

# INSPECTION REPORT

**LONGSANDS COLLEGE**

St Neots

LEA area: Cambridgeshire

Unique reference number: 110905

Principal: Dr Robert Gwynne

Reporting inspector: R Peter J McGregor  
3525

Dates of inspection: 23-27 September 2002

Inspection number: 249630

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Longsands Road St Neots Cambridgeshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Ruth Clapham MBE
Date of previous inspection:	April 1997

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28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English 16-18	
18178	Ian Matthews	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-18	
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Science 11-16 Biology 16-18	
2501	Raye Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art 11-18	
2495	Brian Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-18	
13623	James Waddington	Team inspector	Geography 11-16 Psychology 16-18	
4475	Keith Remnant	Team inspector	Geography 16-18	
30893	Michelle Currie	Team inspector	History 11-16	
14633	Jean Bannister	Team inspector	History 16-18	
10817	George Rayner	Team inspector	ICT 11-16	How well the college is led and managed
15075	Bryan Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages 11-16  English as an additional language	
15208	Anthony Briggs	Team inspector	Music 11-16 ICT 16-18	
23880	Olivia Hall	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16  Sports studies 16-18	How well the college cares for its students

10761	Patrick Willan	Team inspector	Religious education 11-18 Sociology 16-18	
30800	Betty Colley	Team inspector	Special educational needs 11-18 Educational inclusion 11-18	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students
10060	David Gutmann	Team inspector	Business studies 16-18	
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32231	Adrian Lyons	Team inspector		
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Longsands College provides education for students in Years 7 to 13, who transfer from eight main local feeder primary schools. It is much bigger than most other comprehensive schools with 1581 students, 250 of whom are in the sixth form, having grown in size from 1454 five years ago. Just under two-thirds of the students in Year 11 transfer into the sixth form and a few join the college from other schools. The number of boys and girls in the college is similar overall. Most of the students are white and very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Very few of the students have English as an additional language, and an even smaller number are at an early stage of learning English. These are low figures when compared with the national picture. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs in the main school, at seventeen per cent, is below that found nationally. The proportion in the sixth form is four percent. About half the students with special educational needs are at the higher stages of need. The proportion of students with Statements, two per cent, is broadly similar to that in other schools. Special educational needs are mainly dyslexia, emotional and behavioural issues, and hearing impairment.

Judgements made in this report about national test results taken in Year 9 and in GCSE sometimes refer to similar schools. These are non-selective schools with more than five percent and up to nine per cent of students taking free school meals. In September 2002, the free school meal proportion at Longsands has dropped to below four per cent, a well below average figure. Seventy-three of the students joined or left the college other than at the usual times of admission and transfer, indicating below average mobility. Students of a full range of prior attainment attend the college, although standards on entry overall are just above average. The area around the college is socially and economically mixed but advantaged overall. About a third of the ninety staff have left Longsands in the past two years, but the college has been able to replace all of them. More than half of those who left were successful in gaining promoted posts in other schools.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Longsands College is very effective and has several distinctive characteristics from which the students benefit greatly, particularly in the sixth form. The quality of support all students receive is very good indeed, and relationships are excellent. Attendance is very good. Overall, good progress is made in the main school, with some very good work, and students attain above average standards in their GCSE examinations. Middle and low attainers often do better than the most capable students. Teaching is good in the main school and very good indeed in the sixth form. Leadership is strong and successful. The relatively new management structure is far-sighted and effective. The college is popular and increasing in size and students are very pleased to be educated there. It provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Students attained high standards in French, history, music, religious education and English literature in the 2001 GCSE exams
- Teaching is good overall in the main school, with a significant number of very good lessons, resulting in very good achievement in English, dance and drama, French, history and music
- The college provides a very caring and supportive environment, where students want to learn, try hard, behave well, and attend regularly
- The sixth form is very effective with very good teaching, well above average attainment in A-level results, and excellent attitudes and personal development
- High quality leadership has secured a clear and very effective direction for the college
- Pastoral year teams and several heads of department are very good in their roles

#### **What could be improved**

- The most capable students are not always challenged sufficiently in lessons, and some underachieve. This can be a particular issue in the few classes of over thirty students
- Teaching in a small number of lessons, which was unsatisfactory or just satisfactory, did not result in good learning and achievement for the students

- The balance of the curriculum is not as good as it should be for fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds, with insufficient time in some areas. This restricts teaching approaches and students' achievements

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in April 1997. Since then, significant good progress has been made, with improvements in areas of weakness and effort invested in maintaining the strengths of the college, such as students' behaviour and personal development, and leadership and management. Issues from five years ago have been resolved in the main, but a few new areas for improvement have emerged.

