge are too low in a significant number of lessons.
- The National Numeracy Strategy has had insufficient impact on teaching approaches.
- Key Stage 3 schemes of work are over-dependent on one series of commercial texts.
- The use and application of mathematics receive little attention in lessons.

- There is very little use of ICT to support learning in mathematics.
- Poor pupil behaviour inhibits learning in a significant number of lessons.

82. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 (Key Stage 3 SATs) in 2002, the pupils achieved results that were close to the national average and below similar schools. These results are similar to those in science, but markedly better than those in English. While there has been a steady improvement in recent years, this is no greater than the upward trend in results nationally.
83. In GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2001, the number of pupils who achieved grades in the range A*-C was well below the national average; however, the number of pupils who achieved grades in the range A-G was close to the national average. In 2002 there was a marked increase in the number of pupils achieving grades in the range A*-C, although it was still well below the national average. In both years, pupils did significantly less well in mathematics than they did in the average of all the other subjects that they studied. In 2001 boys achieved better than girls, but in 2002 there was no significant variation in results by gender.
84. The pupils' attainment seen during the inspection overall during Years 7-9 is below national norms. Higher-attaining pupils successfully engage with a wide range of topics, including the solution of equations, ratio and percentage increase, the theorem of Pythagoras and trigonometry, calculations in three dimensions, and the representation of statistical data using pie charts and lines of best fit. These pupils tackle challenging exercises and generate copious amounts of written work in their books, which are generally well kept. Many other pupils cover a much more limited range and complexity of mathematics. For them, the lessons lack pace and there is an emphasis on numerical calculation – often largely rule-bound – and relatively mundane exercises in algebra, shape, and data-handling, using textbooks that do not always match the demands of the National Curriculum. For example in a Year 9 lesson, routine work on tally charts could have been enhanced to compare and contrast different distributions in a problem-solving context. Similarly, the National Numeracy Strategy has had only limited impact on schemes of work and the calculation methods taught to pupils. Teachers in the department are beginning to make good use of some of the numeracy strategy's teaching ideas like target boards and follow-me cards. They have not adapted the methods from the primary numeracy framework to help less able pupils to improve their mental recall, with the result that some pupils in Years 8 and 9 have to use their fingers to work out simple multiplication. There is a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7-9. The attitudes of some pupils are unsatisfactory, and some poor behaviour in a significant minority of lessons prevents other pupils from making good progress.
85. The work seen in Years 10 and 11 shows pupils' attainment to be below the national average. There is a contrast between the complexity of mathematics tackled by different attainment groups, and the care with which pupils record their work. While higher-attaining pupils cover a wide span of mathematics and accumulate notes and exercises which could usefully serve as revision aids, many other pupils produce written work which comprises incomplete notes alongside exercises in which only the answers have been recorded. Nevertheless, teaching in Years 10 and 11 is largely satisfactory or better, pupil attitudes are mainly positive, and the textbook resources used match the demands of the GCSE syllabus. For example, one low-set Year 11 lesson successfully combined practical work on measurement with the study of mean and range to compare the collective heights of boys and girls, to the evident interest of all concerned.
86. Throughout Years 7-11, the use and application of mathematics is under-represented both in lessons and in the pupils' exercise books. Similarly, there is very limited use of ICT to support mathematics teaching, even where commonly used computer software is widely recognised to motivate pupils and promote learning. This shortcoming was highlighted in the previous inspection report and has not been remedied.
87. The school has made a satisfactory start to the promotion of numeracy across the curriculum. The mathematics department has audited current usage, provided some examples of good practice, written guidance on calculator use and set up an intranet site, linking numeracy to schemes of work in the other subjects. Joint projects such as the history visit to Buckfast Abbey are beginning to increase the pupils' opportunities to apply their number skills in other areas. The

pupils wrote a questionnaire, interviewed a monk and displayed their data as pie charts; however, the department has not yet made other staff aware of the non-standard calculation methods advocated by the numeracy strategy for pupils who find the standard methods confusing.

88. Leadership of the department is satisfactory. There is a useful action plan which once implemented will result in important gains. At Key Stage 3 the highest priorities need to be to revise schemes of work in line with the Key Stage 3 National Strategy in order to enliven teaching, and to tackle poor pupil attitudes and behaviour. To maintain recent improvements at Key Stage 4, greater attention must be paid to the needs of the large number of pupils who are currently likely to gain grades D and E at GCSE.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Assessment and target setting procedures are good.
- The teachers and other staff are committed to improving standards.
- The development of basic language and number skills is good.

Areas for improvement

- The standards attained in national tests and examinations need to be raised.
- The matching of teaching methods to pupils' abilities and the consistent use of agreed strategies for discipline, especially in Year 9 require attention.
- The pace and timing of some lessons in Years 7-9 is too slow.
- The specific school improvement priorities should be taken into account in development planning.

89. This is a department that has new leadership and several new teachers who have not yet had sufficient time to turn plans for improvement into achievement. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 (Key Stage 3 SATs), the pupils achieved results that were close to the national average and below the average for similar schools. The results were similar to those achieved in mathematics and better than those in English. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 was close to the national average but the proportion reaching the higher levels was below average. The results in 2002 were better than those in 2001, continuing an upward trend at a similar rate to the national improvement in results. There was no significant difference in the results achieved by boys and girls.
90. In the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11 in 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well below the national average. There was no significant difference in the results achieved by boys and girls. In 2001, pupils achieved similar results in science as they did in the average of all the other subjects that they studied. The 2002 results were an improvement on those of 2001.
91. The standards achieved by the pupils in lessons and in their written work are below average for both Years 7-9 and Years 10-11. Procedures for assessing the progress that pupils make are good. Appropriate targets for improvement are set and assessment data is analysed thoroughly. As a result, the pupils at both key stages, including those with special educational needs, make the progress that would be expected when compared with their attainment in previous years.
92. Many of the pupils in Years 7-9 show good recall of work that they have done recently, although their knowledge and understanding of work done some time ago is weaker. For example, the pupils in Year 9 can recall the work that they have done this term on heat, electricity and genetics but they are unsure about work on the same topics that they did in previous years. They can understand the basic mathematics needed to carry out simple calculations and many are able to represent results in tables and to draw graphs effectively. Their ability to explain what a graph

means is weaker. Many pupils think that a straight-line graph means that the variables being plotted are equal to each other. The pupils work safely and are confident in handling equipment when carrying out experimental work, but few of them are able accurately to describe what they are trying to find out or to predict the outcome of the experiment, using their existing knowledge. The teaching in Years 7-9 is satisfactory overall, although some of the teaching in Year 9 is unsatisfactory because the pace of the lessons is too slow and the pupils are not expected to complete enough work in the time available. In these lessons, the teaching does not fully engage the pupils' interest and as a result they make insufficient progress in their learning. In the most effective lessons with Years 7-9, the teaching is well planned, presented in a lively manner and linked to everyday experience. This holds the pupils' attention and encourages them to concentrate and to work hard so that they make good progress in their learning. Year 9 pupils who are very good at science are able to attend extra lessons at lunchtime once a week in order to extend their understanding. These lessons provide an extra element of challenge in the work and it is planned to extend their availability to other pupils.

93. The highest-attaining pupils in Years 10-11 have a good knowledge and understanding of work that they have covered in the past, particularly their most recent work, and some can recall well the work that they covered last year. For example, the Year 10 pupils have good knowledge of the circulatory and respiratory systems; pupils in Year 11 understand their previous work on forces and friction so that they can explain a range of factors that might affect the stopping distance of a vehicle. Other pupils in Years 10-11 are less sure of the work they have covered in the past. As with the younger pupils, they have appropriate basic mathematical skills but they find the interpretation of graphs, tables and charts more difficult and many have difficulty explaining experimental findings or predicting outcomes using their existing knowledge. The teaching of Years 10-11 is satisfactory overall and about a third of the lessons are taught well or very well. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in these years. In the most successful lessons, well-planned teaching matches the work well to the pupils' abilities, and the topics of study are presented in interesting ways that encourage the pupils to learn. In one lesson seen in Year 11, a group of low-attaining pupils made good progress in their learning about the industrial production of ammonia because of the very good teaching that presented the subject matter in a lively way and matched the work well to their abilities. The pupils in Years 10-11 generally behave well and have good attitudes to the subject.
94. The teaching of the pupils in all years places appropriate emphasis on reading and writing skills and on the use of correct scientific vocabulary. The schemes of work include references to relevant uses of ICT and there is sufficient computer equipment within the department. Appropriate support is available for pupils with special educational needs, although the teachers' planning does not always sufficiently consider the wide range of needs in the class or make it clear to the learning support assistants how they can be most effective in the lesson.
95. Standards in science have risen since the last inspection in 1996, although they are still at about the same level in comparison with other schools nationally. There have been significant changes to the staffing and management of the department in recent years. The head of department provides very good leadership and as a result the staff are clearly committed to improving standards in the subject. They are well supported by the science technicians, who share the commitment to improvement. The departmental development plan contains priorities that are important in laying the foundations for improvement. The plan now needs to be reviewed to focus on more specific strategies for improving quality and standards in the subject. In order to build on the improvements already made, these plans need to deal with the areas for development identified in this report, particularly the consolidation of past learning.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Much of the teaching is very good and some is excellent.

- The pupils are keen, learn well and behave well.
- Leadership of the department is excellent.
- Resources for learning are excellent and computers are used well.
- GCSE coursework is undertaken a year early in Year 9.

Areas for improvement

- Some aspects of the accommodation need attention.

96. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations in 2001 and 2002 was significantly above national averages and better than all other subjects in the school. The results are the more remarkable for the abnormally high proportion of pupils at Estover who take the subject. The trend in results has been upward over the past few years. In both years girls achieved better results than boys, but the gap was narrower in 2002 and the gender gap at the school is now very much smaller than nationally. The department is now fast tracking the course and every pupil in Year 9 is placed on the GCSE course, with those opting for art able to take the examination in Year 10. The department expects the majority of pupils to take this opportunity at the end of Year 10, giving a further year for pupils to re-take and improve their results if this is seen as desirable or necessary. In the same way the AS and A Level courses are fast tracked and provisional results for AS Level in Year 11 for 2002 show that every student gained a grade A. There is a need to make a careful analysis of all examination data to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged by this fast tracking arrangement.
97. In work seen during the inspection attainment at the age of 14 (end of Key Stage 3) is consistent with national expectations, with a significant number of pupils attaining levels above expectations. Higher-attaining pupils learn quickly from the very good demonstrations given by teachers at the beginning of lessons. They set to work quickly on their GCSE coursework, mapping out shapes and angles for their observational drawings before going on to use line and tone confidently to convey the form they are studying. Lower-attaining pupils are less confident and tend to fuss over detail before attempting a formal structure to their drawing. Portrait drawing skills are developed effectively through the fast-paced and well-timed lessons that build systematically on observational and drawing skills. Pupils with special educational needs are able to make progress at the same rapid pace as others in the class. By the age of 16 (end of Key Stage 4) the attainment of pupils is consistently above national expectations. They use their well-developed painting and drawing skills to draw images based on the artists that they study, although they do not demonstrate the same level of development in their knowledge and understanding of artists such as Bosch and Picasso. The very good work done in the computer art room is well supported by the additional work done by many pupils on their home computers. All pupils are able to open paint programmes and supporting files to gain access to the manipulation functions of the programmes. Higher-attaining pupils can cut images using both lasso and wand tools, feathering them to tidy the images before moving and manipulating them in a multi-layered design for their CD cover. Lower-attaining pupils do not attempt the more complex processes of digital manipulation, but nonetheless produce very effective designs based on the music that they have chosen to enclose in a CD cover. Standards of literacy are raised by the high expectations teachers have of research work and the annotation required in sketchbooks and personal studies.
98. The attitudes of pupils towards lessons are almost always very positive. They listen attentively and watch demonstrations with interest, work hard and enjoy the lessons. The knowledge and communication skills of the teachers, supported by the excellent resources that they use, ensure that lessons are interesting and stimulating. On occasions a small number of boys in Year 9 tended to show off and tried to disrupt the lesson, but they were quickly and effectively dealt with by the very good class management skills of the teacher.
99. The quality of teaching is very good and on occasion it is excellent. It is never less than good. All the teachers have an excellent knowledge and understanding of their subject. Their commitment to teaching is clearly very strong and they develop their skills further through their practice as artists and their enthusiasm for learning. They plan well from the very good schemes of work and teach confidently to the very high standards expected of them. These high standards are more evident in the challenge to pupils' practical skills than in the development of personal research,

although many pupils pursue their research thoroughly. The use of short, timed drawing exercises is particularly effective in building on drawing skills quickly. Very good use is made of the large number of computers and the very good computer projector in managing the lessons on digital image manipulation. Lessons are characterised by firm, clear management and high expectations of good behaviour. As a result the pupils are able to work without interruption and make very good progress in lessons. The work on display in classrooms and around the school is a testament to the high standard of work that teachers are able to secure from pupils. Some of the excellent large-scale sculptural work is used effectively as a primary resource for observational drawing.

100. The department benefits from the excellent leadership of a very knowledgeable and experienced curriculum leader and his equally strong deputy leader. Both are exceptional teachers who have built a strong team of enthusiastic and committed teachers to enable standards to be raised to a very high level. Teachers give lessons to Year 6 pupils from primary schools and run many workshops and open evenings to make the most of the college's opportunities for learning. These excellent curriculum links reach down to the early stages of learning and up to the Foundation Arts course level, providing a very comprehensive and fluent experience for pupils and students. They also enable works on a large scale and in widely varying media to contribute to the richness of the learning environment. The benefits of arts college status are now showing through in the fast track courses that are being successfully completed by the majority of pupils. The leaking roof and the poorly ventilated darkroom need attention. The department has made very good improvement since the last inspection, accelerated by the grant of arts college status. With a very strong team of teachers and an excellent curriculum, it has a very good capacity to continue its improvement in the years ahead.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Planning for the new GCSE course that embraces citizenship is excellent.
- The course is taught by senior staff and has status.
- Aspects of citizenship are planned in subject schemes of work.

There are no areas for improvement

101. As in schools across the country, citizenship was formally introduced into the curriculum in September 2002, so judgements are based mainly on the quality of planning and preparation by the school.

102. The handbook for citizenship is very good, with detailed guidance on ethos and rationale, including aims and objectives for the subject. All of these aspects will provide support for the staff team. There are comprehensive schemes of work of a very good standard for each module, with differentiated work sheets and stimulus material. The provision for citizenship in Years 10 and 11 is a GCSE course, *Citizenship, Culture and Ethics*, which will include the statutory entitlement for all pupils to study religious education. It will enable all those pupils who wish, to take a full GCSE in religious studies. 70% of the citizenship programme of study is covered by this course, and the possibility of a GCSE examination adds status. Further status is given to the subject by the provision of staffing, which includes senior managers. The remaining 30% will be covered in other subjects. The handbook contains detailed plans for each subject area, and each department is identifying implicit and explicit teaching opportunities to cover the citizenship programme, within their schemes of work. Several of these opportunities are already being provided at both key stages. The level of preparation and planning is excellent.

103. In Year 10, pupils are learning about the benefits of living in a multi-ethnic society. Recent newspaper headlines and topical world news are used to stimulate discussions, with an

appropriate emphasis on positive outcomes. In another Year 10 lesson, pupils are considering the significance of their own beliefs and values in the context of rights and responsibilities, and are developing skills of reflection as they are challenged to justify their opinions. Teaching is of a very good standard, with consistently high expectations both of pupils' behaviour and learning. Excellent planning and preparation of material result in a very good level of progress.

104. In Year 7 in history, pupils consider the hierarchical structures of society. This excellent citizenship opportunity is planned explicitly in the subject scheme of work. In a Year 7 PSHE lesson, pupils consider rules, within a local and national context, as part of their induction into the school. A multi-cultural, experiential learning day for Years 8 and 10 will extend the pupils' cultural experience and provide a major contribution to citizenship. Planning for monitoring and evaluation is contained within the handbook. The present level of planning represents a very good beginning to this subject, and, with the enthusiastic leadership of the citizenship co-ordinator, indicates the potential of an exciting and challenging course for pupils.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.
- Staff are hard working and committed to the pupils in their care.
- The range of links with the community promotes learning.
- The department is well led.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in teaching and learning is restricted.
- Greater planning of curriculum opportunities needs to be made to enhance the contribution of the subject to the spiritual and cultural development of pupils.
- Access to and resources for computer-aided design and manufacture are limited (CAD and CAM).

105. In GCSE examinations in 2002, 40% of pupils gained A*-C grades which is below the national average but represents an improvement on results in 2001. In 2001 the pupils entered for design and technology did the same as the average in all the other subjects that they studied. More girls than boys gained higher grades but the results of boys continued to improve in 2002.

106. In work seen during the inspection, at the age of 14 (end of Key Stage 3), the pupils are achieving standards in line with the national expectations. They are gaining a good foundation in a range of practical skills within all material areas and a growing awareness of designing. The pupils make particularly good progress in developing their design ideas in resistant materials and textiles. There are no significant differences between the standards achieved by boys and girls. Higher ability pupils effectively analyse their research to develop design ideas and become increasingly confident in analysing existing products. The pupils of below average ability experience difficulties in evaluating products. Their knowledge and understanding of materials and their working characteristics is weak. The development of design ideas is sometimes restricted by prescriptive tasks and limited differentiation of learning activities for the different abilities of pupils.

107. In work seen at the end of Key Stage 4, the pupils are achieving an overall standard in line with that expected for their age. The quality of manufacture of the final product is usually better than the design folder. Higher ability pupils are well motivated to analyse information gathered through research and are able to decide on the best means to use it to prepare their own designs. There are particularly good examples of this in graphic products where the analysis of existing promotional packs for various companies led to creative ideas for a promotional pack for a new multi -complex shopping mall. Some pupils of average and those below average ability use a limited range of testing procedures to consider the characteristics of alternative materials and

methods of manufacture; however, the approaches used in the teaching of resistant materials and textiles are particularly successful in this aspect.

108. The quality of teaching is good overall with examples of very good teaching. Teachers have extensive knowledge of their subject and plan a range of interesting activities to motivate pupils and extend their learning. There is much evidence of teachers having high expectations of pupils and learning objectives are communicated well. A strength is the sensitive one-to one tuition during the lessons to extend the pupils' approach to the demands of the project. This results in a good working atmosphere and positive pupil-teacher relationships. Individual help and encouragement contribute to the good progress of pupils at different ability levels. When available, support assistants play a key role in this process.
109. A variety of teaching approaches and good planning are apparent in the best lessons. In a Year 11 food technology lesson, varied practical activities were being undertaken where pupils worked accurately with materials and tools. The teacher set clear guidelines for working on the design brief and pupils were able to explain why they chose the target group and age range of the consumer. In a Year 9 textiles lesson the teacher had planned learning activities to enable pupils to work effectively at different levels of ability. Pupils made a prototype of their bag designs, incorporating a range of construction techniques and design details which reflected individual levels of knowledge and understanding. The department needs to give further consideration to how research and development of design ideas at Key Stage 3 could be extended by the increased use of paper and card modelling, testing of alternative materials and processes and more detailed research to formulate a design specification.
110. Independent learning is best when the pupils explore alternative solutions to designing and making their product. This approach was working well in a Year 8 textiles group. The pupils had previously experimented with a range of techniques for applying designs to fabric, including batik, screen-printing and fabric painting. The pupils organised resources and techniques in a sensible way and used their earlier evaluation of various methods of transferring a pattern on to fabric to assist their approach to the current work. In a Year 11 resistant materials lesson, exemplar folders were available to provide guidance and to raise expectations. Pupils were working independently to research and sketch ideas, with effective use of thumbnail sketching techniques, relevant annotation and checklists to extend their thinking about the development of individual designs. Teachers often use sensitive intervention to challenge and extend the pupils' thinking about their designs. The use of ICT and computer aided design (CAD) and computer aided manufacture (CAM) are restricted by a lack of resources. The curriculum does not meet the statutory requirements in these regards. The pupils show initiative and are willing to take on responsibility. In a Year 10 electronics lesson, pupils co-operated well in group activities to build a transistor circuit and supported each other to identify faults.
111. The curriculum is generally appropriate, showing good planning of interesting units of work relevant to the age and ability of pupils. There is equal access to the full range of design and technology experiences. There is a strong commitment to the pupils' use of ICT skills but access to the resources is irregular. The department needs to review schemes of work to identify and plan those ICT activities that all pupils could undertake. Extra-curricular provision is good, with access to workshops on a regular basis outside the taught programme. Additionally, contributions are made to pupils' learning by links with the local community. Some prescriptive tasks restrict the standards of designing and the development of design ideas.
112. The marking of work is regular and teachers provide constructive comments on how to improve. Homework is set and generally reinforces the work of the lesson. The monitoring and assessment of the pupils' work is particularly effective when teachers explain the requirements for achieving the next highest National Curriculum or GCSE grade level. The information from assessing pupils' work and the analysis of results at the end of both key stages is not used fully to identify any changes of approach needed for the teaching of particular elements of the attainment target.
113. Leadership and management of the department are good. There are explicit aims and values and the two subject leaders focus on strategies to improve standards. There is a shared commitment

