

INSPECTION REPORT

ERNEST BEVIN COLLEGE

Tooting, London

LEA area: Wandsworth

Unique reference number: 101053

Principal: Mr S N Bokhari

Reporting inspector: Mrs S D Morgan
1355

Dates of inspection: 23rd-27th September 2002

Inspection number: 249625

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Boys 11-16 Mixed 16-18
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr I Cheshire
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

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1355	Mrs S D Morgan	Registered inspector	GNVQ Foundation Engineering	The college's results and students' achievements How well are students taught?
9053	Mrs V Phillips	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the college care for its students? How well does the college work in partnership with parents and students?
24142	Ms S McConville	Team inspector	A-level English literature A-level media studies	
1503	Mr T Browne	Team inspector	A-level mathematics	
3242	Dr M Newman	Team inspector	A-level biology A-level physics	
22491	Ms L Small	Team inspector	AVCE information technology	
2496	Dr A O'Sullivan	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students? How well is the college led and managed?
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Ernest Bevin is a large community comprehensive college with 1125 students in Years 7 to 13. The college has a mixed sixth form. Of the 176 in Years 12 and 13, eight are girls. The college is popular with parents and is oversubscribed. Overall, students' attainment on entry is below average, however available data indicates some recent improvement, particularly with students' reading. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. The percentage of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average, at 35 per cent. A well above average proportion of students has been identified as having special educational needs. These students have a range of needs, with most having emotional and behavioural and/or learning difficulties. An average proportion of students has a statement of special educational need. The college has a learning support centre with provision for students who have been identified as underachieving academically and/or having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Students come from a wide range of ethnic groups. Almost a fifth of the students are white and four other ethnic groups make up a significant proportion of the rest of the college: Black Caribbean 24 per cent, Pakistani 15 per cent, Black African heritage 13 per cent and Indian 11 per cent. The number of students speaking English as an additional language is very high, and 31 students are at an early stage of learning English. A small number of students are refugees. In most years there is a turnover of around five per cent of students. Ernest Bevin has gained Sports College, Sportsmark and Investors in People statuses. In 2000 and 2002 it received the Schools' Curriculum Award and in 2002 the School Achievement Award. It is taking part in the Excellence in Cities Programme.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

Ernest Bevin is a good college. Standards are improving, particularly at GCSE, and students' achievements are good. The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes very good. Staff show a high level of commitment under the very effective leadership of the principal and senior managers. The college reviews its provision regularly to ensure that students from all ethnic groups are equally valued and achieving appropriately. It is a very caring community in which all students are encouraged to achieve their best. The college provides good value for money.

What the college does well

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour improve as they progress through the college and this has a positive impact on their learning.
- The college has a very good ethos in which all are valued equally and students are provided with very good support and guidance.
- Staff show a high level of commitment and have high expectations. They work very well as a team under the very effective leadership of the principal and senior managers.

What could be improved

- Provision and achievement in science.
- The extent and impact of the college literacy strategy.
- The accuracy and usefulness of marking.

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

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, the college has made good progress since it was last inspected in 1997. Standards have improved faster than the national trend at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE. In the sixth form students achieve well in relation to their various starting points. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. Strengths reported in the last inspection have been maintained or built upon. Almost all of the issues raised in the last inspection report have been dealt with, although curriculum enrichment and the provision for religious education in the sixth form have not improved sufficiently. While assemblies have clear moral and social content and are sometimes thought-provoking, the college still does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all its students.

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
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	E	D	A
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	n/a	D	

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

GCSE results have shown improvement over the past five years. The table shows that the results achieved by all students were well above average at GCSE compared with similar schools (that is those with a similar proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals). The trend of improvement in GCSE grades is above the national rate. The results for individual subjects varied. Comparing students' results in each subject shows that they did relatively well in business studies and French. They did less well in subjects such as science and sports studies. The most recent results in science showed further decline and were well below the college figures for the usually comparable subject of mathematics. The college set appropriate targets for GCSE results in 2001 and 2002 which had been agreed with the Local Education Authority. These were exceeded and the most recent results show a significant improvement with 54 per cent of students achieving 5 or more A*-C grades. Current standards are broadly similar and students' achievements are good overall. In science, standards seen in lessons indicated recent improvement.

Overall, the college's results in the national assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well below average and results have been similar for several years. The 2001 results in English and science were well below average. In mathematics they were below average. Compared with similar schools, results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were above average. The most recent results for 2002 show particular improvement in English. However, science results remain below those of English and mathematics and indicate that students have not been achieving satisfactorily. Standards of written work in science for the last academic year were unsatisfactory. However, standards seen in lessons were better and indicate improvement. Evidence from the inspection indicates that current Year 9 standards in other subjects are broadly similar and students' achievements overall are good in relation to their starting points.

In the sixth form, standards are average overall, and most results are at least in line with predictions based on GCSE results. Students are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment, both those who have come directly from Year 11 and new entrants to the sixth form.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Students learn to value the college and what it offers. Most are keen to do as well as they can, once they recognise the high expectations of the college and its desire for them all to be successful. Attitudes to college are good in general. In the sixth form students are very committed to their studies. Their attitudes are very positive.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is satisfactory overall. In lessons, most students behave well and make good progress overall. A few students behave less well and find it hard to settle to work in some lessons. Outside classrooms, students do not always show the usual courtesy and consideration for others, especially when moving around the site. Exclusion rates are falling from a level that was above average, as the range of support for those with challenging behaviour takes effect.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships within the college's strong sense of community are very good and contribute significantly to students' achievements. On entry to the college, students' personal and social skills are less well developed than usual. With support from committed staff, students' personal development is much as expected by Year 11. Relationships foster students' personal development in the sixth form although there are gaps in their use of initiative and independent thought.
Attendance	Satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is good overall and this is an improvement on the last inspection. A particular strength is the consistently satisfactory or better teaching across the college. This has a positive impact on students' learning and their achievement. Teachers' management of students is very good; they have high expectations of students' behavior and performance. Their enthusiasm is clearly communicated to students. As they progress through the college students' attitudes and behaviour improve and these factors have positive impact on their learning. Their ability to concentrate improves and older students want to do well and succeed. The teaching of English and mathematics is good. Up until very recently the teaching of science has had significant weaknesses due to staffing difficulties. New staff have now been recruited and the teaching observed during the inspection was good.

The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory overall throughout the college. Most teachers place an appropriate emphasis on developing students' reading and writing skills in a number of practical ways. The college literacy strategy is starting to have an impact on students' literacy skills although this is not consistent throughout the college. Numeracy skills are taught and teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their numeracy skills in a range of subjects. Sufficient opportunities are provided for students to apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. However, the marking of students' work is unsatisfactory in some subjects. It does not always give students a clear indication of how well they are performing and areas for improvement. Very good teacher-student relationships have a positive impact on students' learning. The work is well planned, enabling students to build on their previous learning systematically. In the sixth form, lessons that had weaknesses sometimes lacked sufficient guidance for lower-attaining students and this resulted in these students making insufficient progress with their learning. However, this was only true for a very small number of lessons, and in the vast majority teachers provided work that met students' needs. In the sixth form, a weakness in students' learning is a lack of sufficient initiative and independence. In some but not all lessons they are too passive and wait for teachers to provide answers rather than thinking for themselves.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum responds well to students' needs and abilities. Its particular strengths are vocational courses, careers guidance and the extra support provided for students who have difficulty learning. Physical education has been improved with the acquisition of sports specialist status and is used as a means of motivating students in all aspects of their learning. All students develop good skills in ICT. There is no provision of a daily act of collective worship.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Students are well supported both in class and in the learning support centre. They make good progress and achieve well.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Students' needs are addressed through individual plans, their progress is regularly monitored and they are set targets. They receive specialist help in lessons, supported by teaching materials tailored to their needs. Staff training has improved all teachers' awareness of how to provide effective support for this group of students.

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall throughout the college, with a particularly strong emphasis on moral and social development. Spiritual development is weakened by lack of provision of good regular opportunities for reflection within assemblies and inadequate arrangements to teach religious education to all in the sixth form.
How well the college cares for its pupils	The college cares very well for its students. Students' academic progress and personal development are closely monitored. Assessments of how well students have done identify areas for improvement, and students are set suitable targets. Appropriate policies for child protection and health and safety are in place.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The principal and senior team have established a management culture based on collaboration, mutual support and trust. The strong ethos for learning and achievement is underpinned by effective monitoring and well-focused development planning. Highly effective management has been a key factor in raising standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They are very committed to the college and bring significant expertise to their role in supporting and monitoring its work. They have links with departments and their committee structure provides for rigorous evaluation of key aspects such as financial planning.
The college's evaluation of its performance	Good. Data is being used increasingly effectively to evaluate outcomes of teaching and learning and to set targets. Quality assurance procedures provide a clear framework for professional monitoring which involves all staff in constructive self-review.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Systems for planning and controlling expenditure are rigorous. The use of specific grants is carefully monitored. Principles of best value are very well applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like college. • The teaching is good. • They feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem. • The college expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A decrease in the amount of bullying.

At the meeting for parents and carers held prior to the inspection, concern was raised by some parents of Year 7 students over the bullying of their sons by older boys. Many parents expressed differing views on a number of issues. However, there was agreement that the college had made good improvement overall. Evidence gathered during the inspection supports parents' positive comments. However, inspectors found no evidence to support the view that there is widespread bullying. During formal and informal discussions boys commented that when there are instances of bullying they feel that they can approach staff and the matter is dealt with appropriately.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this 11-18 comprehensive college is of average size with 176 students on roll. Of these students, eight are girls. The number of students in Year 12 is greater than in Year 13. Ninety per cent of sixth form students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and 72 per cent speak English as an additional language, although, most students speak English well. The college provides a range of A and AS-level subjects. Vocational courses, including two-year AVCE and one year courses such as GNVQ information technology are also offered. Some students spend three years in the sixth form, retaking AS courses or progressing from foundation to intermediate GNVQ. About 55 per cent of students from Year 11 continue into Year 12 and between ten and twenty per cent of those entering the sixth form are from other schools. Taking all students' prior attainment into account, the ability of those entering Year 12 is below average, particularly in English where a significant number have gained GCSE grade D. Most students remain in the sixth form for a two-year programme leading to A-level, AVCE or GNVQ. However, a significant proportion follow one-year vocational courses. The general level of qualification for entry into the sixth form is five GCSE A* -C grades. However, the entry policy is inclusive and some students with low GCSE grades are allowed to follow some courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a good and cost-effective sixth form which meets the needs of its students well. Students can choose from a range of AS and A-level courses as well as AVCE and GNVQ courses which add breadth to the curriculum. The college provides a supportive environment in which students' personal and social development are supported well and their very good attitudes to learning continue to develop. Examination results at A-level have fluctuated and an analysis of trends is not possible due to the relatively small numbers that have taken courses. Recently the number of students entering the sixth form has increased after a period of some decline and overall students' achievements are good. Personal guidance and support are good. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall, and very good in some subjects. Leadership and management are satisfactory and there are plans for expansion and development.