Current standards are higher than in 1997 in all three sections of the college, with good achievement across the main school and very good work in the sixth form. Attendance has improved to a very good level. The quality of teaching is better, particularly in the sixth form, where some excellence was observed. The care provided was a great strength in 1997 and is even stronger today. The ethos of the college is better, with provision that is excellent for social development and very good for personal development.

National Curriculum requirements in ICT were not met five years ago but they are today. The large number of computers are used effectively to teach and learn ICT but not all departments make sufficient use of them. The curriculum breadth in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, an issue in 1997, is now good and several vocational courses have been introduced. Curriculum balance is, however, now an issue for fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds. The health and safety concerns identified in 1997 have all been satisfactorily resolved. Assessment and target setting are much improved, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where available data is used well. In Years 7 to 9, assessment and target setting are satisfactory and developing as data is used to better effect. A new school report format is being piloted where National Curriculum levels are now clearly stated for students in Years 7 to 9.

## 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	A	A	B	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	A	

**Key**

well above average      A

above average            B

average                    C

below average            D

well below average      E

Students' standards in end of Year 9 tests in English, maths and science were similar to national averages in 2001. Compared with similar schools, results were below average in English and well below average in maths and science. Girls' results were higher than boys'. The results indicated that students underachieved. In 2002, results were much higher in all three subjects, particularly so at the higher levels. The trend in students' average points score in these tests over the five years up to 2001 was downwards, and below the national trend. The 2002 results, however, reverse this trend.

The proportion of college students gaining five A\*-C grades or more in their GCSE exams in 2001 was above average, at 60 percent compared with a national figure of 48 percent. When compared with similar schools, results were average, indicating satisfactory achievement for high attaining students. The proportion of students gaining five or more A\*-G grades, however, at 97 percent, was well above average when compared with all and similar schools. These results indicate very good achievement, particularly for low and middle attainers. When the results of all students over five years are considered, overall standards are well above average. As students' attainment on entry

into the college is generally just above average, achievement over time by age sixteen has been very good. Students did relatively better at GCSE in history, religious education and French, and less well in maths and science. The 2002 GCSE results have not yet been finalised but are likely to be a little higher than in 2001.

The college's target of 66 percent gaining five A\* to C passes in 2001 was not met and it is likely that the college has narrowly missed the 63 percent target for 2002.

In the sixth form, exam results in 2001 were well above national averages. Boys' results were very high and in the top five percent of all schools nationally, and girls' results were well above average. Results have been high for a number of years. First indications are that 2002 results are good and above average.

In the work seen at this early stage in the school year, in Year 9, at GCSE and in the sixth form, standards are above average. Year 9 attainment is average and improving in maths and above average in science and English, with particular strengths in reading and writing. Achievements are good overall in the main school, with satisfactory achievement in Year 7 improving to very good work in Year 11 and the sixth form. The best work in Year 9 and in Year 11 is in English, dance and drama, French, history and music, where achievement is very good, and weakest in Year 11 maths and science where current achievement is satisfactory. Over time, achievement in Years 10 and 11 has been unsatisfactory in maths and science, because of staffing problems. In most subjects throughout the college, attainment is above average and achievements are good or better.

### PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students' attitudes are very good indeed. They are enthusiastic about their lessons and show a positive approach to learning. They enjoy college, taking part in the activities offered.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students' behaviour is very good, both in and out of lessons, with only a few instances of silliness. They show very good understanding of the boundaries of acceptable conduct. No permanent exclusions have taken place over the past year and the rate of fixed term exclusions is below average.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships amongst students and between students and teachers are very good, and contribute to the excellent learning environment.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is now well above average. Unauthorised absence is well below the national average. Punctuality is good.