to improvement, clear direction and good delegation. Staff are able to contribute positively to the work of the department. There is a collaborative approach that makes best use of the teachers' complementary strengths. The points identified as requiring improvement in the previous inspection report have been tackled well. Some modules enable pupils to research designs and products from cultures other than their own. A system is now in place for the formative assessment of the progress of pupils towards expected levels of attainment. Various methods are used, including discussions with pupils, written comments with suggestions for improvements, observations by the teacher and self-evaluation by the pupils. A more consistent approach is needed for the tracking of progress at intervals within each module of work. This would alert teachers to the need for more structured and varied ways to differentiate the activities for the ability levels of pupils.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are well above average.
- The teachers manage pupils well and establish good relationships with them.
- The pupils have very good attitudes and good behaviour.
- The teaching staff are experienced and enthusiastic.

Areas for improvement

- The low proportion of curriculum time in Years 7 to 9 is too low.
- The pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 should be raised.
- Differences in attainment between girls and boys need to be reduced.

114. GCSE results for 2001 and 2002 were well above the national average, particularly in the higher grades, with girls' results better than boys'. Pupils entered for geography in 2001 did significantly better in this subject than in the average of all their other subjects. The picture has been similar in previous years and there has been a steady improvement over time, which has been carried through into 2002. The department also offers leisure and tourism at GCSE. As this course was only introduced in September 2002, no results are available yet.

115. Attainment by Year 9 (the end of Key Stage 3) is below national expectations, with girls working to a consistently higher standard than boys. Approaches have been put in place to narrow this gender gap, such as more practically-based assessment assignments, but these are too recent to be having any effect as yet. By Year 9 the pupils have made satisfactory progress from a low base of skills and knowledge on entry to the school. They have learned to describe and compare different places but the written work demanded of them is too superficial for them to develop higher order analysis skills. They can use an atlas effectively to locate places and have learned to use co-ordinates but much of the map and diagram work in their books is poorly presented. Overall, work is characterised by weakness in literacy skills, though the teaching does attempt to remedy this by emphasising key words and practising reading at every opportunity. Much of this weakness can be attributed to the pupils' previous level of attainment but the fact that it continues through to Year 9 is due to the very low proportion of curriculum time provided in Years 7 to 9 for geography and the cyclic organisation of the humanities lessons which makes it difficult for teachers to maintain continuity of subject topics. In addition to these difficulties, some lessons in these year groups suffer from too much teacher direction. For example, one Year 7 group spent more than half a lesson watching a video with the apparent objective of filling in word gaps on pre-written paragraphs, instead of being able to discuss and think about what they were being shown. There is also good practice, for example the use of mind maps to stimulate thinking, and a Year 9 lesson where two speakers from Brazil contributed to effective learning, as well as the pupils' social, moral and cultural development, by explaining their work with street children.

116. With a better allocation of time, good teaching and very positive attitudes, pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 and much value is added to their attainment from the end of Year 9. Year 10 pupils have developed the skills of collecting and analysing data, shown through their fieldwork on Dartmoor. Year 11 pupils understand well the effects that people have on the environment and some of the causes and effects of global warming. A high standard of coursework is being produced. The standard of teaching in these year groups is characterised by good planning that ensures continuity of learning and development of thinking skills. An emphasis on spiritual and social development is an improvement made since the previous inspection report. For example, Year 10 pupils discussing their fieldwork on Dartmoor commented on the spirituality of the experience of standing in an ancient stone circle and viewing the surrounding landscape.

117. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory in all year groups because they are known to teachers who give them additional help where possible and liaise well with support assistants where these are present; however, special work appropriate to their needs is

not always well used, though the department has made an effort to provide it. Pupils in one Year 10 group studying the newly-introduced leisure and tourism GCSE were struggling to make progress because the high proportion with special educational needs made it impossible for the teacher to give them the individual attention that they needed. Gifted pupils are not individually identified in teaching groups and there is no evidence on their progress.

118. The quality of teaching is good overall with no unsatisfactory lessons, which is an improvement on the last inspection. It is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 where the lack of challenge frequently limits learning. This last point was made on in the previous report and has only partially been improved. While marking is up to date, it is often cursory and does not give pupils enough guidance on how to improve their work. Development of literacy is built into almost all lessons and numeracy is taught in the form of graphs and co-ordinates. The use of ICT is planned in the schemes of work but is more often seen in the work of Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. The pupils' attitudes are very good. The majority of pupils in all lessons work well and no poor behaviour was seen.
119. Good leadership and management ensure that an experienced and enthusiastic team is committed to improvement in the subject. All documentation is in place and provision is constantly under review. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good overall. New schemes of work are being written for Years 7 to 9, designed to provide lessons at three levels: foundation, core and extension. Assessment and tracking of pupil progress are well established and could now be used to examine and narrow the gap in attainment between boys and girls.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Good teaching helps pupils to raise their achievement.
- The pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- At the end of Years 9 and 11 standards in lessons are below those expected nationally.
- The proportion of A* - C GCSE grades is below average.
- Achievement is constrained by shortage of curriculum time in Years 7 – 9, and by lack of textbooks to take home in Years 10 and 11.

120. In GCSE examinations the proportion of A*-C grades has been below average for the past three years, but they match those in similar schools, are better than in the majority of other subjects, and in 2001 the pupils entered for history did better in this subject than in the average of all their other subjects. All pupils have passed for the last three years. There is no consistent pattern in differences between boys' and girls' attainment.
121. In lessons and work by Year 9 seen (end of Key Stage 3), standards are below those expected nationally, but progress is satisfactory. The pupils enter Year 7 with below average skills in reading and writing, and with a very variable background in history. For example, below average understanding of chronology was seen in one Year 7 lesson, where many pupils struggled to grasp the span from 1500 to the present day. By the end of Year 9, pupils are making satisfactory progress, although work is still below the expected standards. The pupils understand the importance of dates in relation to change. They know and understand why change occurs, for example some of the reasons for the First World War. They appreciate the conditions of life in the trenches. Above average pupils distinguish between short and long-term causes and try to evaluate sources. Most use some technical terms. Below average pupils have difficulty in developing ideas in their writing. Written work is well organised, enabling the pupils to understand links and connections. The low allocation of curriculum time, amounting to about a third of the

suggested minimum over three years, affects the consolidation of knowledge and the opportunities for extended writing.

122. By Year 11 (end of Key Stage 4), the pupils make good progress but still do not quite reach the expected standards in lessons and examinations. At the end of Year 11, pupils understand the significance of change, for example how medicine was revolutionised when it was realised that diseases had natural causes. Knowledge is not generally deep and revision skills are now being emphasised by more frequent tests. Above average pupils evaluate and use evidence well to support arguments. For example, they show the bias inherent in German and English reporting of casualties in the Plymouth blitz. Below average pupils find discussion of sources difficult and make brief and simple judgements. The ability to organise written work, developed in Year 9, enables pupils to obtain their best marks in coursework, which they all complete. Developing ideas fully in writing under examination conditions is difficult for many. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others in all years.
123. The quality of teaching is generally good, more consistently so in Years 10 and 11. This encourages the pupils' interest and helps them to behave well. The teachers' objectives are clearly explained at the beginning and planning ensures that they are carried out. Pupils in a Year 7 class, quite unused to group work, settled down quickly because seating, materials and groups were all pre-planned. Teachers use a variety of methods to stimulate interest so that pupils can assimilate knowledge. In a lower Year 9 set, pupils learned about life in the trenches by playing a board game based on First World War battles. This effectively reinforced the textbook chapter. Homework is set regularly and marking is thorough.
124. The pupils understand from the praise and critical guidance on assessed work and GCSE essays how to improve their skills and understanding. The teachers are very aware of the need to teach basic skills. In all lessons, the meaning of technical and less familiar words is checked and explained so that pupils learn to use specialised phrases. Spelling and other mistakes are carefully corrected and writing frames encourage more detail. Numeracy is well taught; for example, in Year 10 lessons on hyper- inflation in Germany in the 1920's, pupils grasped the impact on German currency and exchange rates. The use of ICT is encouraged and is part of one topic each year. In some classes, the ability range is very wide despite setting. Teachers need to match work to individual abilities more closely.
125. The shortage of curriculum time is a significant constraint. It limits a wider perspective on some units of study. The department has enriched the curriculum by inviting speakers on the Plymouth blitz and the Holocaust. A local group enacts the roles of medieval knights. As at the last inspection, there are too few visits to relevant places of interest. The lack of textbooks to take home curtails revision and reading beyond the requirements of the lesson. The acting head of department is conscientious and methodical in approach. The teachers work well together and are committed to pupils, ready to help them at break and lunchtime. Improvements in teaching and progress in the pupils' work in Years 10 and 11 since the last inspection have been satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **satisfactory** in Years 7 and 9 and for pupils who take GNVQ ICT in Years 10 and 11. The use of ICT by pupils in Year 8 and in some subjects is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- ICT lessons in Years 7 and 9 and GNVQ ICT lessons are well taught.
- The monitoring and assessment of pupils in taught ICT courses are good.
- Discrete ICT lessons are well planned and have good resources.
- The use of ICT in the art and music departments is good.
- The school website enables pupils to use the school's learning resources at home.