Strengths

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and their positive attitudes.
- Relationships are very good and both staff and students show a high level of commitment.
- The college encourages students to aim high and offers high quality personal support to enable them to be successful.
- The good provision for vocational courses provides opportunities for all and an alternative route to higher education.

What could be improved

- The provision for religious education and the range of activities organised for sixth form students outside of examination courses.
- An increase in opportunities for students to use initiative and work independently.
- The recruitment of more students into the sixth form and raising its profile in the college.

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. A-level students overall have achieved well over the last five years and results have been in line with the national average. The numbers taking A-level declined significantly up to 2002, although this trend is now being reversed. The teaching seen was generally good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and give students effective individual support. Students have positive attitudes and work hard.
Biology	Satisfactory. Results are above the national average. Achievement is sound in relation to students' starting points. Numbers taking the subject have fluctuated over the years but rose in 2002. Teaching is sound and learning is good. Relationships, attitudes and staff commitment are very strong features. Students feel well supported.
Physics	Satisfactory. Results are average and achievement is good in relation to students' starting points. Numbers taking the subject have fluctuated over the years but rose in 2002. Teaching and learning are sound. Relationships and student attitudes are good. Students feel well supported. Effective use of ICT promotes learning.
Engineering	Very good. The course provides very good opportunities for lower-attaining students and those who have underachieved in their GCSE examinations to gain a qualification which will enable them to progress onto other courses. Students achieve very well in relation to their starting points. Relationships together with the quality of teaching contribute significantly to the progress that students make.
Business studies	Very good. Standards are well above average. The quality of teaching together with good relationships enable students to make very good progress. The subject is improving rapidly.
ICT	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of the very good teaching they receive. Work is well structured, relationships are very good and students have positive attitudes to learning.
Media Studies	Good. The subject is becoming increasingly popular and standards are improving. Relationships are very good. Teachers are enthusiastic, have good subject knowledge and use a wide range of resources.
History	Very good. Results are at the national average and are on a rising trend. Students achieve well and some do very well in relation to their performance at GCSE. Teaching is very good and based on strong knowledge of the subject and of examination needs. As a result students' attitudes are very positive, they learn very well and with enthusiasm.
English	Satisfactory. Standards at AS level are improving. Numbers are increasing and students are achieving well. Standards at A-level are well below average. Achievement is sound in relation to students' starting points. Students enjoy the subject and appreciate the good relationships and guidance they are given.

Work was sampled in a range of other subjects. The quality of teaching was never less than satisfactory and a significant proportion was good or better. Students' achievements are good overall. Students' attitudes and commitment to their studies have a positive impact on the standards they attain.

The provision for religious education for all sixth form students is unsatisfactory. There is no coherent planned provision for students as expected by the local Agreed Syllabus and the college does not meet statutory requirements.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good support and guidance is provided for students. Their needs are very well known, resulting in well-focused individual guidance about personal and academic progress. Individual subjects assess and monitor students' achievement, although there are inconsistencies in their use of assessment information. Students receive very good, timely support with applications for further and higher education. Advice is focused on raising aspirations and motivating students to do their best to achieve their personal ambitions. Support is equally strong for students across the range of abilities.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Satisfactory. Management and liaison systems are effective on a day-to-day basis and the ethos for learning and the monitoring of students' progress are good. However, the sixth form lacks distinctive aims and its accommodation and facilities, notably for girls, are currently unsatisfactory. The sixth form is cost-effective and the college has plans for expansion and development, including a new sixth form centre scheduled for September 2003.

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"> The choice of courses suits their talents and career aspirations. The college has helped them to settle in well to the sixth form and sixth form work. They are helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently. The college treats them as responsible young adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of advice they were given on what they should do in the sixth form. Outside of main subjects, the range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses.

Overall, students' views both in questionnaire responses and in discussions are positive. Inspectors support almost all of their positive views, although inspection evidence indicates that students need more help and opportunity to develop independence and show initiative. Inspectors agree that the range of activities and enrichment courses outside of main subjects needs to be improved. However, inspection findings indicate that the quality of advice provided to students is good.

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

WHAT THE COLLEGE DOES WELL

Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.

1. The college population reflects the diverse ethnic mix of its catchment area through the high number of students who speak English as an additional language and the presence of twelve students who have refugee status. Students' standards on entry to the college have shown improvement in recent years although they are currently still below average. The college has become increasingly popular with parents and is now oversubscribed. Standards both in national tests at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE have improved faster than the national rate. The most recent GCSE results show a significant improvement over the previous year with 54 per cent of students gaining five or more A* to C grades. Compared with similar schools, results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were above average and results gained by all students were well above average at GCSE.

2. The college undertakes careful analysis of results to ensure that all students are achieving appropriately and takes action to provide support when students are identified as underachieving. Analysis of assessment information shows that students achieve well in relation to their varying starting points. Checks are made to ensure that students from all ethnic groups are achieving appropriately. These show that currently the highest performing groups are of Indian and Pakistani origin.

3. Results, together with evidence gathered during the inspection confirm that students are achieving well and indicate that the college is successful in its inclusive approach to educating all of its students. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of all. Work is well planned to meet their needs by challenging the highest-attainers and providing good guidance, encouragement and support for lower-attainers, those with special educational needs and students learning English as an additional language. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the time of the previous inspection. In Years 7 to 11 in almost all lessons teaching was at least satisfactory. It was good or better in over six out of ten lessons and very good or excellent in a quarter. The quality of teaching in the sixth form has similar strengths. Overall, the quality of teaching throughout the college is good.

4. Teachers have high expectations of all students. Their lessons are well structured and there is a consistency of approach. For example, in the expectation that students will use all of the lesson to learn and not waste any available time. This was very evident in a Year 11 mathematics lesson where as soon as the students were in the room the teacher expected them to settle and start work. The work to be completed in the lesson was explained and key important vocabulary discussed. The pace of work was rapid and through rigorous questioning students' recall of knowledge and understanding was checked before the teaching of new work started. In a Year 8 French lesson, the lively and enthusiastic presentation by the teacher enabled students to make excellent gains in their understanding of the names of countries. The teacher used a variety of techniques such as a learning and consolidation game whilst focusing on pronunciation. This made the activities fun and was very effective.

5. Staff work hard to encourage students to develop positive attitudes to their learning and respect for each other and adults. For example, in a lower-attaining English class of Year 7 students the teacher planned the work meticulously and management and organisation of students was very good. The classroom had lively displays making a stimulating learning environment. The teaching emphasised listening carefully, respecting what others have to say, together with the development of classroom

routines in which good behaviour was fostered and congratulated. The teacher took every opportunity to focus on developing students' literacy skills by emphasising the need for accuracy, the use and style of note taking and extending vocabulary. At the end of a Year 9 art lesson, the teacher noted students whose behaviour was good or had improved and they were congratulated. In a Year 10 physical education lesson, the lesson was skilfully broken into a range of varied activities, which maintained students' concentration and interest. At one point in the lesson the teacher calmly dealt with a behaviour problem and students' learning was not disrupted. Students showed respect for the teacher and responded quickly to instructions, which resulted in them making good learning gains.

6. The positive features exemplified are regularly to be seen in lessons and are the result of a committed staff who are keen for all to experience success. The groups of teachers supporting students with special educational needs and those learning English show a high level of commitment. Careful attention is paid to testing and assessing students, both when they come to the college and at regular intervals, to ensure that they are achieving appropriately. Teachers work well as a team and staff new to the college or the profession are provided with good quality support. New staff spoke very positively about the help they had received. Consistent classroom routines together with a continued emphasis on respect are well established throughout the college so that students feel valued and know what is expected of them. This helps foster positive attitudes to learning and results in students achieving well.

Students' attitudes and behaviour improve as they progress through the college and this has a positive impact on their learning.

7. Many students arrive at the college with significant gaps in their experience. Their personal and social skills are not well developed and they lack positive attitudes towards learning. College staff are successful at improving students' attitudes towards work and fostering a desire to succeed. Students' attitudes improve as they progress through the college. By the time they are in Years 10 and 11 they are good, and in the sixth form they are very good. This is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection.

8. Most students are keen to work, and do what is asked of them in lessons because they believe in their own abilities and chances of success. Discussion with Year 11 students indicated that they had high aspirations, saying that they wanted to continue their studies in the sixth form and then at college or university. In the best lessons, teachers have very good strategies for developing students' listening skills and helping them to organise their thoughts and written work. For example in a Year 7 drama lesson, students had to learn characterisation and freeze techniques when developing a space story.

9. Students' behaviour improves as they progress through the college and this has a positive impact on their learning. Many Year 7 students are not used to listening carefully to each other or following instructions. However, teachers are successful at establishing good classroom and learning routines. They organise their lessons well and manage the challenging behaviour exhibited by some students in a calm and purposeful way, limiting the impact on other students. Emphasis is placed on polite behaviour in class and routines such as marking the register, orderly entry to classrooms, welcoming visitors and thanking the teacher. Most students respond very well to good quality teaching and to clear guidelines stating what they are going to learn and how they are expected to behave. Instances of misbehaviour in lessons are much less evident in classes of older students. This is because students develop an understanding that they are in college to learn and that poor behaviour will reduce their chances of success both in college and in adult life. Opportunities are provided for students to take responsibility, for example through the college council. Students commented that notice is taken of the issues raised, for example the need for litter bins, blinds and drinking water fountains. Year 11 students are also

chosen to become prefects and have responsibilities around the college at lunchtime.

10. Staff teamwork, commitment and a constructive approach to those who are most vulnerable or most challenging, builds very productive relationships. The quality of relationships with staff is valued by students. Students in Year 11 said that staff are good at giving help and tutors and mentors are “there for you”. In the day-to-day life of the college there is clear evidence of regular informal staff and student discussions which are relaxed and friendly. Relationships between the many ethnic groups that attend the college are very good with no evidence of racial tension. Parents are also involved as part of the college community and many value the extent of the college’s concern, for example, if their sons truant. A number of parents also said that they felt the college responded quickly to any concerns they had. Attendance has improved considerably since the previous inspection, when it was judged to be having a negative impact on the learning of some students. Rates of attendance are now broadly in line with the national average, as are rates of unauthorised absence. This improvement is having a positive effect on students’ achievements.