Clear college rules and a very strong positive and pervasive ethos have a very good impact on students' attitudes and behaviour. Older students are excellent role models that younger ones try to follow. As students move through the college they learn and accept college codes that result in the very good levels of personal development in the sixth form. Students are thoughtful and active, not passive and diffident, wanting to gain as much as possible from their life at the college.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

A clear trend of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning is seen as the students progress through the college. The best lessons were observed in Years 11, 12 and 13 where the quality was very good, and the least effective in Year 7, where the quality was satisfactory. As the students settle into the college and appreciate what is and is not acceptable, there is a discernible improvement in the quality of learning. In Year 7, where a higher proportion of lessons are taught in mixed ability groups, work was not always matched well to students' prior learning, building on what they learnt in primary schools. By the time they are in Year 11, the quality of many lessons is good or better, with a high proportion very good or excellent.

The quality of teaching in English was very good throughout Years 7 to 11. It was effective in Years 7 to 9 in science and in maths, where the national strategy is having a good impact. Science and maths teaching were satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In other subjects the quality of teaching was good or very good, overall, with more strengths in the teaching of older students. The teaching of dance and drama was excellent.

Particular strengths in teaching and learning include: clear and detailed planning for lessons so teachers share clear learning intentions with students; a very good range of teaching approaches, with a good balance of teacher directed work and tasks where students have to work independently; high expectations and very effective preparation for GCSE exams; and teachers' good subject knowledge and understanding, resulting in lucid explanations. Few weaknesses were seen in teaching and learning. The most significant issue was the lack of challenge for very capable students in some lessons.

Boys and girls are taught equally effectively. The quality of teaching for students with special educational needs is good overall with good support from learning support assistants.

Literacy skills are taught well throughout the college, with explicit support for reading and writing. A considerable amount of numerical work takes place across several subjects and the development of numeracy skills is satisfactory. In some subjects, such as music, ICT skills are taught very well but in others, too little use is made of computers in teaching, particularly in maths and science.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall with good breadth. The National Curriculum and religious education are well planned for in Years 7 to 9 and a good range of courses and options is available in Years 10 and 11. Insufficient time is available for PSHE, religious education and science. Careers education, and work experience are very good. The range of extra-curricular activities and visits is very good. A good range of option choices is available in the sixth form, including vocational courses, but teaching time for A-level courses is insufficient.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The college has a well-managed programme of support and students are fully integrated into college life. Provision for the small number of students with special educational needs in the sixth form is effective.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few students with English as an additional language are supported well in individual lessons, but planned provision across the college is weak.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall and excellent for social development. The college provides many opportunities for students to extend their social skills. Provision is very good for moral development, good for cultural development and satisfactory for spiritual development. Performing arts are a great strength, making a valuable contribution to students' personal development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. Staff know students well. Year teams provide excellent support and tutors build up a relationship of care over five years. Procedures for monitoring attendance and behaviour are very good. Students in the inclusion unit are very well supported and remain

	integrated in college life. Extensive and very useful data, prepared on students' attainment, is used to provide good targets for individual students in Years 10 and 11.
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The partnership between parents and the college is satisfactory. Some good quality documentation is provided for parents. Parental involvement in the college is limited, with neither parents nor staff focusing on developing stronger links. The college often seeks parents' views but has been slow to react to the few negative responses it has received. The statutory requirements for teaching religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form are not fully met and a daily act of collective worship does not take place.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership and effective management. The principal has a very clear view of the strategic direction for the college. A clear and comprehensive plan reviews progress since the last inspection, sets out the college's targets and considers the challenges facing it in achieving these. All managers have clarity of view and a common purpose.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. They assess the college's strengths and weaknesses and analyse its performance. Governors visit the college regularly and keep themselves informed about its activities. They are proud of the college and have considerable respect for the teachers and students, which is reciprocated by the staff who work there.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good overall. A good system is in place for monitoring teaching and learning throughout the college. The way in which the information gathered is used to evaluate and improve teaching, learning and standards is a less strong feature of the college. Departments are inconsistent in their approach.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The governors have invested in the new college management structure, which is linked carefully to the strategic plan. Very great and successful efforts are made to appoint staff in specialist subjects where there are national shortages. Significant resources have been spent on improvements in college accommodation from which the students are benefiting.