Areas for improvement

- In Year 8 there is no systematic development of ICT skills either in discrete lessons or by planned provision in subject schemes of work.
- The use of ICT to enhance subject learning is inadequate in several subjects.

126. Standards in lessons and the work seen in Years 7 and 9 match the expectations for this age group. Pupils in Year 7 have made good progress since beginning their ICT course. In one lesson where pupils were developing their skills in desktop publishing, most were able to combine text and images to good effect and include appropriate headings using different fonts and effects. Progress and attainment in Year 9 are at least satisfactory and often good. In a Year 9 class pupils discussed different ways of producing web pages using specialist software. By the end of the lesson, several pages had been planned by most pupils, who had also used the Internet effectively to find suitable resources.
127. In Year 8, there are no timetabled ICT lessons. This is a policy entirely within the school's discretion, although it is at odds with the national Key Stage 3 strategy. The school has not, however, undertaken the necessary planning to ensure that the development of specific skills that the pupils would have learned in discrete ICT lessons in Year 8 have been included in subject schemes of work. It has no means of ensuring that Year 8 pupils make the required progress in their learning of ICT skills in a planned, systematic way.
128. The ICT curriculum has improved in Years 10 and 11 where pupils can now opt to take GNVQ ICT at Intermediate Level. In 2001, for the first time, a small group of pupils were entered for GNVQ Intermediate ICT and results were encouraging, with over a quarter of those entered achieving merit grades. Girls performed better than boys. Because of timetable constraints, some lessons take place after school. Attendance at these lessons during the inspection was good. Pupils are making good progress because of good teaching and the very positive attitude which they have towards the subject. Attainment in lessons and other work seen was at least satisfactory in Year 10 and often good in Year 11, despite the fact that the time available is below that recommended for the course. Pupils on the GNVQ course can use ICT with confidence for word processing and desktop publishing. By Year 11 skills in the use of spreadsheets and databases are developing well. Pupils can combine different ICT applications to good effect when producing coursework.
129. Throughout the school the use of ICT in lessons varies greatly between subjects. Overall it is inadequate. Opportunities for using ICT in art and music are good but they are unsatisfactory in mathematics and modern foreign languages and in geography at Key Stage 3. The use of computers to aid design and manufacturing should be increased in design and technology. In science more opportunities should be provided to use ICT for measuring changes during practical work. In the sixth form, students have optional time-tabled opportunities to develop appropriate ICT skills, but development of this key skill is not guaranteed for all. In all discrete ICT lessons, pupils with different needs and abilities are catered for appropriately through targeted support and very good resources produced within the ICT department. Resources for all ICT courses are available to pupils through the school computer network and via the Internet for pupils working at home. For the GNVQ course, a CD Rom is available for pupils who do not have Internet access at home.
130. Teaching in ICT lessons is good. Activities are well planned and resources are often very good. A brisk pace is a frequent feature and in many lessons pupils are selected to work very effectively with the teacher when demonstrating software to the class. In one ICT room, however, poor positioning of the projector limited the impact of this technique and the absence of window blinds impaired the visibility of some computer screens when the sun shone. Pupils respond very well in most lessons and are keen to produce a good standard of work, particularly in after-school GNVQ sessions. Pupils use the Internet and school intranet effectively, although a minority in Years 10 and 11 need to ensure that they remain focussed upon their school work during Internet activities. Good assessment procedures are in place and pupils know how well they are achieving in ICT lessons, particularly in the GNVQ course where assessment criteria are frequently discussed during lessons.
131. The ICT department is effective and standards in ICT courses are rising. The recently introduced GNVQ course has broadened the scope of the ICT curriculum at Key Stage 4. Progress in Year 8

has been compromised this year because cross-curricular provision does not compensate for the loss of the taught ICT course in the development of ICT skills. The use of ICT in subjects has recently been audited in detail. This information needs to be used to ensure that all pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop and use their ICT skills.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

French and Spanish

Strengths

- Good plans exist for the development of assessment procedures with documentation in place for French.
- The pupils behave well in most lessons.
- Classrooms are brightly decorated with key words highly visible on the walls.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' motivation needs to be improved by raising teachers' expectations and increasing the level of challenge in lessons.
- The target language should be used as the normal means of communication in lessons.
- Assessment should be used to help pupils to obtain greater understanding of their learning needs, set targets for themselves and gain independence from their teacher.
- All aspects of teaching, including marking need to be monitored and evaluated in order to guarantee adherence to policies, consistency of practice and improvement.
- Working with the ICT department to make use of the opportunities offered by new technology will motivate pupils and enable them to achieve.
- Work with teachers and support assistants in the special needs department needs to occur in order to plan more effective learning activities and resources.

132. Compared with national levels of attainment, standards were particularly weak in 2001 when there were very few A*-C grades and very high numbers of G grades, especially amongst boys in Spanish. They have risen in 2002 with a return to the levels achieved in 2000 in French and a smaller improvement in Spanish, but are still below the national average and the results in other subjects at the school. The pupils entered for French and Spanish in 2001 did worse in both subjects than in the average of all their other subjects. There was little difference between the performance of girls and boys, though the relative performance of girls was slightly better than that of boys in Spanish and worse in French.

133. Progress made in lessons is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, but is unsatisfactory overall. Many pupils express the view that they are not good at languages as if to explain their reluctance to undertake tasks and exercises that they perceive as difficult. In several lessons, their teachers responded by providing more support to make the work simpler, but this often made pupils feel it was too easy and therefore unworthy of their effort. Pupils tried hard when the tasks captured their imagination and seemed relevant, no matter how difficult they were. For example, a group of pupils in Year 11 watched some authentic Spanish television advertisements with interest and enjoyed the challenge of working out which products they promoted.

134. Pupils with special educational needs did well when they received support, and examples were seen where appropriate help was provided either by the teacher through supplementary resources or by a suitably briefed teaching assistant; however, language teachers do not hold planning meetings with the teaching assistants and therefore miss an opportunity both to improve pupils' learning and to share their own workload. An after-school club has been planned to provide additional challenge and support for high-attaining pupils, but none attended the session scheduled for inspection week. Some teachers provide additional tasks requiring greater independence, but this practice is not followed consistently in all lessons.

135. Teaching in French and Spanish is unsatisfactory overall, but some good teaching was seen. Expectations are too low and pupils hardly ever work independently of their teacher. The concept of project work is mentioned, appropriately, in the departmental handbook, but it does not take place. The policy on marking in the handbook is well written and clear, but some teachers do not put it into practice consistently and it is not monitored. The sections on teaching styles contain good guidance, including the importance of using the target language as much as possible; however, one of the principal weaknesses of the teaching is that this approach in particular is under-used.
136. Classes are well disciplined and pupils conform to their teachers' high expectations of behaviour. In most lessons, pupils concentrate on the learning activities, follow instructions and respond to their teachers' demands, participating in pair and group activities when asked. In one of the good lessons, pupils were very interested in aspects of Spanish culture, presented by their teacher, relating to festivals and saints' days. They listened carefully and could understand elementary phrases spoken in Spanish at normal speed. They also learned to generate their own phrases without reading from a course book or notes.
137. Tests in French are accompanied by details of the attainment levels represented by each component, but this work has not yet been completed for Spanish. Parents receive an annual report showing their children's attainment levels and pupils transfer the data into their planners. Work has started within the department to make pupils aware of their levels of attainment so they can set targets for themselves, but it is still at an early stage of development. Pupils are placed in sets, depending on how well they achieve in termly tests, but pupils in a Year 9 Spanish class did not know which level of attainment they had reached or how they could improve.
138. Not enough published resources are available. Pupils cannot take course books home and in some larger classes there are not enough copies for everyone. ICT resources are available in school, but they are not used in language learning, thus denying pupils access to a source of information and motivation.
139. The department's approach to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is satisfactory. When pupils compared the celebration of religious festivals, they were led, through skilful teaching, to a deeper understanding of the breadth of experience the world has to offer. All lessons are conducted within a clear moral framework. One good example was seen of a lesson in which pupils quickly reached a consensus that they condemned discriminatory practices, such as racism and sexism. Pupils respect each other and socialise within the language lessons through working in groups or pairs. Cultural similarities and differences between Britain and Europe are contrasted in a manner that increases pupils' respect for people with different backgrounds.
140. Leadership and management within the department are unsatisfactory, with tolerance of inconsistencies of approach by teachers and low expectations in lessons, leading to a lack of challenge to pupils and below average attainment. A strength of the leadership is that there is a thorough and well-written departmental handbook containing sound policies, advice and guidance on important issues such as how pupils learn, inclusion, differentiation and teaching styles. The need is for these to be implemented.
141. A development plan has been written with priorities for improvement that are appropriate, but not sufficient, as they include no action aimed directly at improving teaching. The department's approach to performance management includes provision for lesson observations, but last year only two internal observations were held and an observation form completed for only one. An external observation took place, but so far no action has been planned to deal with the priority identified, which was to increase use of the target language. There is not yet a shared commitment to improvement by the teachers in the department. Meetings are held once a month, but staff feel that they lack time to discuss improvements to teaching. There is currently no clear strategy within the department for diagnosing weaknesses and following up with focused monitoring, evaluation and review of teaching, including marking.

142. Little progress has been made overall since the last inspection and in certain respects the department has slipped backwards. The proportion of teaching rated as satisfactory or good has fallen and lessons are not conducted in the target language.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The accommodation and resources are good.
- Instrumental teaching is very good or excellent.
- Some excellent extra-curricular activities take place.