11. The college works very hard to avoid exclusion and whilst the rate of fixed term exclusions is relatively high, it is falling. Support for students is provided by a counsellor who is in regular contact with learning mentors and teaching staff. Discussions with staff and students, together with documentation, indicate that staff work very hard to ensure that students with difficulties are included in college life and continue to attend.

The college has a very good ethos in which all are valued equally and students are provided with very good support and guidance.

12. The college has a very strong ethos of valuing all and sense of community spirit. Underpinning all of its work is the belief that every student has the potential to achieve and their needs should be catered for. The evidence of this belief in practice is that students achieve well throughout the college, examination results are improving and students feel valued.

13. Students and parents spoke very positively about how improvements to accommodation and equipment had taken place since sports college status had been gained. Older students mentioned that facilities had improved. Many of the existing buildings had been refurbished and a new building project including sports facilities was soon to start. All of these developments added to parents and students feeling valued.

14. A positive atmosphere of trust is evident throughout the college and students will seek and accept help through the tutor or welfare system. Personal support in the college is focused on enabling individuals to make the most of the opportunities available. Support is centred on underpinning achievement and this was very evident during discussions with the pastoral team. A range of high quality support networks throughout the college ensures that, whatever the personal need, students have someone to turn to who will be able to provide support and guidance, such as a counsellor or a mentor. Funding from the Excellence in Cities programme is well used to support aspects of this work, such as learning mentors.

15. In discussion, sixth form students said that there is open dialogue. They said that problems are not allowed to develop with work as a close eye is kept on progress and there is regular target setting. Year 7 students commented that you can go to teachers or your tutor if there is a problem. They said that they had found help when they needed it. They thought the college was a friendly place although they had been nervous when they started. The induction day had made them feel welcome and allayed many of their fears. Students in Year 11 again commented on the support provided by staff and said

that they were given a lot of encouragement to aim high.

16. The tutorial system is well organised and tutors know students well. Information is shared where it is relevant to an individual's progress so that staff can deal with situations appropriately. In tutorial sessions observed during the inspection time was used well on a range of activities, such as checking students' planners and discussing what happened in lessons the previous day. Successes through the "gold slip" system were celebrated and expectations for the coming day clearly set out.

17. Students in Years 7 to 11 are involved in their own target setting and action planning. In a Year 10 assembly a target setting day to be held the following week was discussed, emphasising high expectations and setting personal goals. The presentation highlighted the need for targets to be achievable and realistic and prepared students well for the meeting the following week. The setting of these targets is taken seriously by students. Each student has a fifteen-minute session with their tutor to discuss and reflect on their progress and attitudes before setting new targets. The targets seen in students' planners were simple, meaningful and effective in helping promote individual achievement. The college also celebrates the success of individuals through the extensive use of certificates which then form part of each student's record of achievement.

Staff show a high level of commitment and have high expectations. They work very well as a team under the very effective leadership of the principal and senior managers.

18. The principal has been very successful in developing a learning environment which has high expectations of students but is also supportive. Staff, parents and students value his approachability. The principal is both reflective and forward looking and is continually seeking improvement in all aspects of the college. His leadership is very good, giving a clear educational direction. The positive response to most of the issues raised in the previous inspection report clearly indicates that the college sets appropriate priorities for development and is successful in achieving them. The principal works in close partnership with the two vice principals and their management of the college is very good. All senior managers within the college share the principal's vision and ensure that it is put into practice. There is a high level of collaboration amongst staff, with mutual support and trust as key factors which are helping to drive the college forward. In discussions, all staff were positive about the work of the college. They mentioned improvements both in academic standards and to accommodation as well as talking about plans for the future. From discussions it was evident that staff, whether new to the college or those who had many years of service, felt valued and supported in their work.

19. The principal has been successful in appointing staff who share the values of the college. The appointment and retention of well-qualified staff are constant priorities and staffing difficulties, for example in science, have been managed well. A significant number of new staff have been appointed to the college over the last two years. Several of these mentioned that they had been supported well by longer serving staff members. A particular strength within the college is the way in which staff who have taught within it for many years have been keen to embrace change and learn from new colleagues. Support staff work in close partnership with teaching staff and they make a significant contribution to the work of the college. For example, dealing with queries from parents, producing college booklets and working hard to ensure that the buildings are clean and well maintained.

20. Both support and teaching staff have high expectations of students. Many parents commented that staff are accessible to discuss any concerns or problems. Students mentioned that staff are ready to give help outside of lesson time and to discuss any difficulties. The principal and other senior managers are regularly to be seen around the buildings outside of lesson times, for example at break and lunchtime. They use the opportunity to chat to students as well as to ensure that students are behaving

appropriately and provide support to other staff if necessary. Staff mentioned that if they needed help to deal with any problems, either related to students not producing work or to a discipline issue, it would be forthcoming. Either a member of their department, the pastoral team or senior managers would help resolve the situation. They said that if they expressed concerns they were always followed up.

21. The college's aims focus strongly on equality of opportunity and are realised in practice through the successful management of provision for lower-attaining students, those with special educational needs, those whose first language is not English and, more recently, those who are gifted and talented. The college's commitment to quality in teaching and learning, together with well-directed support and guidance for students, has created a culture of achievement and led to it gaining the Schools' Curriculum and Schools' Achievement awards. This has been further enhanced by the award of Sports College status: the development of sport in the curriculum focuses on involving all students, raising their self-confidence and improving their attitudes, self-esteem and motivation in all aspects of their work.

22. The governors are highly committed to the college and bring a significant level of expertise to bear both in supporting its development and in critically evaluating its progress. Governors recognise the role of high-quality management across the college in its improved academic performance and feel that their input is valued.

23. Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are well structured and involve all levels of management. There is a college-wide acknowledgement of the value of critical self-evaluation in the context of improving standards and educational opportunity. Data is used increasingly effectively to evaluate outcomes of teaching and learning and enable targets to be set. The college development plan addresses fundamental issues such as the coherence of the whole curriculum, monitoring the performance of minority groups and improving students' attitudes. A section of the plan deals specifically with support for students to improve social inclusion. A policy on race equality is in place and is fully reflected in the college's aims and practice. The college has used outside systems to extend its own self-evaluation and has gained "Investors in People" status. A culture of self-review and striving for further improvement is embedded in the college's work.

24. Financial planning and management are very good. The college applies principles of best value very effectively, and financial monitoring and college administration are very efficient. Regular comparisons are made with the financial management of similar institutions. The college receives additional funding from a number of sources, such as the Excellence in Cities Programme, and its use is carefully tracked and monitored. The college's budget and financial management are effectively overseen by the governors' strong resources committee. Additional funding has been used effectively for significant improvements to the quality of accommodation and a further building programme to improve sports facilities and sixth form accommodation is soon to start.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Provision and achievement in science.

25. Standards in main college science are a concern. In 2001, the percentage of students attaining level 5 in Year 9 was well below national expectations and below English and mathematics results in the college. The average point score was below that in similar schools.

26. In 2001, GCSE results were well below national averages. They declined further in 2002. There were a particularly large number of students who were not entered for the examination (22 per cent) due to failure to complete coursework. The overall pass rate at A* to C was well below the college figures for the usually comparable subject of mathematics.

27. Standards of the written work scrutinised during the inspection, which were collected over the period 2001/2002, were unsatisfactory in all year groups. There were examples of poor work in classes taught by a series of temporary teachers, no longer at the college. But some of the unsatisfactory features were in classes taught by current staff.

28. Standards in the lessons seen were better. Although many classes were below average in attainment, changes in personnel and curriculum in 2002 have led to learning that was at least satisfactory and in some cases, good. The schemes of work were rewritten from April 2002 and now match the demands of the Key Stage 3 strategies. ICT is currently planned into the schemes of work although implementation is not yet evident until the sixth form. Student discussion is now a strength in a number of classes, for example a Year 7 class was able to show its knowledge of food groups gained in primary school and a Year 9 class was able to discuss renewable energy resources.

29. Evidence from scrutiny of students' work for the last academic year indicates that teaching and learning were unsatisfactory in all year groups, with particular examples of poor teaching in Years 8 and 9. This was due to difficulty in recruiting suitable staff and has now been resolved with the replacement of five staff and the appointment of a new head of science.

30. There are now examples of teaching strength, such as data collection in Year 7 about heights, and active involvement in the learning of chemical structure in Year 9. Good teachers have high expectations and are sensitive to the literacy needs of students. They plan well and are particularly good at assessing students' understanding through detailed and constructive marking.

31. Teachers have a high degree of care for their students, know them well and provide good support. All teachers attempt to follow the literacy policy and there is an appropriate emphasis on numeracy. However, there are some weaknesses that remain. Some teachers are not gauging the level of students' skills and understanding well and therefore present a take-it-or-leave-it style of teaching, which lower-attaining students and students who are learning English as an additional language find hard to follow. In these cases, presentation of materials is often insufficiently planned, marking unhelpful, board-work is disjointed and, in consequence, students' work lacks structure. Higher-attaining students often do well, in spite of these circumstances, being given the freedom to structure their own work. In these cases their good attitudes to work lead to good learning and this needs to be preserved. However, other students, particularly if they have problems in literacy or are learning English as an additional language, are held back in their learning of science.

32. The science department needs to tackle these issues through action such as closer monitoring of classroom teaching, and identifying and building on the good practice that exists.

The extent and impact of the college literacy strategy.

33. The college recognises weaknesses in literacy among a large number of students and has taken a number of steps to introduce a college literacy strategy. Considerable staff training aimed at raising staff awareness of issues has taken place. Whole-college and subject strategies have also been developed, for example the use of writing frames to help students structure their writing and classroom displays of useful words and phrases. Subject departments have been required to submit their literacy priorities to the literacy steering group. This group was set up last year and is currently evaluating each department's progress.

34. Good use is being made of the expertise of the literacy consultant from the local education authority who is meeting regularly with a member of the English department. Together they are devising a scheme of work for Year 8 students. An excellent lesson using these materials was observed during the inspection. The theme for the lesson was football. Work was very carefully planned and tightly structured, with the class looking at bias in reports on football matches and learning the difference between subjective and objective writing. At each stage of the work emphasis was placed on what was to be learned. Students discussed the most appropriate words to use in a report and considered how this might be changed for different audiences. They considered the impact of language and this provided very good opportunities for vocabulary extension. Students were able to explain that they were learning to write in different styles, for different audiences and search for the best words to use. At the end of the lesson they had made excellent learning gains.