Staffing is good with the exception of a small proportion of non-specialist teaching, resulting from a shortfall in some subjects, and insufficient technicians. Accommodation is satisfactory, with very good music and good physical education facilities, and satisfactory specialist accommodation for science and design and technology. The library is a good facility. Dance and drama areas are poor and the college buildings themselves are difficult to manage, having been added to over many years without any apparent overall plan. Resources are generally good, with a large number of computers, although some of these are now rather dated.

The college applies best value principles well, assessing its own success in meeting local needs, working to improve its own performance, spending available finance efficiently, and consulting before taking action.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The college has high expectations of its students</li> <li>Their children are making good progress</li> <li>They feel very comfortable about approaching the college if they need to</li> <li>Their children are happy at the college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The amount of homework set</li> <li>How closely the college works with parents</li> <li>The behaviour of some students</li> <li>Information they receive about their children's progress</li> </ul>

A very small proportion of parents returned questionnaire responses and attended the parents' meeting before the inspection, so the views stated may not be representative of the vast majority of parents. The overall picture was broadly positive though some concerns were expressed by a few parents. From their findings during the inspection, inspectors endorse all the positive points above. They do not agree that behaviour is an issue as this was judged to be very good. Inspectors do, however, agree that the inconsistent use made of the homework log, by staff, students and parents, leads to some inequalities in amounts of work set and completed. The partnership between parents and college is not as strong as it might be and information on reports has not always given a clear picture of a student's current level of attainment. The college is aware of these shortcomings and is working hard at improving the home-college relationship and communication. Few parents find the time to support the college, except through attendance at their own children's activities, which makes the task of involving parents more difficult to achieve.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form of 250 students, with 139 in Year 12 and 111 in Year 13, is larger than most sixth forms. There has been a steady year-on-year increase in size for some time. Girls have outnumbered boys for several years. A handful of students join the sixth form in Year 12 from other schools. All students live quite locally to the college. About four-fifths of students stay on into Year 13. The number of students taking free school meals in the sixth form is substantially lower than the national proportion. About four percent have special educational needs. No students have English as an additional language. Entry requirements into the sixth form depend upon the courses followed. Those wishing to take 4 AS courses in Year 12 have to gain six A\*-C grades or better, for 3 such courses, four A\*-C grades or better are required. For those not securing these grades, other courses such as repeat GCSE courses and GNVQ intermediate are available, and entry is by individual negotiation. Each year a small number retake their GCSE English and maths exams to try to improve their grades. The standard of students on entry varies greatly from subject to subject, but is generally that expected of an academic sixth form, focusing on A-level courses. About three-quarters of the students take AS and A-level courses but, as vocational schemes are becoming established in Years 10 and 11, they are becoming more popular in the sixth form. About four in every five students go on to higher education, selecting a great range of universities and local colleges. Almost all the remaining students go into employment or take a gap year.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is very effective. Very good teaching, with some excellent tuition, results in well above average attainment, and very good achievement and personal development. Behaviour and attitudes are excellent. Individual needs are very well met by the wide range of courses provided, although few planned opportunities are provided for physical and recreational activities. Tutors, teachers and managers provide a very supportive sixth form environment where students thrive. Relationships between staff and students are of the highest quality. Leadership and management are very successful, portraying the sixth form as central to the college, and an end point that younger students can aspire to. The sixth form is cost effective.

**Strengths**

- Standards in A-levels in 2001 were well above national standards with 60 percent of grades at A or B, and particularly high attainment in biology, chemistry, economics, graphics and physics
- Very good or excellent teaching was observed in over half the lessons seen, a very high proportion, resulting in very good progress and achievement
- Students are confident and enjoy their sixth form careers, developing good independent learning skills in several subjects, and appreciating the responsibilities they are given

**What could be improved**

- Insufficient time for AS and A2 courses, with four hours a week of timetabled lessons, which restricts what students could achieve, particularly where classes are too large