Areas for improvement

- Standards need to be raised in both key stages by providing consistently good teaching.
- Regular monitoring and formal evaluation of teaching and learning to promote the raising of standards should take place.
- The assessment policy needs to be extended to influence curriculum planning.
- The development of vocal and instrumental teaching should offer a broader range of challenge to the more musically able pupils.
- A broader range of music in extra-curricular activities, including instrumental ensembles and choral work should be offered.

143. The unsatisfactory provision for music is largely due to the unsatisfactory standard of teaching and learning caused by frequent changes of teachers since the last inspection.
144. In the 2001 GCSE examination, the percentage of students obtaining A*-C grades was well below the national average. In the 2002 GCSE examination the percentage of students obtaining A*-C grades improved, but results were still below the national average. These results show the impact of frequent changes in music staff, and the need to use supply staff for the last five years. For some of the pupils the results achieved in music were their highest grades, and they also show an improvement on the expected results based on their performance at the end of Year 9.
145. Standards in Year 9 (end of Key Stage 3) are still below average. The pupils arrive in Year 7 with a wide variety of musical experiences, and the fluctuations in staffing at Estover have resulted in no improvement in standards.
146. In work seen in Years 10-11 standards are generally below average. In a Year 10 lesson the pupils made their preference for a practical lesson clear, becoming unco-operative when they realised that they were expected to participate in a composition lesson. Standards in Year 11 are more in line with expectations for this stage in their course. Some of the compositions realised using ICT were of a good standard.
147. Attitudes and behaviour in music lessons in all year groups are mostly satisfactory, but in a third of the lessons observed in Years 7-9 this was not the case, as a result of lack of challenge and pace and ineffective class management. The Year 10 class has still to realise the need for personal commitment when studying a subject at GCSE and to make the most of all the opportunities offered. In the remaining lessons at Key Stage 4 the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good or better. The pupils enjoy the subject, are actively involved in practical work and rise to the teacher's expectations.
148. Teaching overall is unsatisfactory, although some improvement was noted during the inspection week, and a majority of lessons were successful with almost a half of those being very good. In these lessons the pupils were always totally absorbed in the subject, with the teacher's control and high expectations ensuring that little time was wasted. Planning for these lessons caters for the needs of a large majority of the pupils, with the teacher's knowledge of the subject and enthusiasm making a big contribution to the pupils' learning. Nonetheless, the provision for the more musically able pupils requires more rigour. In contrast, in the unsuccessful lessons very little learning took place as a result of the slow pace and lack of expectation or challenge resulting in the pupils quickly losing interest. Under these circumstances the teacher resorts to talking over the pupils' chatter even when dismissing the class at the end of the lesson.

149. Since the last inspection and following a succession of assistant or supply teachers, the college has appointed a new curriculum leader who started last September. She and the original head of department, who has taken up responsibility for the community side of the subject, are striving to reverse the downward trend in standards which has inevitably taken place as a consequence of the instability in staffing. The present scheme of work offers a wide range of learning opportunities, but does not adequately outline the very good use of ICT possible in some lessons. The use of assessment is satisfactory and good use of target setting occurs in some lessons, but the assessment policy gives no indication of how assessment will be used to affect lesson planning. No monitoring and formal evaluation of teaching has taken place since the beginning of the year. 120 students take a variety of instrumental lessons at the college, with the standard of teaching contributing to the excellent standard of some of the percussion-based ensembles.
150. There is a limited number of traditional extra-curricular music activities. A growing number of percussion bands have been developed, some of them achieving international recognition for excellent standards which have resulted in performances for the Queen's Jubilee at Buckingham Palace, the Commonwealth Games and outstanding performances at the Notting Hill Carnival. These and their feeder groups attract many pupils who revel in the vibrancy and sense of musical pleasure that these performances create.
151. During this period the college has funded and built a new performing arts block that was opened at the beginning of this academic year. Money for the resources for this multi-purpose building has been raised from the surrounding community as well as by pupil fund-raising. Plans are in place to increase the existing collaboration with primary schools in the area and set up subject specialist tutor groups. The department is now excellently equipped to meet the challenge of raising academic standards and developing the more traditional vocal and instrumental tuition and associated performance groups, providing discipline can be improved in some classes.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The leaders of the subject have a very strong commitment to improvement and success.
- Teaching and learning are good; the teachers plan lessons using a range of activities that allow all groups of pupils to learn well.
- The very good extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for all pupils to extend their learning.
- Relationships in lessons help to create good learning environments.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results, particularly the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades need to be raised.
- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is currently insufficient.
- A subject base for the teaching of examination classes should be provided.
- Curricular links with partner primary schools need to be strengthened.

152. Standards in this department are above average throughout the school except for the most recent GCSE results. In the 2001 sports studies examination, the proportion of the 41 entrants gaining grades A*-C was below the national average. Results in the 2002 examination are similar to those achieved in 2001. The pupils entered for sports studies in 2001 did worse in this subject than in the average of all their other subjects. High-attaining pupils, including the talented, achieve well in a range of sports at city, county and sometimes national levels. Pupils achieve particularly well in basketball, netball and football.
153. Standards in lessons and observed work by Year 9 pupils matched national expectations and showed good improvement from work in Year 7; most pupils are achieving well. They understand

health and fitness aspects, make effective use of individual and team skills, and evaluate performance well. The teachers' knowledge of the subject is very good and enables the pupils to make considerable gains in their understanding of technique, tactics, rules and fitness. This was very evident in a Year 9 gymnastics lesson where pupils of all different abilities made good progress, because the teacher planned work that was appropriate for all levels of attainment. Lower-attaining pupils progressed well, because the teacher modified the apparatus, simplified tasks and used demonstrations. The standards of a small minority are well-below average. Their poor levels of skill, hand-eye co-ordination and body control restrict progress. Higher-attainers show good tactical awareness in games and plan sequences of movement well in gymnastics; their learning is accelerated through extension tasks in lessons. Learning was not as good in a few lessons, when teaching was more prescriptive and pupils were given fewer opportunities to explore their own ideas. Learning is enhanced by good relationships in lessons. Pupils in all years show satisfactory standards of literacy and numeracy. They accurately measure and record performance and use scoring systems well. Teachers emphasise key words and are adept in their use of questioning. These approaches improve the pupils' technical vocabulary, speaking skills and ability to listen. The subject provides few opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills.

154. Standards in lessons and observed work by Year 11 pupils (end of Key Stage 4) are above national expectations. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 because of good specialist teaching, featuring very good subject knowledge, planning and management skills. In a Year 10 dance lesson, the teacher provided opportunities for pupils to choreograph and perform their own routines, evaluate performance and plan improvements. Higher-attaining pupils use well-refined skills and tactics to outmanoeuvre opponents; their learning is accelerated by their participation in extra-curricular sport. Most pupils understand the main components of fitness and apply their knowledge of attacking and defensive tactics in games. The standards of a small minority are below average. They understand basic rules and tactics, but poor levels of hand-eye co-ordination and spatial awareness hinder their progress. A relatively small minority of Year 11 pupils participate in GCSE sports studies; they often perform well in the practical aspects, but most show a below-average understanding of the main theoretical concepts. The learning of a few pupils is affected by poor levels of concentration. Year 10 pupils participating in the newly introduced GCSE dance course are making very good progress; the excellent dance studio and very good specialist teaching create a stimulating learning environment. Most pupils' language and number skills are sound, but ICT is not used sufficiently. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and those who are talented achieve very well.
155. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The curriculum leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success and is ably supported by a dedicated team of specialists. Good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve standards. Assessment systems are good and used effectively to monitor the pupils' progress and to guide curricular planning. The department liaises well with the library; pupils have access to up-to-date reference material. The subject makes a good contribution to the pupils' moral, social and cultural development.
156. Much has improved since the last inspection. GCSE sports studies and dance have been introduced. The standards of teaching have been raised; all lessons observed were at least good and a significant number were very good. Resources have improved and independent learning opportunities now feature in most lessons. Standards in Year 10 and Year 11 are now good. In order to continue to improve, the department needs to increase the use of ICT to support teaching and learning, improve GCSE results, develop curricular links with partner primary schools and secure a subject base for GCSE theory work.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Much of the teaching is good or excellent.
- GCSE results are above the national average with a larger entry than in most schools.
- Basic skills, including thinking, are developed well in religious education lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient time is allocated to the subject in Years 7-9 and in the sixth form to enable the local Agreed Syllabus to be followed in full.
- More visitors from non-Christian faiths are needed to cover the syllabus.

157. Standards of attainment and progress in Year 11 show a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. Results at A*-C grades in GCSE religious studies show an improvement from 30% in 2001 to 72% in 2002. In 2002 all pupils were entered for the GCSE short course, and the A*-C grades of 54% were a very good improvement on the previous 41% in 2001. The pupils entered for religious education in 2001 did better in this subject than in the average of all their other subjects.
158. Current pupils in Year 10 are now studying a new GCSE course, *Citizenship, Culture and Ethics*, which is a very good opportunity to enable pupils to obtain a full GCSE in religious studies and an excellent development for the department.
159. Standards and achievement at Key Stage 3 are very good overall, with several examples of excellent teaching. The strengths of teaching include excellent subject knowledge, which enables pupils to be challenged not only to explain their answers, but also to give depth to their reasoning. This also reflects an excellent balance between the two attainment targets in the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Agreed Syllabus. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on Buddhism, the pupils made excellent progress when they considered the philosophy that desire or craving leads to suffering, and they discussed the impact of this philosophy on their own lives.
160. In Year 8, pupils learn about denominational differences within the Christian church and are encouraged to understand the significance of belief in shaping history. Good use of resources, such as high quality videos and differentiated worksheets, allow all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to make progress. Other factors promoting good levels of work and progress include excellent class discipline, with consistent strategies for each stage of the lesson. Regular quizzes, involving the revision of facts connected not only to the current topic but also with the subject generally, engender a purposeful atmosphere.
161. Pupils in Year 10 consider the significance of the crucifixion for Christians and the concept of forgiveness, both 2000 years ago and in the present day. The very good range of teaching strategies includes thinking skills, which promote the learning of all pupils but particularly improve boys' learning. Teachers have the highest possible expectations of both behaviour and learning. Lessons are briskly paced and tasks provide pupils with fresh challenges at regular intervals. Pupils are motivated and engaged because of the variety and structure.
162. There has been considerable progress since the previous report. The department now has three subject specialists. The initiatives that have taken place since the previous inspection are extensive and include cross-curricular work with the art department. Reporting of attainment at the end of Year 11 has been instituted and there has been an improvement in the provision of religious education in the sixth form through the general studies programme and an annual day conference; however, this still does not meet the recommended twenty hours a year, especially in Year 12, as recommended in the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