35. During the inspection some tutor periods at the start of the day were used well to develop students' reading skills and some students use the subject reference and dictionary pages in their planners to record words they find hard to spell, useful specialist words and information. This was evident in a Year 9 registration where students were using their time to read quietly and note three words that they would find difficulty in spelling in their planners. In some but not all lessons, teachers drew attention to new words that were to be used and explained their meaning, for example, in A-level mathematics. Students' communication skills were developed effectively in a sixth form business studies lessons where they were required to present answers to examination questions orally and then to grade the answers using examination criteria. In history, sixth form students are encouraged to speak and debate in lessons. They do this well, with some students displaying high order thinking and originality. These students also develop the ability to express their opinions clearly in written answers because the work is very well structured and planned to meet the needs of the examination syllabus. However, in other lessons, for example in sixth form, GNVQ engineering, teachers tended to assume that students understood the words without checking this through questioning. In other lessons, such as biology and physics in the sixth form there is an expectation that students will structure their own notes and they are given insufficient help in structuring their written work. This has a particular impact on lower-attaining students who find it difficult to organise longer pieces of written work. In other sixth form subjects such as ICT, media studies and English literature weaknesses in students' literacy skills were also evident which limit their achievements.

The accuracy and usefulness of marking.

36. Scrutiny of students' written work showed a wide range in the quantity and quality of marking throughout the college. In discussions with students, many commented on the fact that in some subjects work was not marked often enough. Examples of good marking were seen in history where helpful comments on how the answers to questions could be improved were evident. In English marking is regular. Good quality marking was seen where constructive written comments were made

and good oral feedback in lessons gave students clear guidance on how to improve their work. In sixth form GNVQ engineering, prompt good quality feedback is given to students through one-to-one discussions with the teacher. This enables students to quickly develop aspects of their work and the praise given for improvement motivates lower-attaining students.

37. In other subjects, for example, mathematics marking was superficial and inconsistent with some inaccuracies. Scrutiny of students' work in science showed that over the past year marking of work was unsatisfactory. This was particularly evident in classes that had been taught by temporary staff. Some work that was clearly incorrect, such as "planets are named after astronomers" and "when I feel my pulse I am touching a vein" had comments such as "good" written on it whilst other work had unhelpful comments such as "poor progress" written on it for no apparent reason. In business studies marking is not of a consistent quality or quantity. In sixth form ICT insufficient feedback on assessments is given to students to enable them to make effective improvements to their work.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

38. Building on the good improvement made since the last inspection, and to raise standards further, the principal, staff and governors should:

- (1) improve provision and students' achievement in science by;
 - monitoring to identify and remedy weaknesses and build on the good practice that exists ;
 - implementing the Key Stage 3 strategy and improving the use of ICT;
(25-32, 83,90,92)

- (2) ensure that the good work already underway in developing the college literacy strategy is continued and fully implemented in all subjects by;
 - sharing the good practice that exists
 - monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of agreed policy and procedures in departments and providing support where necessary
 - continued development of staff expertise;
(33-35, 42, 56, 89, 96, 104, 107-8, 117)

- (3) improve the quality and consistency of marking throughout the college by;
 - ensuring agreed marking procedures are consistently applied throughout the college.
(36-37, 54, 76, 78, 82, 90, 100)

Sixth form

- (1) improve provision for religious education and increase the range of activities organised for sixth form students outside of examination courses;
(46, 48-9, 58,60, 66)

- (2) increase the opportunities for students to use initiative and work independently;
(41, 45, 49, 55, 76, 100, 107, 119)

- (3) seek to increase the number of students in the sixth form and raise its profile in the college.
(48, 67)

(the numbers in italics show the main paragraphs in which these issues are discussed within the report)

39. The report also identifies some other issues which governors may wish to include in the action plan to be developed following the inspection. They include:

Further development of ICT in some subjects	85, 100, 102, 115
Improving provision for a daily act of collective worship	49, 58, 66
Making full use of available assessment data	62, 104, 114,

Improving the organisation of library books for sixth form students	85, 92, 115
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PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	51
	Sixth form	42
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		93

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7– 11							
Number	2	11	20	17	1	0	0
Percentage	4	22	39	33	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	12	19	10	1	0	0
Percentage	0	29	45	24	2	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 Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the college's pupils

Pupils on the college's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the college's roll	949	176
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	352	43

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	22	2
Number of pupils on the college's special educational needs register	369	22

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	479

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils

Pupils who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	46
Pupils who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	58

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
College data	8.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
College 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	2001	179	n/a	179

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	114	79
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	79	114	79
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	College	44 (47)	64 (54)	44 (36)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	College	8 (8)	34 (26)	9 (12)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	51	121	65
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	51	121	65
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	College	28 (49)	67 (59)	36 (40)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	College	3 (10)	33 (25)]	10 (11)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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
	2001	175	n/a	175

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	50	153	171
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	50	153	171
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	College	29 (28)	87 (84)	98 (95)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	College	32.7 (29.3)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	23	5	28

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
College	Number of candidates	32	5	37
	Average point score per candidate	12.4 (12.1)	11.2 (20.0)	12.2 (12.4)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (16.8)	18 (17.7)	17.5 (17.3)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	Number of candidates	23	5	28	11	0	11
	Average point score per candidate	12.5	11.2	12.3	9.8	n/a	9.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
169	13	
4		
28	2	
121	2	
161	8	
31	1	
259	59	4
140		
120	30	2
10		
17	2	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3:1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	378

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	4,202,471
Total expenditure	4,183,435
Expenditure per pupil	3,817
Balance brought forward from previous year	160,609

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.9
Key Stage 4	21.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Balance carried forward to next year	179,645
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Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the college during the last two years	30.2
Number of teachers appointed to the college during the last two years	31.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1125
Number of questionnaires returned	145

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	56	39	3	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	41	46	3	1	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	48	31	10	3	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	38	15	4	8
The teaching is good.	43	47	3	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	31	11	4	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	39	4	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	29	3	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	41	35	13	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	43	40	2	2	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	41	3	1	10
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	32	39	12	3	10

* figures may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Other issues raised by parents

At the meeting held for parents and carers a number of parents of Year 7 students said that their sons had suffered a degree of bullying from older boys, particularly in Year 8. Many parents expressed differing views on a number of issues. However, there was general agreement that the college had made good improvement overall. Parents mentioned the increase in the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and improvements to the accommodation.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The college's results and students' achievements

40. The small numbers of students that have taken some courses make analysis and interpretation of trends in results over time difficult. From 1999 the number of students declined and numbers fluctuated on various courses. However, this trend is now reversed, group sizes have increased and almost all courses are now viable. Overall, recent standards have been below average, however, results are often better than those predicted based on GCSE results. In 2001, in subjects where there were sufficient candidates to make comparisons with national averages significant, students attainment was average in mathematics and history, but below average in most other subjects and well below average in English literature. The most recent results are similar, although there has been improvement in subjects such as AS-level English literature, ICT and business studies.

41. In almost all of the subjects inspected in detail, evidence from current work and lessons observed indicates that standards continue to show some improvement and are broadly average for this stage of the course. In some subjects such as history standards are above average. Overall, students' achievements are good with particular strengths in subjects such as ICT, business and engineering. In English literature A-level standards remain well below average as students have entered the course with results at GCSE that make the transition to advanced study a significant challenge. They find the demands of the texts difficult and are very reliant on the teacher for interpretation and explanation, which limits their progress.

42. In the subjects sampled, students' achievements are satisfactory or good and their current standard of work is broadly in line with that expected for this stage of the course. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are supported satisfactorily in most subjects. In a number of lessons key words of specialist subject vocabulary are displayed and discussed. However, at times teachers overlook students' weaknesses in basic literacy and this holds back their attainment. Students with weaker numeracy skills, such as those taking GNVQ engineering are well supported through a carefully structured programme, which reinforces basic computational skills.

43. Students' ICT skills are supported satisfactorily overall, although this varies between subjects. Examples of good use were seen in a number of subjects. For example in science, where students used desktop publishing to present their work and used sensors to measure and log temperatures. In the GNVQ engineering foundation course, students used word processing, researched information using the Internet, used tables and prepared graphs to present data they researched. This helped to improve the overall presentation of work.

44. Up to a fifth of students who join the sixth form are from other schools. The good advice students receive before joining the sixth form, together with the range of courses at varying levels, meet students' needs well and ensure that most students complete their courses. Almost all students who want to continue into higher or further education achieve qualifications which enable them to do so. Work is well planned and matched to students' prior attainment. This, together with the commitment and high expectations of staff, ensures that students make good progress.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

45. Students have very good attitudes to their work and are very keen to succeed in their chosen courses. Their attendance is good. They work hard and are happy to do what is asked of them. They are developing positive attitudes towards the idea of continuing education beyond college and throughout adult life. Their skills in planning and organising their own work are adequate but not as well developed as their commitment to studying. This is because of uneven provision of opportunities for students to think for themselves and use their initiative, which results in expectations that they should wait for staff to tell them what to do. In lessons, students tend to accept teachers' ideas almost without question and are used to listening and note taking rather than initiating active debate of issues raised. Even in good lessons they usually depend on the teacher to draw out their ideas and to guide them in solving problems. They work together well when given the chance to support each other in achieving clear goals, as in a physical education lesson where students had to take turns to record heart rate and body temperature during exercise.

46. At present, the college offers a limited range of activities outside the taught curriculum. It is difficult for students to get together, to organise activities for themselves and to become fully involved in the life of the college, because of a lack of sixth form base at its heart. Students do not feel particularly confident about using time outside formal lessons to extend their knowledge and experiences of other activities. This is partly because they are not used to thinking about the benefits of different ways of learning. The college has been slow to explore ways of enriching the curriculum to provide systematic opportunities for community service, reflecting on issues and viewpoints, spiritual and cultural development, team building and outdoor pursuits. As a result, students' development of personal and learning skills is no more than adequate.

47. Relationships among students and with staff are very good. Students are very appreciative of the way that they are treated as individuals with equal rights. They value highly the way that staff respond to different individual needs, for example, in terms of very well presented careers advice. Students know that teachers and support staff want the best for them, which motivates them to work hard and contributes significantly to rates of achievement.

48. Students' views of the college are positive because, in general, they think that it offers them good opportunities to succeed on their chosen courses. They value the encouragement that teachers and other staff give. They feel that they are helped well to settle into sixth form life and treated as responsible young adults. Students would welcome an improved range of opportunities and activities to enrich their learning experiences, including more of a voice in the life of the college. The inspection confirmed the overall picture that they have of the sixth form.