*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	<b>Good.</b> Students achieve above average and good examination results. Staff are well qualified and teaching is of very good quality, leading to very effective learning.
Biology	<b>Very good.</b> Very good teaching and learning leads to results well above the national average. Limited time allocation reduces the amount of challenging practical work that can be done.
Chemistry	<b>Good.</b> Results have been well above average and show good achievement. Year 13 students are extremely positive about learning chemistry and teaching is good. Students' work should be more rigorously marked. The lack of time restricts teaching approaches.
Design and technology	<b>Good.</b> Results have been well above average. Students achieve well because teaching is good. Students are well supported through the good individual guidance they receive. Assessment is regular and helps to improve standards.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Good teaching and learning in lessons and work seen indicates good progress on A-level and AVCE business courses. Standards of current students are in line with national expectations.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	<b>Good.</b> Students learn well because of the good quality specialist teaching and good relationships between teachers and students. Students made good progress during the first year of the course. Insufficient opportunities are planned for students to gain first hand experience of ICT used by outside organisations.
Sports Studies	<b>Good.</b> Excellent student attitudes and relationships with staff. Good achievement in coursework. Standards in line with course expectations. Teaching is good.
Art and textiles	<b>Very good.</b> 2001 results were similar to the national average and nearly half the students entered gained A or B grades. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Students are enthusiastic and learn very well.
History	<b>Good.</b> Above average results and good achievement resulting from good, sometimes very good, teaching. Student attitudes to learning are excellent.
Geography	<b>Very good.</b> Very good teaching and learning. Above average standards of work. Students are extremely well motivated and achieve very well. Staff knowledge and enthusiasm enhance students' learning.
Sociology	<b>Very good.</b> Very good quality teaching has led to good achievements and results after the first year of the course. Students enjoy their studies and receive very clear guidance on how to maximise their achievement.
Psychology	<b>Satisfactory</b> with some good features. Teaching is good overall but too little emphasis is placed on students experiencing applied aspects of the subject. Examination results represent satisfactory achievement for the students.
English	<b>Very good.</b> Most recent results show considerable improvement on those of 2001, which were average, and achievement is now very good. Teaching is very good, utilising very good staff subject knowledge. Excellent student attitudes lead to very good independent thinking and maturity of learning.

In the thirteen subjects and courses not focused on during the inspection, standards were equally good. In economics, physics, performing arts and geology, provision was particularly good, with very good achievement and examination results. In all areas, teaching was good or better and most was very good. Teaching was excellent in

economics and performing arts. Work was challenging and interesting, students were very enthusiastic about their subjects and worked very hard to achieve success. The extent to which students' independent learning skills are developed varies from subject to subject depending upon how great a body of knowledge has to be taught.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very well. Sixth form staff have very good knowledge of their students through individual mentoring. The relationships between students and staff are excellent. Tutors maintain very full records in terms of both academic and personal development. Students value the information, advice and guidance they are given in relation to their studies. Advice of a similarly high standard is provided as they move to higher education or employment. Students appreciate the way they are helped to settle into post-16 education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very effective. The sixth form has an individual identity as well as being seen to be a key and very successful part of the main college. The broadening of the curriculum to include vocational courses widens the range of students who would benefit from studying at the college. All students are valued and staff are committed to providing the best environment in which all can flourish. The sixth form is the area of the college where the aims are most strongly and consistently secured, with a very high proportion of very good and excellent teaching and learning, and very good achievement.

### 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"> <li>• They are treated as mature young adults</li> <li>• Courses are suited to their needs and aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well they are kept informed of their progress</li> <li>• How their work is assessed</li> <li>• The range of extra-curricular courses and activities</li> <li>• Guidance on future careers</li> </ul>

Initial indications from the college questionnaires returned by 91 percent of the students stated above gave a mixed picture, with several positive and negative responses. This contrasts with inspection findings that students' views of the sixth form overall are very positive. In conversations and interviews during the inspection, students made clear that they enjoy life in the sixth form and feel very well supported. They appreciate the interest and care shown to them by staff, and feel the teaching they receive and the guidance offered are very good. Students are pleased with the courses they have chosen, and strongly recommend the college to others. Inspectors endorse these positive views. The quality of feedback and guidance to students on their work and progress is very good as is advice on careers and further or higher education. The range of activities and enrichment courses is satisfactory but could usefully be extended to provide more sporting and cultural opportunities.

### COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and pupils' achievements**

1. Students' end of Year 9 tests in English, mathematics and science in 2002 were much higher than in 2001 and earlier years. The college was aware from national comparative data that standards had not been as high as they should have been in Years 7 to 9 in these and other subjects in 2001 and earlier. By focusing on improving teaching and learning, making use of aspects of the new national Key Stage 3 strategy, standards have improved. In English and mathematics in 2001 the proportion of students attaining the expected levels of 5 and 6 was a little above average, but a little below average at the higher level 7. In science the shortfall was at both levels 6 and 7. In all three subjects high attainers did not do as well as they did nationally, and boys underachieved more than the girls. In 2002 the proportion of students attaining test levels 6 or 7 improved greatly in all three core subjects. The improvement was greatest in English, with 55 percent of students attaining levels 6 or 7 compared with 32 percent in 2001. Although high attainers improved their performance substantially the proportion of level 7s in all three subjects did not rise by as much as the level 6s. The college has a current focus on improving achievement of gifted and talented students.
2. Current standards in English and science are above average and in mathematics, they are average and improving. In all three subjects, standards are higher than in the 2001 national tests. Students' achievements are better. In English, very good progress is being made in improving students' writing and reading skills and achievement is very good in both areas. Middle attaining boys' writing is not always as accurate or as substantial as that of girls, and the department is working to improve this. Students' oral work is satisfactory overall, although many students speak very well indeed. A weakness exists, however, in the lack of planned support for those students who lack confidence in speaking. In mathematics, good progress is being made with sound achievement over time. Work is not always effectively matched to students' prior attainment with the result that high and low attainers sometimes underachieve, but the good focus on number work is helpful to all. Achievements are improving steadily as effective teaching and the national strategy impact on learning. Achievements in science are now good. Progress is being made in physics, chemistry and biology, as well as in investigative work. Students' written work is an improvement upon last year but work in the mixed ability classes in Years 7 and 8 is not always sufficiently challenging for high attainers who then underachieve.
3. In almost all other subjects current standards are above or well above national expectations for fourteen-year-olds. The highest standards are in dance and drama and history where attainment is well above average. Students achieve well and often very well in history and very well indeed in dance and drama. Their high literacy levels help in history tasks such as structured writing and using sources. In modern foreign languages, French in particular, students make very good progress as they move through the key stage. They understand French and speak confidently and at length. Their attainment is above and sometimes well above expectations. In subjects such as geography, art and music, the good and very good teaching helps students to achieve well as they work to attain above or well above average standards. In physical education, standards are as expected, with some above average skills. Students' achievements are good, as they build on a broadly average base of expertise. In ICT standards are above average and discrete lessons enable students to make satisfactory progress. The use of ICT in subjects is variable, with very good achievement in music, for example, but insufficient use and therefore unsatisfactory progress in some subjects.
4. Examination performance at GCSE has been above or well above average in most subjects for a number of years. The college's success has been in the attainment and achievements of students with middle and low prior attainment, whose standards have been very good for several years. As in Key Stage 3, the current focus on gifted and talented students is resulting in higher expectations and achievements for this group. The college's GCSE target of 66 percent attaining five A\*-C passes in 2001, with hindsight, was overambitious, considering the entry profile of the students that year. In 2002, the college's results of

around 62 percent attaining five A\*-C grades, all but met the target of 63 percent. Staffing problems in several subjects had been identified as likely to restrict students' achievements in both 2001 and 2002.