163. The subject is excellently managed. The level of planning, detail and presentation of lesson plans is of a very good standard, which is supportive of both specialists and non- specialists. Regular training and support are given to staff and they are supported by a good range of resources in the form of textbooks, videos, visits to places of worship and visitors, which particularly enriches the teaching of Christianity.
164. There are some steps that will enable even more improvement to be made. The organisation of religious education within a humanities cycle at Key Stage 3 means that the time allocated is four per cent, which is lower than the five per cent recommended by the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Agreed Syllabus. The impact of this on standards is that pupils do not have sufficient time for pieces of extended writing, or for longer discussions and debates on ultimate life questions. The flexibility to develop a 14-18 curriculum will be restricted in religious education if there is an insufficient time allocation. There will need to be a wider range of visitors to enrich the teaching of faiths other than Christianity, using the resources and facilities of the Plymouth multi-cultural centre, which is an excellent city initiative.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002; results have improved significantly in 2002

N.B. In several subjects, Estover students learned in groups that were made up of students from two or three schools in a consortium and which were therefore much larger than the numbers shown below.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	4	50	52	0	2	0.75	0.79
Geography	1	100	n/a	0	n/a	2.0	n/a
Sociology	1	100	63	0	7	2.00	1.17
Psychology	4	25	n/a	0	n/a	0.25	1.47
General studies	37	73	n/a	3	n/a	1.4	n/a
English literature	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	1.5	n/a
Physics	1	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	0.9

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics A Level	3	100	87	0	43	2.00	5.80
Biology A Level	3	33	88	0	34	1.33	5.25
Physics A Level	1	100	88	0	40	4.00	5.67
Design and technology A Level	3	100	91	33	30	4.67	5.38
Home Economics A Level	4	75	83	25	28	3.5	4.73
Business studies A Level	13	77	92	0	32	3.38	5.50
Business studies AVCE	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.00	10.45
Leisure and tourism AVCE	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.00	10.06
Health and social care AVCE	9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13.33	10.79
Art and design A Level	17	94	96	12	46	4.47	6.57
Art and design AVCE	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.00	12.24
Media studies A Level	7	100	93	43	31	6.57	5.53
Performing arts AVCE	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18.00	9.14

Geography A Level	6	83	92	0	38	4.00	5.74
History A Level	2	100	88	0	35	4.00	5.45
Sociology A Level	4	0	86	0	35	0	5.32
Psychology A Level	9	89	87	22	34	4.89	5.30
English literature A Level	12	100	95	25	37	4.67	5.91

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	2	100		50		0	
Health and social care	2	100		0		0	
Art and design	3	100		33		33	
Performing arts	1	100		0		0	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching in Year 12 takes account of the wide range of students' prior attainment and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Students in Year 13 appreciate the tutorial approach to their lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Student insecurity with key algebraic skills hampers their progress in higher-level work.
- There is insufficient use of target setting to inform and guide student progress.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT.

165. There have been very small entries at both A and AS Level in recent years. In 2001 and 2002 there were only three candidates at A Level in each year, all of whom passed with one student reaching a grade A in 2002. The very small numbers entered renders national comparisons unsafe.

166. Sixth form students currently studying AS and A Level mathematics at the college comprise one group of thirteen students in Year 12 and one group of two students in Year 13. There is also a GCSE resit group in Year 12, but it was not possible to observe this group during the inspection, nor was any student work from this group available for scrutiny.

167. Most Year 12 students commence their A Level studies having achieved a grade B at GCSE, although a small number of students start the course having achieved a grade C via the intermediate tier of study. Whilst the sixth form open access policy of the school is commendable, it is apparent that some mathematics students experience particular difficulties with algebraic manipulation. Teachers are careful to check required background skills when

tackling new topics, but even in Year 13 it is apparent that some students' progress is still hampered by their limited grasp of algebraic manipulation.

168. Teaching in Year 12 is lively, motivating and well paced, with clear explanations of the steps involved. The students are interested, engaged and determined to succeed. They work together well providing mutual peer support, and are encouraged to make decisions for themselves regarding the number and level of examples that they need to tackle. In consequence their work is well focused and they make good progress, albeit from a sometimes low baseline.
169. Teaching in Year 13 adopts a tutorial style that is entirely appropriate for such a small group, and the students appreciate this informality. The students are well supported and teachers ensure that the learning of processes and routines is firmly rooted in context and purpose. The students' work provided for scrutiny was limited in scope and depth, and of insufficient quantity to make secure judgments of achievement in the longer term. Furthermore, some ungraded outcomes in earlier module examinations indicate that progress is less than should be expected. Within lessons, largely because of the small group size, there is little sense of energy or momentum and very little interaction between students. For example, in one lesson the quotient rule for differentiation was derived entirely by the teacher, and students then tackled examples without reference to each other.
170. Whilst teaching in lessons is at least satisfactory, student learning could be enhanced by the integration of a broader range of approaches. At present there is no element of independent study beyond the comparison of iterative techniques and solutions required for examined coursework. Critical evaluation, research and analysis should lie at the heart of A Level work, and the department needs to investigate ways to incorporate these elements into schemes of work to help prepare students for their studies after moving to higher education. As in the main school, there is little use of ICT to support mathematics teaching. The place and value of symbolic manipulation devices and graph plotting and calculus software need to be recognized and their use integrated into courses.
171. The marking of the students' written work is satisfactory and offers useful pointers to errors made and opportunities missed; however, longer-term assignments and individual target setting are not regular features. A more explicit declaration of what needs to be learned, which are the best learning resources, and when the work should be undertaken would help the students to take on greater responsibility for the management of their learning.
172. The management of sixth form provision in mathematics is satisfactory, and the contributing staff work together well. The approaches to teaching and the use of resources would benefit from review, and the introduction of target setting would boost the students' development of their study skills and responsibility for their own learning.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject.
- The subject is well managed.
- There is good monitoring of progress and support for students.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient co-ordination between different staff teaching the subject.
- Expertise needs to be shared with less experienced teachers.
- The take-up of the subject, particularly by higher-attaining students is currently too low.

173. The small number of students entered for both A Level and AS Level is too small to make reliable comparisons with national averages. In 2001 only three students took the A Level examination

and one took AS Level. In the only recent year (2000) in which the number of entries was sufficiently large for national comparisons to be made, the results were above the national average and the students' performance in biology was similar to their performance in the other subjects that they took. The A Level results for 2002 were an improvement on those for 2001 but the AS Level results in 2002 were below those of 2001. Since the numbers are so small, it is not possible to comment on trends in the results, or on differences between the attainment of male and female students. The results of individual students are generally in line with what would be expected in relation to the GCSE grades they gained.

174. The standards of work of current students are average, both in the lessons seen and also in their written work. The students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course but they are making the progress that would be expected on the basis of their GCSE results. They have good practical skills and the highest attaining students have good knowledge and understanding of the work that they have covered in the past. They are able to give well thought-out answers to challenging questions on their work on cytology and respiration. The other students in Year 12 are not as sure of previous work and are consequently reluctant to ask and answer questions. This difficulty is overcome when the teacher skilfully involves all the students in questioning to check their understanding. The students in Year 13 are also making appropriate progress. The group is very small. They have very good attitudes to work in the lessons, although they do not all have good attendance. They have good knowledge of their work on electron transport and are able to understand the mechanism of the Krebs Cycle. They also have good knowledge of the work that they have covered on genetics and are able to do calculations using the Hardy-Weinberg equation. They are less sure when asked to explain phenomena associated with inheritance. The students in both years have appropriate skills in number and language to cope with work at this level.
175. The quality of teaching is good overall in both years. The teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and they plan lessons that have clear objectives and are challenging and interesting. This helps to motivate the students and encourages them to have good attitudes to their work. As a result, the students' learning is effective and they make appropriate progress. For example, a lesson on respiration with Year 12 students included a variety of teaching methods and was well focused on the requirements of the examination syllabus. This kept the students interested and gave them a clear idea of what they need to achieve in order to improve their grades.
176. Four teachers share the teaching of Years 12 and 13 and they each take responsibility for their own units of work. There are no arrangements for teachers to share their expertise with each other or for more experienced teachers to observe and support the work of less experienced colleagues. This happens informally but could be improved in order to ensure that the students all get the full benefit of the considerable experience within the department.
177. The biology course is well managed and the teacher in charge has produced a very useful course guide that sets out the requirements of the syllabus. The teachers are committed to improving standards and they monitor the students' progress well in order to set targets for improvement. There is sufficient specialist equipment, including computers, to teach the course effectively and all the students have textbooks. Students are often required to use computers in the presentation of their work and also for personal research on the Internet.
178. The students make good progress in their learning because of the good teaching and effective support that they receive. Numbers opting for the subject have been low in recent years and some students have had grades at GCSE that make it difficult for them to attain good grades at A Level. In order to improve provision for the subject the school should take steps to improve the take-up of biology, particularly by the higher-attaining students.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- The range of staff expertise contributes to the breadth of the curriculum.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on industrial processes.
- The quality of the products which students design and make is good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of independent learning skills needs to be developed.
- The opportunities need to be increased for students to use analytical skills to develop their understanding of the processes and stages involved in the development of design ideas.
- The students should be involved in more structured assessment of their own progress.
- Standards at the higher levels in the AS course need to be raised.

179. Three students were entered for the A Level examination. Their performance was almost in line with national expectations but there were too few entries to make a valid judgement about these students' performance in design and technology in comparison with their other subjects. Of the eleven students who undertook the AS Level examination in 2002, about a fifth achieved the higher grades, half were assessed at grade E and the other candidates did not achieve a grade.