49. Students' personal development is good overall. However, the college is stronger in supporting the development of moral principles and a sense of community than in fostering reflective skills or use of initiative. As with younger students, the college values the richness and diversity of its intake and is quick to celebrate different traditions and successes. It has been slow to provide religious education and collective worship for all students and does not meet statutory requirements. This was a key issue at the last inspection. Action has not been good enough. The college has missed an opportunity to meet the wider needs of students for reflection, thinking and debate within a framework that supports spiritual, moral, social, cultural, health and citizenship education and complements its high quality careers education programme.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

50. Overall, teaching and learning are good and have many positive features. Almost all lessons observed were satisfactory or better. Almost three out of ten lessons observed were very good and nearly three-quarters were good or better. In the good and very good lessons the work is very well matched to the needs of all students and this enables them to make rapid learning gains. Teaching in all subjects was at least satisfactory and in a number, including business studies, engineering, history, mathematics, ICT and media studies it was good or very good.

51. The best lessons have a number of similar features. These include teachers' good subject knowledge, enthusiasm and high expectations. Teachers prepare their lessons well, give clear explanations and carefully build upon students' previous knowledge. For example, in mathematics teachers give clear instructions and question students effectively to ensure they have understood new work as well as recalling what has been taught previously. Students also receive considerable encouragement and high levels of individual support. When completing a numeracy task in a Year 12 engineering lesson, students were praised when they used the correct method for calculation. The teacher ensured that all students were fully involved in answering questions and provided considerable help when some students found aspects of the work difficult to understand. This support resulted in all students developing their understanding of how to undertake a range of calculations. Students were positive about the support they received from staff and commented that teachers gave generously of their time outside of lessons. This is evident, for example, in biology where staff take students to conferences and Saturday school as well as encouraging participation in national competitions such as the Creativity in Science and Technology scheme (CREST bronze, silver and gold awards). This has a positive impact on the progress that students make. Staff know the particular learning needs of students well and plan work accordingly.

52. In most lessons a good range of teaching methods is used. In business studies lessons, time is used very well through quick and rigorous questioning which includes all students. The questioning allows the teacher to check students' understanding and recall and enables students to learn rapidly. Teachers also make good use of college technical staff together with a wide range of resources to gain students' interest and help them learn. This was particularly evident in media studies. Teachers' planning is closely related to examination requirements and in subjects such as history students are made very aware of the quality and range of research and written work they need to complete to be successful. Teachers carefully structure work to link with students' own experiences. For example, in media studies teachers successfully draw on the cultural and ethnic diversity within the college and link ideas to students' own experiences.

53. In many lessons teachers show great enthusiasm for the subject and make the work interesting and challenging. This motivates students to work hard and some students commented that in a number of lessons time flies by because the work is absorbing. Very good relationships are evident in all lessons. Students are very well motivated and students whose first language is not English generally learn well. Currently there are no students receiving support for special educational needs. Appropriate homework, including longer-term assignments, is set regularly and this supports students' learning well.

54. The quality and use of assessment by teachers varies, but is satisfactory overall. In engineering it is very good, all staff regularly discuss pieces of work with individuals and suggest how they can improve. This provides students with small achievable goals and encourages them to persevere. Marking in history is detailed with advice on how to more closely meet examination requirements. In other subjects such as mathematics the marking of work is not consistent. This does not give sufficient

help for students to improve the presentation or content of their work. In English, teachers mark students' work promptly with constructive comments and in lessons good oral feedback on how to improve is provided.

55. Whilst many teachers provide students with good quality support and encouragement in lessons the quality of guidance on developing a range of learning skills varies. For example, in a number of subjects such as mathematics and English students are too passive and insufficient opportunities are provided for them to actively participate. In other lessons such as biology good guidance on some coursework aspects is given but guidance on other study skills such as how to structure note taking are not provided. This disadvantages lower-attaining students. In physics, teaching methods do not effectively support the progress of lower-attaining students as tasks are sometimes set at too high a level in relation to students' prior knowledge.

56. The development of students' literacy skills is satisfactory. Teachers concentrate on increasing the range of students' specialist vocabulary by ensuring that they are aware of the key words being used each lesson. In some lessons, for example in media studies where a significant proportion of students have some difficulty in understanding the finer nuances of language, teachers use group work effectively so that higher-attaining students can provide support. Good guidance in history helps students learn how to form their own opinions and express them both in discussion and writing. However, in other subjects students' written work showed weaknesses in note taking and essay writing. Students' numeracy skills are satisfactorily developed, for example in ICT through work on spreadsheets. In subjects such as engineering emphasis is also placed on improving students' basic numeracy skills. The development and application of students' ICT skills is satisfactory in most subjects and good in some, for example, physics. Where it is weaker, for example in business education insufficient access to the Internet restricts students' opportunities for independent research and limits their learning.

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

57. The quality and range of learning opportunities provided for sixth form students is satisfactory. Whilst not extensive, the sixth form curriculum has evolved as a coherent follow-on to the education provided in the main college. A total of sixteen academic subjects are offered at AS and A-level, but only thirteen AS and 11 A-level courses are running. Nevertheless, students, including the small number of girls and boys recruited to the sixth form from other institutions, are content with the range offered. A distinctive and positive feature of the curriculum is the good provision for vocational courses which, at advanced level, provide an alternative route into higher education for students who studied GNVQ courses in Years 10 and 11. The provision of GNVQ courses in engineering and ICT offer sixth form study to a broader spectrum of students. The opportunity to retake GCSE mathematics has just been reintroduced. Following the college's gaining sports specialist status, recruitment to AS-level physical education courses has improved, though a GNVQ course in sports, leisure and tourism failed to recruit a viable group.

58. Students' personal development is addressed through a taught programme of personal, social and health education, which incorporates very good careers education. However, although religious education modules are also taught, they are too infrequent to comply with the statutory requirement on the subject, nor is there any daily act of collective worship. The needs of students with special educational need and those whose first language is not English are well provided for through specialist support as required.

59. Although students are enabled to attend higher education study days and Summer schools and receive very good support and guidance in their applications for universities and colleges, most of the enrichment of the curriculum comes from the initiative of subject faculties. There is currently no overall provision for the teaching of key skills, with the exception of ICT. Some sixth formers are involved in mentoring younger students and in outreach work in local primary schools and a sixth form council is starting up. Private study facilities in the library are limited, though sixth formers are able freely to use the college's excellent media resources centre.

60. Overall, the curriculum is well planned to respond to students' individual needs – a point firmly made by students in discussion. Planning is very good in history, engineering and ICT. It is good in media studies and business education and satisfactory in other subjects. The curriculum has developed consistent with local demand and the increasing emphasis on vocational courses meets the needs of a sixth form population drawn from an increasingly broad social and ability spectrum. Its weakness, as reported in the last inspection, is in the lack of a broad-based programme of enrichment activities to appeal to all students, including girls.

61. It was not possible to observe the teaching and learning of students whose first language is not English during the inspection as the specialist teachers were still carrying out detailed assessments of the needs of those at an early stage of learning English. However, interviews with teachers and inspection of documentation showed that provision is very good. Students' needs are carefully assessed and individual education plans are drawn up. These are shared with the relevant teachers. Support is provided in class rather than by withdrawal, consistent with Local Education Authority policy. A wide variety of supporting materials created by the specialist team is used to enhance students' access to the curriculum. This includes writing frames and worksheets tailored to different levels of need.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

62. Arrangements in the sixth form for assessing and monitoring students' achievement are satisfactory overall, although their quality varies. The best practice, for example in history and the GNVQ engineering course, involves well-organised procedures so that assessment information is used to guide course planning and to focus the support for students. In such subjects, individual targets are effectively based on prior attainment, and structured help is given to students. Generally, subject departments use GCSE results and other assessment data to establish students' targets and monitor the progress they make towards these. However, the co-ordination of form tutor advice with subject department information is less well developed than in Years 7 to 11. Sixth formers generally know about their targets and how well they are doing, and teachers offer a considerable amount of individual help. Students are involved in reviewing their progress and drawing up action plans. The written reports students receive are sound. Moderator reports indicate that the college meets the requirements for examination coursework. The college uses assessment data adequately to evaluate its provision, although the approaches to measuring value-added information would benefit from being refined and co-ordinated across the sixth form.

Advice, support and guidance

63. The college offers students a good range of support, which is of consistently high quality in terms of personal matters. Tutors and teachers generally know students very well and are sensitive to their individual needs. They are mindful of the link between personal support and academic achievement.

Students are very clear that no-one is left to flounder as problems are not allowed to develop into crises because extra help is given readily when difficulties arise. The college monitors attendance well. It keeps a close eye both on absences and on any missing work. Careers guidance is of high quality, not least because of the very constructive individual help offered in an atmosphere of warmth and trust. The individual education plans of students whose first language is not English are of good quality and reviewed twice yearly and termly reports on their progress are issued. The college takes very careful steps to secure the welfare, health and safety of all its students, including sixth form students.

64. Most students feel that they are given clear information before they start courses and that advice is tailored to their circumstances carefully. In one or two cases, students are not fully aware of the implications of their choices and the possible impact of being taught in very small groups from more than one year, or of the restricted course options that may be available at a particular time. Most students welcome what they believe is impartial advice in choosing courses and no false expectations about their chances of achieving particular goals. Those that are new to the college, including a small number of girls, said they had been made to feel part of the college and settled in well.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

65. In general, parents and students are happy with what the college offers and achieves. Their reasons for choosing this sixth form are very clear and based on positive experiences of their own earlier success in the college or that of others well known to them. They have a strong sense of the college's desire to see them do as well as they can, which is reflected in their own commitment to hard work within the sixth form. In spite of some disappointment that the sixth form block is not built and a feeling that opportunities to enjoy a richer, better-resourced experience are restricted, parents and students have a sense of belonging to the college and determination to succeed. They have no major concerns about the quality of what is offered, or the willingness of the college to consult and inform them about new developments.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

66. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The head of sixth form works closely with heads of faculty and the head of careers to ensure that students are effectively monitored, supported and guided. The work of the sixth form is evaluated by governors through an annual report, but their contact is otherwise somewhat limited. In almost all respects governors fulfil their statutory duties. However, they have not ensured satisfactory provision for religious education, nor for any daily act of collective worship. The college's overall commitment to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning has had a positive impact in the sixth form, with success in courses of advanced study now accessible to a broader spectrum of students. Performance data is used increasingly effectively to evaluate outcomes and set targets.

67. Teachers are highly committed to all students, consistent with the college's aims and ethos. However, the sixth form lacks a distinctive identity and its profile in the college is not as high as it might be. For example, at the time of the inspection, the sixth form council and new temporary accommodation were not functioning. The new sixth form centre, for which plans are now well advanced for opening in September 2003, will bring a much-needed increase in status to the sixth form. The result of self-review and seeking further improvement is evident in plans for the sixth form. The college development plan targets the sixth form as an area for significant development and there is a

determination among governors and senior managers that this will have high priority.

68. A structured and effective programme of monitoring teaching and learning is in place. Staff are encouraged to continually develop their expertise and these factors are helping to raise standards. The specialist teachers who support students whose first language is not English work as a close-knit and effective team. In addition to supporting students in all years, they have undertaken in-service development and produce materials for all teachers. This has served both to raise teachers' awareness of students' needs and to improve the quality of provision for teaching and learning. A good development plan focuses on improving the quality and detail of record-keeping and better systems for auditing students' needs.

69. Financial planning and management in the sixth form are good. Courses only run with viable numbers or a strong educational rationale and the overall cost of the sixth form has been increasingly less than the income it generates for the last three budget rounds. The sixth form is thus cost-effective and the principles of best value effectively applied.

70. Staffing in the sixth form is satisfactory: there are a number of strong areas, notably in vocational subjects, but there have been difficulties in recruiting staff in key areas. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in respect of the lack of a sixth form base which could provide leisure and private study facilities, although this deficiency will soon be remedied when a planned building programme is completed.

Resources

71. Overall, resources are satisfactory. The library is not well organised from sixth form students' point of view and there is limited Internet access. However, sixth formers are able freely to use the excellent media resources centre.

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 college.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE A level courses and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Mathematics – A-level	7	100	87	14	43	4.9	5.8
Chemistry – A-level	3	100	90	67	43	8.0	5.9
Biology - A-level	4	100	88	25	34	5.5	5.25
Physics - A-level	4	100	88	50	40	7.0	5.7
Business studies - A-level	9	67	92	33	32	4.4	5.5
Computer studies – A-level	8	63	86	25	23	3.8	4.6
Art and design – A-level	2	100	96	50	46	6.0	6.6
History – A-level	10	80	88	40	35	5.4	5.6
Other social studies – A-level	1	100	87	100	34	10.0	5.3
English literature – A-level	10	70	95	0	37	3.0	5.9
Communication studies – A-level	7	71	93	0	31	4.3	5.5
Other languages – A-level	2	100	93	100	56	10.0	6.8

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% distinction	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Business - GNVQ	7	100	n/a	71	n/a	0	n/a
Information technology - GNVQ	9	56	n/a	11	n/a	0	n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on A and AS-level mathematics, biology and physics. Work in chemistry was sampled. Chemistry teaching, in the lesson seen, was very well planned to cater for a very diverse group, some at a very early stage in their course and some re-sit students. The new students were currently lacking in laboratory skills, but their good attitudes led to sound learning on empirical formulae and volumetric analysis. The lesson was hampered by a shortage of sufficiently precise balances. Analysis of examination results indicate that students have achieved well in relation to their varying starting points.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- A-level students achieve well especially in learning and applying routine methods.
- Students have positive attitudes about the subject and work hard.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and give students effective individual support.

Areas for improvement

- The A-level students would benefit from more active involvement in lessons.
- The teachers' marking of work needs to be more consistent and effective.
- Sixth form mathematics course planning and records need to be improved.

72. The inspection covered the A-level courses offered by the college, which involve pure mathematics, statistics and also decision and discrete mathematics. The college also provides a re-sit GCSE course, but this could not be observed and there were no plans or records to scrutinise.

73. Results at A-level in 2001 and over the previous three years were in line with the national averages. The majority of students achieved well taking account of their standards when they started the courses. However, the numbers taking A-level declined from fifteen in 1999 to just one in 2002, although this trend is now being reversed as group sizes have increased to viable numbers. There is no evidence of differences in achievement between students from different ethnic or other groups.

74. The standard of work seen in lessons and in written work are satisfactory and indicate that students are strongest in applying routine methods. They are accurate in using algebraic skills and sketching graphs for example. Students are keen when responding orally to questions posed by the teacher, and show a good recall of facts and methods. In a Year 12 lesson the students showed they knew the key features of different linear, quadratic and cubic graphs. In another lesson, students were effectively learning the methods for calculating statistical measures although some had a less secure understanding. Some students have difficulty with explaining mathematical ideas and interpreting longer questions.

75. Students have positive attitudes about the subject and work hard. They concentrate well in lessons. Whilst some students ask pertinent questions to clarify ideas, they would benefit from more regular opportunities to discuss mathematics and explain what they are doing.

76. The quality of the teaching and learning seen was good overall. Major strengths are the teachers'

confident and good subject knowledge reflected in their clear instructions and effective questioning. The teachers have very good relations with students, who respond well to the individual support provided. Lessons are well planned, with recorded learning objectives and good coverage of the required material. The noting of key words on the board is an appropriate strategy, with teachers recognising the importance of developing students' use of mathematical language. The students themselves appreciate the value of the textbooks, that closely match the examination modules and assessments, and provide answers to exercises. However, the taught lessons provide too little activity for the students, who tend to be passive in listening for long periods to teachers' explanations. Students sometimes record very little in a lesson. The lack of regular marking and record keeping does not help students strive for high standards of precision and presentation in their written work.

77. Sound use is made of ICT. Some students made appropriate use of graphic calculators in lessons, and A-level coursework shows they can make good use of computers for the modules on pure mathematics and statistics. Many effectively use software for plotting graphs and extensively use spreadsheets for solving equations.

78. The management of sixth form mathematics is sound but informal. It benefits from teacher experience and the use of textbooks that match the A-level modules. The department does not use recorded planning, schemes of work or consistent approaches to marking, for either the A-level or GCSE courses. However, standards have been maintained since the last inspection and there are strengths in the commitment of the teachers and the individual help and encouragement they provide to students. Leadership and management of sixth form mathematics need to build on these strengths, to improve provision further.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Results in biology A-level are higher than the national average.
- Teachers give very good personal support to students.
- Students' attitudes to work are very good and they feel well supported.
- The curriculum is enriched by investigative work in the CREST scheme.

Areas for improvement

- Some aspects of the teaching do not provide sufficient structure for average and lower-attaining students to readily access information.
- The use of ICT needs to be developed.

79. The inspection covered AS and A-level classes and work samples in both Year 12 and Year 13.

80. The number of students taking A-level level biology in 2001 was only four. Their pass rate and point scores were higher than the national average. Their results were in line with their GCSE grades, which mean that achievement is sound. In the previous five years the number of students has fluctuated, but when the sample size permitted comparison with national statistics, results were above or well above average. AS-level results are above average with 75 per cent of the current Year 13 cohort attaining A-B grades at AS-level.

81. Current standards in Year 12 are at national expectations. Students' achievements are satisfactory in relation to their starting points. Students were able to conduct practical work on food testing in a

systematic way and higher-attaining students could make interesting presentations of work they had conducted independently.

82. Overall, work seen in Year 13 was in line with national expectations, with above average performance by higher-attaining students but below average work by the lower-attaining minority. The work of higher-attaining students was systematic, well structured and contained many well-answered examination questions. The work of lower-attaining students was unstructured and contained some uncorrected errors. Course work (on catalase) was well informed on syllabus requirements and the external moderator has validated the marks. Work of all students met or exceeded expectations on the investigation and evaluation components. Higher-attaining students showed good statistical skills and were more able to integrate scientific knowledge and understanding into their planning and better able to analyse results. Students' achievements are satisfactory in relation to the grades that they gained at GCSE.

83. Three teachers contribute to post 16 teaching, although the timing of the inspection did not allow all to be seen in sixth form teaching. Teaching was satisfactory overall. However, learning was good due to students' very good attitudes to work and very good personal support by the teachers. Strengths in teaching include high expectations, management of students, use of time (including time outside the college day) and enthusiasm. However, expectations that higher-attaining students can provide their own structure and guide their own learning, lead to some explanations that average and lower-attaining students cannot follow and insufficient help in organising student work. This is partially overcome by one-to-one tuition but there is still a need to improve teaching methodology and clarity of explanation. Teaching of numeracy is appropriate to the syllabus.

84. Coursework assessment is good and well directed to the needs of the AS and A-level modules. Good guidance is given within the department on learning strategies needed in investigative coursework. Guidance on other study skills is less effective, being mainly directed at mock tests, leaving students to structure their own notes with little help. Paradoxically, this benefits higher-attaining students who use the opportunity to research texts independently, but it leaves below average students to flounder. Attitudes of all the students are very good and their perception of the subject is positive. Support in the form of teacher time devoted to one-to-one tuition and to taking students to Saturday schools and conferences is very good. Relationships were good in all lessons seen. There is a particular strength in the curriculum enrichment provided by participation in the CREST awards. Students gain responsibility by working with younger students, gain independence by working on investigation and gain confidence by participation in national competition (in which members of the current Year 13 were national winners.)

85. The management of the department is sound. This is seen in choice of syllabus, in student support, resourcing, and examination arrangements. Textbooks are well used, however, students have to pay for their copies. Library provision is satisfactory, although the students perceive that its arrangement makes it difficult to identify suitable books. There is a need for further monitoring and sharing of expertise to improve the clarity of teaching and the organisation of student work. ICT in sixth form biology is at an early stage and needs to be developed by the acquisition of new materials and the use of that which is available. Standards have been maintained and therefore improvement is sound.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Achievement in physics is good.
- Average and higher-attaining students learn well, especially in Year 13.
- Attitudes are good and students feel well supported.
- The curriculum is broad and ICT is used to good effect.

Areas for improvement

- Some aspects of the teaching are unstructured, making it difficult for some students to access information.

86. The inspection covered AS and A-level classes and work samples in both Year 12 and Year 13.

87. The number of students taking A-level level physics in 2001 was four. Their results were above the national average and above what would be expected from their GCSE grades so that achievement was good. Students entered the course with below average GCSE results (including some at grade D in English). Hence there was good added value. In the previous five years the number of students has fluctuated, but when the sample size permitted comparison with national statistics, results were well above average. Since 2001, recruitment has improved and there are now viable groups in Years 12 and 13, with a significant number from other schools and a number of students who have joined the college from overseas.

88. Standards in Year 12 meet national expectations and students are achieving well. Predicted grades cover the whole spectrum from grade A to E, with approximately equal numbers above and below average. Students were able to conduct practical work on acceleration in a systematic way and able to use both light sensors and ticker tape to measure velocity. The use of ICT aided their learning. The work of average and higher-attaining students was systematic, well structured, and contained many well-answered examination questions. Many students were able to make clear presentations about the experiments they had conducted.

89. In Year 13 standards also meet expectation and students' achievements are good. Work observed included activities on centripetal force in which students were able to sense the forces involved and relate them to scientific theory, for example predicting that, if gravitational forces were removed, an orbiting body would continue to move at constant velocity along the tangent to the orbit. Students' recorded work is generally well organised and their assignments well marked. However, many students lack skills in literacy and numeracy. The literacy weakness shows especially in longer answers (e.g. on car safety) and students require more support in the structuring of their notes.