180. In work seen during the inspection, students are achieving standards at A and AS Level in line with that expected for their age. There are examples of high quality products. A desk accessory set designed for a local company showed skill and accuracy in the use of materials and components. The students are generally good at researching information to prepare their designs. The higher-ability students make good graphical representation of their design ideas. Coursework projects show the use of a range of methods to research, modify and develop ideas from direct analysis of existing products.

181. The students' response in written tasks is most successful when a structure is provided. They record information, analyse and apply this to practical contexts for product development; however, they need support to recall the significance of the knowledge when working on their individual coursework projects. In a food technology lesson, the students were developing their understanding of modified starch and gelatinisation. They were able to consider and explain the chemical reactions and discuss the effects of freezing, acid and sugar on the viscosity of gels. They explored the effects of whisking gels on their stability and linked all stages of the experiments and research activities to applications in the food industry. This enabled them to consider the possibilities for their next practical lesson to develop food products with specific characteristics.

182. The quality of teaching is very good and makes a strong impact on the quality of the products that the students design and make. The teachers work with individual students to review progress and to challenge them to justify their design decisions. The students are highly motivated by the teaching and quickly develop ways to improve their project work. The expertise and industrial experience of teachers were evident in all lessons observed. The teachers use skilful questioning to challenge design thinking which has a direct impact on the students' ability to modify and develop their ideas. The coaching of individual students includes demonstrations of the most successful approaches to handling materials. Technical competence in the teaching of key skills is evident when students record their designs.

183. The most successful methods to involve the students were evident in Year 13 lessons. When the students investigated how new technologies related to product development, the teacher demonstrated ways to explore the properties of polymorph material (a commercial plastic which

can be reduced to a mouldable condition by immersing in hot water). The students demonstrated very good diverse thinking when experimenting with the possibilities for new products based on polymorph. They were able to discuss key features, difficulties and successes, which led to a clear analysis of the possibilities for the use of this material. Year 13 students are developing their confidence in responding to the requirements of the coursework project. They are resourceful in their approach to using a range of resources and research strategies. In the lessons observed, Year 12 students would benefit from more active involvement through more independent research. This would increase their confidence in approaching the research and analysis of the design features of existing products.

184. The students have good attitudes to their work, show initiative in the more practical lessons and are willing to take responsibility for their learning. They are able to form constructive relationships with the teachers and each other and thus enhance the ethos of the learning environment.
185. The curriculum is generally of a good quality because students are provided with a well-structured series of teaching and learning activities that meet the requirements of the examination course syllabuses. The teachers stimulate and encourage a good degree of challenge to extend the students' thinking at pertinent points during the development and construction of products. Graphical representation of design ideas is most effective in Year 13, where students are encouraged to link their projects directly to industrial practices.
186. The subject is well led and managed. Teachers are deployed appropriately and are thoroughly committed to helping students to reach their full potential. To improve standards, the department needs to revise the schemes of work to include more opportunities for ICT activities, particularly computer aided design and manufacture. More independent learning activities should support the progress of the students and develop their ability to apply knowledge and understanding to the requirements of the written examination.

BUSINESS

Business education

Overall the quality of provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- There is a commitment by teachers to raise the status and standards of the subject.
- Teacher-student relationships are very good and produce a friendly working environment in lessons.
- The students' attitudes to the subject are very positive; they are well motivated and able to research topics to good effect.
- The assessment of student attainment and progress is thorough.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching and learning methods need to be regularly reviewed to ensure that lessons are stimulating and delivered in the most appropriate way.
- Lesson outcomes should always be evaluated to ensure that the students' knowledge of key concepts is secure.
- Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory for the effective teaching of courses.

187. Examination results have recently improved significantly. Those for A Level in 2001 were below the national average and this continued a falling trend in students' attainment over the previous three years. Students have not usually done as well in this subject compared to their other A Levels. The 2002 results indicate a significant improvement, with all six students entered gaining at least a D grade and two gaining the top grades (one A and one B). Results at AS Level were similarly good in 2002, with all six students passing and four gaining the top grades. The department also offers courses in the vocational A Level with two of the three students entered in 2001 gaining distinctions and progressing to university to study degrees in the subject.

188. Current students are achieving at least in line with national expectations, with two exhibiting excellent skills in analysis and evaluation of business issues. All students have a good understanding of basic business terms but need to be more accurate in using them when presented with written case studies and teacher questioning. In a good Year 12 class on the construction of cash flow statements, the teacher gave clear explanations using a digital projector and provided effective support and guidance to students, including those with special educational needs. As a consequence all pupils made progress and over half proceeded on to more difficult examples. Vocational A Level students were able to describe and explain extension strategies such as advertising and remodelling in a good Year 12 lesson on the product life cycle. One very good student gave a clear and authoritative explanation of the effects of litigation on market share and revenue in a Year 13 class.
189. The students have a positive attitude to the subject and as a consequence work conscientiously in and out of class and are appreciative of each other's contributions when working in groups. They are able to communicate effectively in discussions, use appropriate numerical concepts in their written work and are confident in the use of ICT for research. There are not enough opportunities for students, particularly the more able, to develop their presentational skills in lessons. Teaching overall is satisfactory; there were no unsatisfactory lessons observed but lessons often attempt to cover too much at the expense of reinforcing understanding of the key concepts which should be the focus of learning outcomes. There is a need for more self-evaluation of lessons as well as collaboration between the two knowledgeable teachers, for example in sharing best practice, to ensure that lessons are stimulating and use the most appropriate methods. This includes having a bigger emphasis on student-centred activities.
190. The head of department is committed to raising the status and standards of the department, for example by reviewing course content and delivery and actively marketing the qualifications offered. The assessment of the students' attainment and progress is thorough but this needs to be integrated more formally into lesson planning to ensure that activities meet the different needs of students. Accommodation and learning resources are unsatisfactory; there is a need to provide more appropriate teaching areas, including the use of dedicated departmental computers, as well as the use of more stimulating business specific resources such as videos and relevant computer software. The subject was not covered by the last inspection report.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Strengths

- The two co-ordinators of A Level physical education and the curriculum leader have a strong commitment to improvement and success.
- All teaching is by specialist teachers.
- The students are given good support and guidance.
- Students are offered a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Many sixth form students achieve well at city, county and sometimes national levels in a range of sports, particularly basketball, football and netball.

Areas for improvement

- Measures should be taken to raise the numbers of students following post-16 courses in physical education.
- Students should enhance their learning through increased use of ICT.
- Library resources for A Level students' private study are insufficient.

191. The college's first group of A Level physical education candidates - nine Year 12 students - will undertake the 2003 AS examination.
192. Students in Year 12 have made good progress since they started this year's AS course. They are achieving well. From the evidence seen on this inspection, the standards of most students are in line with national expectations. Their work files show improved planning and presentation skills, but only a small minority display extended writing skills. Year 12 students have a sound grasp of the theoretical work covered to date, such as skill acquisition and historical aspects. Most are able to apply their knowledge of fitness and training principles to the analysis and measurement of performance. A few students lack detailed knowledge of anatomy, physiology and the principles of training, mainly because they have no GCSE background in the subject. The teachers are well qualified and use methods and resources that meet the students' needs. In one class, the students examined the main differences between skill and ability. The teacher provided students with opportunities to research in small groups, to measure and record performance and analyse results. The students made good progress in this work. A few students are finding the change to sixth form study difficult and do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. The co-ordinators give good support and guidance by easing them into research and further reading. Some students use the Internet to research information, but ICT generally is underused. The students have satisfactory levels of numeracy and literacy. They use technical vocabulary well and their written work is satisfactory. Most are confident in their handling of number. Year 12 A Level and non-examination students develop good levels of personal performance through timetabled opportunities and extra-curricular sport.
193. The standards of Year 13 students, from the limited evidence (practical only) seen on the inspection, are above national expectations. Their work shows good improvement from standards in Year 12; they are achieving well. All sixth form students have a timetabled opportunity to take part in a wide range of sports, ranging from rock climbing to basketball. Sixth form matches against other colleges are held regularly, and several students help in the coaching of younger members of the college. The learning of Year 13 students is enhanced by good specialist teaching and facilities. Very knowledgeable teachers, often teaching in their own specialisms, provide high levels of technical input. Most students show good technique, can identify opposition strengths and weaknesses and change tactics appropriately. The college provides Year 12 and Year 13 students with extensive extra-curricular opportunities. Individuals and teams are successful at city, county and sometimes national levels, in a range of sports, particularly basketball, football and netball.
194. Sixth form physical education is well led and managed. The examination course is now established and good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve standards. Assessment systems are good and used effectively to monitor the students' progress and to set them targets. Learning resources for examination students are generally good, but the college library does not provide them with sufficient research material.
195. In order to make further improvements there is a need to raise the numbers of students undertaking post-16 examination courses, to increase the use of ICT to enhance learning and to provide better A Level library resources.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art

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

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently very good and occasionally excellent.
- The leadership of the department is excellent.
- Students are mature and committed.

- The curriculum is very broad and the balance between two and three-dimensional work is excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Examination data could be better analysed and used.
- Some aspects of accommodation, such as the leaking roofs and the ventilation for the darkroom require attention.

196. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades A-B in the A Level examination in 2001 was well below national averages and very low when compared with other subject results in the school. This was a significant fall from the previous year's results and well below the performance at the time of the previous inspection. With the new fast track courses and the arts college status now having an improving influence on the department, the 2001 results can be seen as a temporary setback for the students and staff. The results for 2002 are now back to 2000 levels. The very few students taking the Intermediate GNVQ examination in 2001 gained good results. The results for 2002 show a significant improvement, with one distinction and two merits gained by the three students. The new advanced vocational double award examination, the AVCE, was taken for the first time in 2002 with three of the four students gaining a double A. This was a significant improvement on the previous year and further confirmation of the strong upward trend recorded in evidence found during the inspection.
197. In work seen during the inspection attainment at age 18 is at least consistent with and often above national expectations. The evidence from portfolios and sketchbooks indicates exceptional achievement in some individual instances. There are currently three students aged 19 who have obtained high grades in AS and A Level examinations a year early, and who are currently working on the accredited Foundation Arts course, which the art department also manages. Students in Year 12 work confidently with ink on both wet and dry paper, exploring the wide textural and tonal ranges that are possible in the process. Students with special educational needs make the same very good progress as others in the classes. On occasions the progress of higher-attaining students is slowed down by the need for the teacher to address a very wide ability range during plenary sessions, but it is usual for students to work to the level of their abilities at a pace that is appropriate for them as individuals. Year 13 students understand the concept of abstraction, working confidently from observational studies, simplifying and re-building images as they go. Students who prefer to work in sculptural media experience difficulties in using acrylic paints for their supporting studies, but they are diligent and produce effective work, some with clear sculptural qualities in the painted forms. Some excellent annotation is found in sketchbooks and personal studies, showing the depth of research and the breadth of artists and art movements that are studied in advanced level courses. In one excellent lesson seen during the inspection, the demonstration of the basic skills used in painting with oil enabled students, who had never worked with oil paint before, to make very rapid progress in laying the basic areas of colour for their self-portraits, based on digital abstract images. Sculptural work is very impressive in the size and range of materials used. Sheet metal, wire, plaster, ceramic, thermalite and papier-mâché are amongst the materials used by students.
198. The students have a very high level of commitment to their studies, using much of their free study time to continue their coursework, often working in the department after school. They are mature and independent learners, frequently achieving beyond the teachers' expectations.
199. The quality of teaching is consistently very good and occasionally excellent. The teachers have an admirable knowledge and understanding, which enables them to teach confidently and with enthusiasm for their subject. Relationships are mature and positive, enabling an extremely constructive working environment to be established, in which students are able to discuss, research, argue and evaluate the work of a wide range of artists. The teachers have appropriately high expectations of the students and they use the high quality resources of the department very well, enhancing them with visiting artist workshops and visits to galleries, as well as running a department that is open every day after school. Trips to Spain and Paris are used to extend the artistic and cultural awareness of students.

200. The department benefits from the excellent leadership of a very strong team of teachers. The successful bid for arts college status has given a boost to the department that is carrying standards higher, as the very rich curriculum is explored by students in developing their personal studies and following their clear commitment to art. There is a separate studio available for the students, although most teaching is carried out in the main art rooms. Very good records of progress are kept, but the department needs to analyse examination results more rigorously to evaluate the impact of the curriculum on individual and group development. There is a need to upgrade the ventilation system in the dark room and to stop the potentially damaging leaks in the roof skylights. These are minor faults in an outstanding department.

Media studies

Overall, the quality of provision in media studies is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The teachers' subject knowledge is good.

Areas for improvement

- Students need to be clear about learning objectives lesson by lesson.
- Students' oral skills should be extended.

201. All students achieved passes in the lower grades (C-E) in the recent A Level examinations, following the pattern of recent years. Staying-on rates have been pleasing: all of those starting the course took a final examination. In 2002 two Year 13 students took AS Level media studies.

202. The number of students has been small for some years. The current arrangement whereby students from two local schools travel to attend lessons at Estover Community College has boosted the number of students significantly in Year 12, with lesser impact in Year 13. Travel arrangements mean that some visiting students have to leave the Year 12 lesson early in order to return to their own school, causing some disruption to the latter portion of the lesson for Estover students.

203. The students have a basic grasp of key concepts such as media institutions and visual language and can draw on prior learning to consolidate their understanding. They are attentive and sustain their concentration through lessons; several showed real enthusiasm for media studies. These students have good knowledge and understanding of media forms and conventions and speak with conviction about their insights into print media. Few students make the extended oral contributions in lessons which would help them to develop their thinking about abstract concepts and which is an essential aspect of the subject. In a Year 12 lesson students responded to detailed questioning by the teacher with answers often limited to one or two words. Students were unwilling to explain their reasoning or what underpinned their attitudes to media artefacts. When working in smaller groups the level of discussion was limited to brief and over-generalised comments; few students used an appropriate critical vocabulary with ease.

204. Teaching is good overall. The teachers draw on good subject knowledge and provide appropriately-chosen resources for lessons. In a Year 12 lesson the teacher had provided materials comparing tabloid newspaper front pages. Students were asked to compare formats and the ways in which the newspapers addressed their audiences. Whilst this was an appropriate selection of material, further exploitation of resources to include detailed reference to relevant conceptual frameworks is necessary if students are to make best progress. In a Year 13 lesson students were given helpful and detailed guidance on critical writing approaches for the final examination; the setting of short tasks and immediate feedback from the teacher provided clear goals for learning and maintained a brisk pace, which contributed to effective learning overall. Overall, students would benefit from a clearer view of learning objectives in lessons and from teaching that provides structured guidance in developing extended oral skills as a critical response to the media.

HUMANITIES

205. Geography was the main focus but lessons were also sampled in history. A carefully planned lesson Year 13 on Stalin's purges was taught very well and the students were achieving average standards.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards of teaching and learning are very good.
- The students' have excellent attitudes and relationships with teachers.
- Independent learning skills are fostered.

Areas for improvement

- There needs to be improved advice and guidance in order to raise the number of students choosing to study the subject.

206. In 2001 A Level results were below the national average though in previous years they have been above and well above, with average point scores significantly above the national average. Group sizes are always small, very small in some years, so statistical analysis is unreliable and results fluctuate from year to year. For the same reason there is no reliable trend in comparisons between male and female students' results. In 2002 four of the ten entrants did not attain the A Level grades that were expected of them. Four out of five AS Level students gained grades A or B, all above their expected grades, and all gained a pass grade.

207. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is satisfactory, maintaining but not exceeding the very high standards sets at the end of Year 11. Because of knowledgeable and well-planned teaching, students have become independent learners, basing much of their study on research and drawing their own conclusions. They use the Internet well, making their own searches and selecting information perceptively. In one lesson they were learning about the features of the earth's movements that lead to climate change, in preparation for using the Internet to research and discuss the most likely causes of global warming. Although only a few weeks into their course, Year 12 students have already honed the skills of collecting, interpreting and presenting data that they will shortly be using in their coursework studies. They used their background knowledge of longshore drift effectively to analyse the development of different kinds of land spits. Some didactic explanation still persists in some lessons but in others the teachers have become guides and facilitators, using discussion and marking well to ensure that students understand the standards they need to reach. One student whose first language is not English was seen to be making the same very good progress as his peers with discreet additional support from the teacher.

208. A travel and tourism AVCE course has been started this year to provide for students who have not reached the grade C at GCSE required to begin the AS Level course. This course is appropriate for students in an area where tourism forms a large proportion of the local economy. The four studying it in Year 12 are making very good progress in learning about the business structure of tour operators, again guided by knowledgeable and well-planned teaching.

209. Overall the standard of teaching and learning is very good, mainly as a result of the teachers' good management and high level of knowledge and enthusiasm. The students' attitudes are overwhelmingly positive and lessons are conducted in an atmosphere of good humour and good relationships that encourage high standards of learning. The students' progress is carefully monitored; all are known well to their teachers who give individual help and advice wherever it is needed. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with thinking and research skills better developed and the new AS and ACVE courses catering for a wider range of students. At present the number of students opting for these courses every year is low and in order to ensure that they remain viable, more students need to be attracted to geography.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, encouraging students to try hard and achieve well.
- Students co-operate very closely with teachers and prepare for lessons well.
- The subject is very well led and the number of students has doubled at AS Level this year.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at A Level are below average.
- Students need to develop their vocabulary more.

210. Standards achieved in A Level were below average in 2001. Results in 2002 are similar. The pattern of AS Levels in both years reflects the A Level pattern; however, the GCSE results of these students indicate that their attainment is in line with their potential.
211. The work seen during the inspection confirmed that the students' progress is now good. Their knowledge of the texts is good. They are familiar with characters, plot and theme. In Year 12, the students studying *Chaucer's Prologue* are still mainly concerned with language and meaning, but in Year 13, students reading *The Pardoner's Tale* understand something of Chaucerian background as well as the biblical and classical references. Students are ready to comment and discuss in all lessons, and in Year 13 are fully confident in explaining their opinions and giving reasons.
212. The students understand the terms of literary criticism and use these in discussion. Their written work shows their good understanding of the text, but their analysis and critical evaluation are generally less well developed. Their vocabulary and comprehension are not widely developed. When 'medley' was encountered in one lesson, students hesitated before linking it to a 'medley of tunes' and then to a wider context. In their personal enquiries, undertaken in both years, the students develop their own response to literature. ICT skills are used to research individual topics.
213. Much of the good progress of both AS and A Level students is the result of their very hardworking and co-operative attitudes. They come well prepared to lessons and their interest and enthusiasm is evident throughout. This response is fostered by the very good relationships with their teachers.
214. The quality of teaching is good, with some lessons that are very well taught. The teachers' preparation of each lesson and its place within the module is meticulous. Their methods are carefully designed to ensure interest and learning. For example, in Shakespearean and Chaucerian texts, each line must be considered, but by their own good knowledge and constant involvement the students' interest is maintained. Simple methods such as an initial quiz on quotations add an element of challenge whilst reinforcing textual knowledge effectively. Lessons build effectively upon the previous preparation by the students who work together in pairs and groups effectively.
215. Prompt and constructive guidance is given on both oral and written work. The teachers' comments are extensive and very helpful in suggesting ways in which the students can improve their work. This includes explaining how to improve essay structures and style. Progress is carefully monitored with reference to the target grades.
216. The curriculum is well balanced and enriched by local theatre and film visits as well as those further afield to Stratford. The students are enjoying their course and a significant number intend to continue their studies after leaving school.
217. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department has succeeded in raising the number of Year 12 students and is planning to introduce an English language and literature course next year. Her energy and determination to raise standards and achievement are shared

by all the sixth form teachers. The good progress, teaching and increased student numbers represent good progress since the last inspection.