90. Teaching and learning was satisfactory overall. Two teachers contributed to teaching the course. There were good aspects of teaching including academic and syllabus knowledge and enthusiasm. However, not all teachers have come to grips with the wide range of attainment of students on the course. Expectations that higher-attaining students can provide their own structure and guide their own learning are justified in about half of the students. For the lower-attaining half there is a need to

improve teaching methodology and to base it securely on detailed assessment of students' current skills. In one lesson the board work was muddled, the explanation of momentum unnecessarily complicated and the tasks set were at too high a level compared with the existing skills of students just starting the course.

91. Overall, assessment is well directed to the needs of the AS and A-level modules. Good guidance is given within the department on learning strategies needed in investigative coursework. The promotion of study skills in other parts of the course could be improved. Attitudes of the students are good and their perception of the subject is positive. Relationships were good in all lessons seen.

92. The management of the department is sound. This is seen in choice of syllabus and textbooks, in student support, resourcing, and examination arrangements. Numeracy is well dealt with in the curriculum, aided by computer simulations. Recruitment has been a problem, although this has shown recent improvement. There is a need for monitoring of teaching method and student learning in order to improve the clarity of teaching and the organisation of student work. Textbooks were well used and the library contained a satisfactory range of physics materials. However, students perceive that the organisation of the texts makes it difficult to identify suitable books. ICT in sixth form physics is a strength and contributes to the learning of all students both through data logging and curriculum and informational guidance on the college Intranet. Improvement since the last inspection is sound.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on GNVQ Foundation engineering. Work was sampled in AS-level design and technology. The course was introduced this year, most students on the course have obtained higher grades at GCSE and at this very early stage in the course are achieving appropriately.

Engineering

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well in relation to their varying starting points.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers plan activities very well and this helps students learn effectively.
- Very good formal and informal assessment procedures help students know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Students develop positive attitudes towards their studies and this helps them achieve very well.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers need to be more consistent in checking students' understanding of subject specific vocabulary.

93. The inspection covered GNVQ Foundation engineering classes and work samples in Year 12.

94. The college offers this course to those students in Year 12 who, for a variety of reasons, have not been successful in their GCSE examinations. It provides lower-attaining students and those who have underachieved with an opportunity to gain a qualification which will enable them to progress onto other courses. The most recent results are similar to those of previous years with half of the students entered gaining a pass with merit. For a number of reasons the proportion of students completing the

course varies from year-to-year. Most students starting the course have weak literacy and numeracy skills and they achieve very well in relation to their low attainment at the start of the course.

95. Although still only in the early stages of the first term current standards are in line with those expected for the course and show that students are achieving very well. In the lessons observed teachers had high expectations, both of the amount and quality of work to be completed. Tasks were well-matched to students' needs and developed basic literacy, numeracy and practical skills. These factors enabled students to make very good progress. In a practical lesson, students were able to follow instructions when using a metal turning lathe. They turned a piece of aluminium rod to a specific diameter, ready to cut a screw thread using a tap and die. All students worked with care and were able to complete the process. In another lesson, students showed a developing understanding of health and safety issues when discussing how to make risk assessments for practical activities. Scrutiny of students' coursework projects from last year indicate that skills such as researching and evaluating are developed systematically. Students are encouraged to become more independent as they progress through the year. Their work shows that they increasingly use a wider range of sources for information and prepare formal drawings using orthographic projection for their designs. The presentation of their work improves and their skills in sketching, annotating their work and using correct technical terms increases. The appropriate use of ICT for applications such as word processing, digital photographs and representing information in tables and charts is evident in coursework.

96. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Particular strengths in teaching are teachers' subject expertise, detailed planning and enthusiasm for the subject. Staff have very good relationships with students. They know students very well and clearly explain what has to be completed and the time available for the task. This ensures that lessons are productive and students can feel a sense of achievement. These features were exemplified in a lesson, where the teacher's lively approach and very good questioning successfully involved all members of the group. The unit of work being covered, on numeracy, was well linked to students' own experiences and very good opportunities were provided for students to work both individually and as a class. The teacher skilfully drew their ideas together and provided considerable encouragement and praise. This enabled all students to both make a contribution and learn from the activity. By the end of the lesson students had developed an understanding of how to calculate various standard SI units, such as meters per second and how to write them correctly. In all lessons teachers consistently use specialist vocabulary. However, they do not always check that students understand the terms being used by means of careful questioning and this is a weakness.

97. The marking of students work is both regular and thorough. Marking is linked effectively to examination marking criteria and students are given guidance on how to improve aspects of their work. Very good informal feedback and guidance is given in lessons and this enables students to make very good learning gains. Teachers take every opportunity to develop students' independence and to encourage them to think for themselves. In lessons, students' attitudes are positive. In discussions they said that they were enjoying the course. They show respect for adults, and an increasing respect for each other.

98. The subject is very well led and managed and this has led to the course meeting the needs of students effectively. Teachers work well as a team and show a very high level of commitment. There is a clear understanding of the elements of the course that are most successful, together with a desire for continued improvement. Assessment procedures have been developed, using examination criteria, that are very effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses of individuals. Staff teaching the course meet regularly to discuss units of work and the progress of each student. This is having a positive impact on students' achievement.

BUSINESS

The focus was on AS and advanced vocational (AVCE) business studies.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the quality of teaching is very good.
- Use of curriculum time to offer a variety of provision for different groups of students at A-level.
- Relationships between the teacher and students are very productive.
- The course builds sequentially on students' knowledge and skills, making very good use of situations from the real world of business.
- Many students achieve results that are well above what might be expected from their GCSE results.
- Constructive guidance and feedback are given on students' coursework, enabling them to make very good progress.

Areas for improvement

- Greater use of ICT including opportunities for research using the Internet
- The development of structures and policies to ensure consistency in the quality and quantity of marking.

99. Until recently Year 13 business groups have been small and results have fluctuated. Recent results have shown significant improvement and students have achieved very well. The department's strategy of offering a range of teaching groups in each year has been particularly successful in improving results. For example, Year 12 advanced students are taught in three different groupings dependent on their interests and experience. Two groups following the AS-level course and one the new AVCE course. Many students now begin Year 12 with a good record of GCSE success in the subject. However, others start with limited subject knowledge or a record of GCSE results that would suggest reduced chances of gaining high grades or even pass grades. The department is particularly successful with these students. In AS examinations most students exceed their predicted A-level results by between one and three AS grades and achieve very well.

100. The quality of teaching is very good. All lessons have a clear structure and positive working atmosphere. Lessons are driven by the charisma of both teachers and a fast pace of learning is achieved through rapid question and answer sessions, which include all students. For example, in one very effective Year 13 lesson students' ability to analyse and evaluate was extended through a clear advantages and disadvantages framework. The teachers' very good subject knowledge is conveyed to students with explanations that include clear examples with which students can easily identify. For

example, in one Year 13 lesson introducing the concept of “working capital” the analysis focussed on what happened in a story-line from the BBC soap “Eastenders”. Teachers give very effective real world examples to enhance learning. For example, in one Year 12 marketing lesson students were required to relate pop groups and artist suggested by the teacher to a business management tool known as the “Boston Matrix”. However, students’ own first-hand experiences are less well used to impact on their learning. Opportunities for students to develop as independent learners are less well developed where, for example, there is very limited access to the Internet. The marking of student work varies in quantity and quality, but the department is now dealing with this. The subject documentation and examination board feedback suggest that the examples of very good teaching observed are not isolated.

101. Students have a high regard for both teachers and one volunteered that the time in lesson flies by because they are so interesting. They appreciate the efforts made by staff to keep them on track, and they are aware that failure to attend or carry out work will be followed up. Students respond well in class, and relationships between students and their teachers are good. Students are given clear feedback on their work and the requirements of the examination are understood. For example, a particularly effective way of developing this understanding is through being required to grade each other’s oral answers using examination criteria.

102. The leadership and management of the subject are very good with the two teachers forming a powerful team. The department is continuing to develop procedures and policies and has plans in place to ensure that all work is marked regularly. The use of ICT is not yet developed and the unsatisfactory access to the Internet restricts opportunities for students to conduct independent research in the subject. However, opportunities for the development of literacy and numeracy skills occur frequently and naturally throughout the courses. The subject is improving rapidly.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The inspection focused on AVCE IT. Work was also sampled in the GNVQ intermediate IT course where the teaching observed was good and students achieving well in relation to their various starting points.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Achievement of students doing the AVCE course is very good as a result of the very good teaching they receive.
- Very good relationships between staff and students, lead to positive attitudes and a very good learning environment.
- The work is well structured and meets the needs and aspirations of the students.

Areas for improvement

- Use assessment data more effectively to inform students of their performance and link this more closely to their subject targets

103. Standards in the sixth form are now broadly in line with national expectations. The 2001 results

were below the national average. The most recent results and the work seen during the inspection indicate further improvement. Few students who took the examination in 2001 had gained an A* to C grade in GCSE information technology prior to starting the advanced course. As a result all students studied the GNVQ Intermediate course in Year 12, along with the AVCE course. Achievement of all groups of students who have followed the AVCE information technology course is very good considering that students started the course at a standard that was well below average. This meant that teachers had to cover work at a basic level as well as the more advanced skills. As a result, the course has been challenging for both the students and teachers. Those who started the course in 2002 have completed the GNVQ Intermediate course in Year 11 and are therefore starting at a higher level.

104. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are very well planned and teachers are well organised. They have very good knowledge of the subject. As a result, students benefit from detailed specific guidance, and support which is well matched to the needs of individuals. Teachers set clear objectives in lessons to guide students with their coursework. However, students are not regularly informed of their assessment grades to help them to make effective improvements to their work. In lessons, teachers develop students' knowledge effectively and explain the information well. However, students were less active in their own learning in lessons. As part of the course, students are encouraged to complete a network management certificate course. This gives them the opportunity to gain further practical knowledge and application of computer network systems. An example of this was seen in a Year 13 lesson where students were building on their existing understanding of networks. The teacher explained the information and this was well supported with a structured interactive learning scheme. The specialist resources at the local City Learning Centre were used well to support this learning. The majority of students develop adequate skills in numeracy to cover work on spreadsheets and gain sufficient understanding of the necessary concepts. Their literacy skills are adequate and students complete work to an appropriate level. However, students' recorded work shows that they find note taking and essay writing more difficult. They benefit from teacher guidance and the use of ICT to increase the quality and presentation of their final coursework. Teachers establish good relationships with the students, which create a good learning ethos in which there is mutual respect.

105. Management of the subject is very good. The AVCE course is now well established and has become very popular amongst students. Teachers work very well together and good relationships have created very good conditions for learning. Standards are improving as more students are now doing the GNVQ Intermediate course before starting the AVCE course. Good monitoring of the work of students and teachers now takes place and this is having a positive impact on standards. Overall, there has been good improvement.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was not inspected in detail. Work was sampled in AS-level physical education. In a lesson linking the theory and practice of the immediate effects of exercise on heart rate and temperature, students made good progress in their measuring and recording skills. The students were keen and interested, in response to the good teaching. However apart from this one group of AS-level students, other sixth formers do not have timetabled opportunities for physical education lessons.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on media studies AS and A-level. Art was sampled. The number of students taking A-level art has been small making significant statistical comparisons impossible. Students with a wide range of ability study the subject and analysis of results indicates that students achieve well in relation to their varying starting points. The subject is increasing in popularity with some students joining the sixth form to follow the course. In the lesson observed students in both year groups made good progress. Some higher-attaining students had completed good quality research on a visit to the South Bank in London in preparation for a unit of coursework on city life. They were able to discuss the work planned in some detail. The quality of teaching observed was very good. Relationships were positive and staff provided high quality support and practical guidance to students. Each student was made aware of what should be completed and advice was given on possible outcomes. This resulted in time being used effectively and students making very good learning gains. Some lower-attaining students find it difficult to consistently complete the necessary research and preparation work to complete assignments to a high standard and this limits their long-term progress.

Media studies

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

Strengths

- Good subject knowledge of the teachers with integration of theory and practical work.
- Good use of available equipment, resources and technical support.
- Very good relationships which support students' progress.
- A growing popularity of the subject resulting in an increase in group size.

Areas for improvement

- More active participation of all students.
- Higher standards of literacy to foster accurate writing and wider reading.
- Some students' critical and evaluative skills are insufficiently developed.

106. Results in A-level media studies over the last five years have been consistently below or well below the national average. There has been some fluctuation in both results and numbers of students taking the course since the last inspection. The results indicate good achievement for most students, since they often start the course with average or lower attainment at GCSE.

107. The evidence of the inspection indicates that standards are improving, particularly amongst those students taking the one year AS-level course, more of whom are now pursuing the subject into a second year at A-level. In discussion, Year 13 students demonstrate an enthusiasm, particularly for the practical film production work in which they receive very good support from their teachers and the college technical staff. Their moving image productions are their best work. In writing, more complex ideas are fully grasped only by the higher-attainers who display a sharper critical awareness of representation, form and audience. All students have an understanding of genre and communication, but most show less confidence when required to use media concepts to evaluate texts and ideas. The standard of written coursework indicates that many students experience problems with literacy and few pursue the wider reading necessary for success at the higher levels. A significant number of students, including those for whom English is not their first language, have difficulties fully understanding the necessary subject vocabulary and nuances of language. The emphasis on group work, where students feel supported by others, is clearly enabling the lower-attainers to make progress. A Year 12 class, working on the ideological stance of newspapers in their treatment of

celebrities, showed the positive impact of group dynamics. They shared ideas and fed back their thoughts other groups. However, in whole class discussions, not all students contribute fully and some become over-reliant on the teacher.

108. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers know the students well, evident in the thoughtful and effective personal guidance offered and the very good relationships that pertain. Students speak highly of the support they are given. Teachers are particularly good at drawing on the cultural and ethnic diversity within the college and connecting ideas to students' own experiences. Teachers discuss the meaning of specialist media studies vocabulary, though, at times, students' weaknesses in basic literacy are not dealt with. A wide range of resources is used and very good use of new technology is made. Teachers work hard collecting current materials to maintain students' interest and help them learn. Expectations are high and teachers set challenging work but do not always pay sufficient attention to including all students.

109. Courses are well managed and students benefit from an enthusiastic team of teachers who work closely together. Teachers are implementing successful strategies to improve attendance and retention rates are good. There is a strong commitment to the growth of the subject in the college and to recruit from a broader level of attainment at GCSE. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on history at AS and A-level. Work in geography was sampled. The most recent AS and A-level geography results indicate that students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their varying starting points. Current work indicates that students are achieving satisfactorily.

The provision for religious education for all sixth form students is unsatisfactory. There is no coherent planned provision for students as expected by the local Agreed Syllabus and the college does not meet statutory requirements.

History

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

Strengths

- Students' achievement at A-level is good and, for a significant number, it is very good compared to their GCSE results.
- Students' learning is consistently good and they produce high quality written work in homework and coursework for both AS and A-level courses. Students have very good attitudes to learning.
- The teaching of history is very good overall. Teachers have very high expectations, plan well and have strong knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements.
- The department is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The department is not yet making the most sophisticated use possible of assessment data to both monitor and promote students' rates of improvement.
- Even more challenge is possible in some lessons.

110. Students' performance in A-level examinations over the last five years has been in line with the national average, with about one third achieving A or B grades and about three-quarters achieving a pass. The trend in results is upward since the last inspection, and over that period history has been

consistently one of the most successful subjects in the college. There is no indication of differences in the achievement of students with special educational needs, of those from ethnic minority groups or of the few girls who have taken the examination in the college. However, some students did not complete the AS level course in 2002, in response to its demands, or to external pressures.

111. In lessons seen students attain above the national average expectation. Attainment in Year 12 AS- level classes, in particular, is above what might be expected for this very early stage of their course, reflecting the very good teaching seen. Year 13 work is at least in line with the standard of recent A-level results. This is because current students had average, or above, AS-level results and they are benefiting from the department's thoughtful implementation of the new examination arrangements. They are very well motivated and committed to success. Students in both years speak and debate well, using their prior knowledge and a good understanding of ideas and the views of respected historians. Some display very high order thinking and originality.

112. Students in both Years 12 and 13 achieve well. Most start their AS-level course with a GCSE grade A* to C, but not necessarily having done as well in their other subjects. Students feel they achieve their potential in history as a result of the department's commitment and skill in adding value to their progress. In 2001, most students achieved well at A-level. For example, some students achieved an A or B grade, when their attainment at GCSE had indicated that a C or D would have been satisfactory progress. Using national comparisons over the last five years, students have done better in history than in their other subjects taken, by an average of about one grade.

113. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Students learn very well in their courses in sixth form history, with progress being particularly noticeable in Year 12. In both lessons and written work they make rapid progress in using sources, and in their knowledge and recall of the periods studied. By Year 13, students can evaluate skilfully a wide range of sources and viewpoints, and the best candidates can defend controversial views in both debate and written work. They carry out their own research and understand fully the requirements of extended writing in both coursework and examination formats. Work in both years is very well organised in folders, and notes are complete and thorough. The quality of essays, Year 12 coursework assignments and Year 13 personal studies are particularly good.

114. This very good learning results from teaching that is well planned, lively, very challenging and carefully structured to meet the needs of groups and individual students. Teachers have high expectations, give clear explanations and good advice on how to structure answers for different purposes, including examination requirements. Marking is of good quality and done with care. As a result students' show consistently good application to study both in and out of the lessons. The quality of teaching was very good in three out of five lessons seen and good in the remainder. At its best teaching is characterised by great enthusiasm for the subject, very good subject knowledge and an excellent understanding of examination requirements, which is well communicated to students. Lessons are not, however, overly 'examination driven', and a good range of methods is used to actively involve students. Teachers know their students' abilities and needs well and teach with a sensitivity and humour that leads to excellent relationships. Assessment is used well to guide individual progress, but could be refined and used more productively for analysis and prediction. While pace is generally high, the good lessons could be even more challenging by placing more emphasis on the learning processes and on requiring even more complexity from the most able students.

115. The department is very well led and managed and has a good balance of staff experience. Staff turnover has been well managed, and younger teachers are well trained and supported so that consistent standards have been achieved. Resources are satisfactory and are used well, although library books could be organised more helpfully for sixth form students. The department now has

access to good resources for ICT, but has yet to make full use of this development. ICT is used well by students for individual research and for the presentation of course assignments, but it is not fully integrated into the teaching of the department and is now receiving priority. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, particularly in the maintenance and improvement of results in the face of external change and staff turnover.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on AS and A-level English literature.

English

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

Strengths

- The increasing number of students attracted to AS-level with improving results.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Relationships are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Achievement at A-level has been unsatisfactory.
- Personal and learning skills, including literary criticism and wider reading, are insufficiently developed.

116. Results in A-level English Literature are well below average. This was the case at the last inspection and has been each year since. There was no Year 13 literature course operating in year prior to this inspection and only a small group of students is currently taking the course in Year 13. However, the college is promoting the one-year AS-level course and the number of students is increasing in Year 12. Recent results at AS-level indicate an improvement.

117. The standards seen in the A-level class remain well below the national average. As students have

entered the A-level course with average and below average overall results at GCSE and usually only average results in English, the move to advanced study of literature represents a considerable intellectual challenge. For example, while students have ideas about characters in plays and novels, and can generally retell the plot, they are less clear about the dramatic impact and effect. Students studying Orwell's novel, 'Nineteen Eighty Four', and 'Shakespeare's 'Othello' listened carefully in class and most participated briefly in discussion, but all found the demands of the texts very difficult. They relied heavily on the teacher for interpretation and explanation. Written work was similarly brief and had weaknesses in basic structure.

118. However, the standards seen in a larger class of Year 12 AS-level English Literature students were at least average and their achievement early in the course is good. Most have entered the sixth form with higher qualifications at GCSE, and plan to take the subject for one year to broaden their sixth form studies. These students have a keen awareness of language use, particularly in debate, analysis and explanation. In their discussion of the poem, 'Disgrace', by Carol Ann Duffy, they showed sensitivity in interpreting the poet's ideas of broken relationships. All students contributed confidently as a result of meticulous planning and delivery by the teacher, who ensured every student prepared for each stage of the lesson with a personal response. Higher-attaining students displayed a sophisticated critical vocabulary and the teacher used their contributions very well to raise the level of debate of the whole class. This resulted in very good learning.

119. Students work well together in pairs and small groups and they enjoy the subject. Relationships between students and staff are very good on a personal and social level and students appreciate this. However, at A-level many students show an over-dependence on teachers due to their low prior attainment. Students in both A-level and AS-level lack the confidence to extend their range of reading or show a rigorous pursuit of ideas in their private study.

120. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. All teaching is lively and well paced and teachers have good knowledge of the subject. In the best lessons, teachers adopt strategies which involve and stretch students of all abilities. Teaching which is less successful pays insufficient attention to the strategies needed to involve passive students and the lower-attainers. There is prompt and constructive marking of students' written work and good oral feedback on how to improve.

121. Most teaching takes place in a dedicated suite of rooms with ready access to good resources and equipment. Staff collaborate closely to share good practice and discuss students' progress, retention and achievement. Trips to the theatre support the studied texts and enrich the course. Recent improvement is satisfactory.