5. Current standards in Year 11 are above average overall, with some well above average attainment in very effective departments. Current achievements are satisfactory or better in all subjects, with very good or excellent achievement in one or two areas. The very good achievement in English literature is being maintained and improvements are being made in standards in English language. Writing and reading standards are above or well above average, showing very good progress and achievement from students' results in Year 9. Oral skills although satisfactory and of a broadly average standard, are not as high as they could be. Improvements in staffing in mathematics and science are having a good impact on standards in these subjects. In mathematics standards are average and achievements satisfactory, with a good emphasis on number and algebra. The quality of teaching is not as good as in Key Stage 3, however, and this is reflected in the standards attained. Science achievements have been unsatisfactory over time, but are now satisfactory and improving. The setting arrangements result in work being better matched to students' prior learning with resultant better progress.
6. The highest attainment and achievement in other subjects at GCSE are in dance and drama, where attainment is well above national expectations and achievement very good. Poor facilities prevent excellence from being achieved in this subject; teacher expertise is excellent. Attainment is also well above average, with associated very good achievement, in history and music, the former because of a very strong focus on examination board requirements, and the latter because of very effective use of high quality facilities by knowledgeable staff. In most other subjects, standards are above average and achievement is good. In physical education, standards are average and achievement good. In GCSE religious education, attainment is above average with some well above average work, and achievements are good or very good. The lack of curriculum time for those students not taking GCSE, however, results in below average standards and underachievement, although the quality of teaching in the time available is good.
7. Overall, gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress, with examples of good and very good work in some subjects such as dance and drama and history. Where very capable students do not achieve as highly as they should, for example in some mathematics and science lessons, teachers do not match work well enough to their prior learning and needs. The college's current focus on the needs of very capable students is beginning to have an impact on teaching and learning, with higher expectations, and standards.
8. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers and support staff receive good information on students' individual needs and most respond well to this, ensuring that challenges are appropriate and result in success. In a few lessons this is not the case and teachers do not plan tasks to meet students' targets, with the result that work is unfinished or of an unsatisfactory quality.
9. There are few students for whom English is an additional language at the college and very small numbers of these are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The college is providing well for these students with appropriate support both in and out of lessons, resulting in good progress for the individuals concerned.
10. Current standards are higher in Key Stages 3 and 4 than those reported in 1997 in the last inspection report. Progress has been good and higher standards achieved in ICT, an area of weakness five years ago.

### **Sixth form**

11. High standards were attained in the 2001 A-level and vocational course examinations in several subjects, particularly economics, and attainment was similar to national averages or better in nearly all subjects. Where numbers of students taking subjects were small, comparisons cannot be made. Considering the students' starting points of GCSE results, these outcomes reflect very good progress and achievement over the two-year courses. 2002 results are under review at the time of the inspection and so no national comparisons can be made. Results are unlikely to be as high as in 2001, reflecting the greater range of GCSE results this cohort of students achieved in 2000, compared with that of the previous year. Entry

requirements into the sixth form were reduced in some areas in 2000, to enable a broader range of students to experience the Longsands sixth form.

12. Current standards overall are above those expected at A-level and students' achievements are very good. In focus subjects for the inspection, the highest standards and best achievement were in biology, art, geography, sociology, mathematics, design and technology and English. In those subjects sampled, achievements were good and often very good, particularly so in economics, performing arts and geology. In all subjects progress and achievement were satisfactory or better. Students have made a sound or better start on all Year 12 courses, with very good support provided by teaching staff where the AS courses constitute a 'quantum leap' from their GCSE work, such as in mathematics, chemistry and physics. Year 13 students have good research skills and develop their own ideas well, for example in English, history, geography and sociology. In practical subjects such as art, biology and design and technology practical skills are of a high standard, although the use of ICT is subject and teacher dependent. In English and design and technology good use is made of the college computers but insufficient use is made in business studies and sociology. Examination board requirements are appreciated by students who develop very good use of needed specialist vocabulary.
13. No students have English as an additional language in Years 12 and 13. The few students with special educational needs progress as well as their peers in their chosen subjects because teachers are aware of targets and previous attainment and students receive appropriate support.
14. The good and very good standards reported in the last inspection in 1997 are higher today, with very good achievement and well above average standards in examinations overall. Very good progress has been made in maintaining strengths and improving areas of weakness in the sixth form.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

15. Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good, as is their personal development. This reflects a further improvement on the good standards seen at the time of the last inspection. All these factors have a positive impact on students' learning.
16. Students are enthusiastic about coming to college. They have very good attitudes to lessons and to their learning. They arrive on time and move purposefully between lessons. In class, most show a considerable degree of interest and concentrate well. They listen carefully to their teachers' instructions and make constructive contributions to class discussions. Most students take a pride in their work and take care to set it out neatly. They are willing and able to talk about their work and explain their ideas. In conversations with inspectors, students were pleased to discuss and show their work. As a result of these positive attitudes, they learn successfully, extending their subject knowledge and understanding well in lessons. For example in a Year 8 French lesson, students responded very well to their teacher's lively and engaging strategies for teaching them the names of various parts of the body. As a result of their enthusiastic response, and keen participation, they gained a thorough knowledge of the vocabulary and phrases they had been taught, and effectively developed their speaking and listening skills. In a Year 11 ICT lesson, students showed good levels of independence and interest to produce a report based on their visit to the town centre to research sandwich prices.
17. The overall standard of behaviour is very good. Students are aware of what is and is not acceptable behaviour. Good order and a strong sense of purpose characterise many lessons. In only a very few lessons was there any evidence of unsatisfactory behaviour. This was more likely to occur in lower ability groups where the teaching did not engage students' interest or motivate them sufficiently. When this was the case, several students became either passive or restless, though rarely disruptive. Students behave very well out of lessons. They move about the college sensibly and, on most occasions, behave responsibly in congested areas, showing respect for one another. In the dining room students are tolerant when they have to wait in a queue for their food. Outside at break-times, they socialise well and enjoy each other's company.

18. Around the college students are orderly and polite, and helpful to visitors. As well as showing respect to each other the majority of students respect property and equipment. The college is free of graffiti. There is some litter although this is promptly cleared up by efficient caretaking staff. Most rooms are open all day with access at lunchtime and breaks. Since the previous inspection, the number of exclusions has been reduced and there have been no permanent exclusions in the past academic year. Fixed term exclusions are lower than those for similar colleges, consistent with the very high standards of behaviour seen during the inspection. No incidents of bullying, racism or other oppressive behaviour were noticed and students did not consider any of these to be a concern. The college has a good system to make students aware of what to do if bullying occurs.
19. Very good relationships exist between staff and students, and among students, and this contributes strongly to students' learning. In class, students are not afraid to give wrong answers because they know their contribution will be valued. In many lessons, students showed the ability to work well together, sharing ideas and learning from each other. For example in a Year 7 history lesson, students listened well to others reading out their work and then made constructive suggestions, and in a business studies lesson on the costs and benefits of economic growth, Year 11 students engaged enthusiastically in a whole class question and answer session. In physical education, students' strong sense of teamwork and fair play enables them to work together well. The quality of both working and social relationships contributes much to the ethos of the college.
20. Outside lessons, students involve themselves in activities both during and after college. These include good initiatives such as clubs closely linked to academic subjects as well as sporting and social activities. The library with its computer facilities is well used by the students outside lessons. At lunchtime students from all year groups congregate there and it is a hive of activity, with students working, reading, doing research and engaging in discussions.
21. Attendance in all year groups is very good, and the college's overall attendance rate is above the national average. Unauthorised absence is well below average. Punctuality to college and to lessons is good, in spite of the spread-out site. Registration is undertaken morning and afternoon and meets statutory requirements.

### **Sixth form**

22. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are very good. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and welcome the more independent status they receive. They are well motivated and approach their work with interest and commitment. In lessons they are attentive and conscientious and they co-operate well with each other and their teachers. Extremely good relationships exist between staff and students. A number of students, particularly in Year 12, are more dependent on their teachers for guidance and support. They tend to be rather reticent in lessons and wait for direction rather than taking the initiative. However, by the time they reach Year 13 most students have become independent and resourceful learners, taking responsibility for their work. Students' good academic progress is promoted by their attitudes to their work. Sixth formers benefit from links to the main college, for example through the 'befriending scheme', where older students take pleasure in supporting those in Year 7.
23. Students' involvement in personal development and enrichment activities is not as active as it could be. The pressures of examination courses and part-time jobs and the lack of a defined programme of sport and cultural opportunities restrict this participation. Students do, however, take part in a number of voluntary initiatives such as raising money and collecting clothes for charities and they appreciate the residential exchange visits and curriculum-related trips organised for them.
24. Sixth form attendance is very good, and there are very few students who do not attend regularly.

### **Students' views**

25. Students' views of the sixth form are good. Initial indications from the college questionnaires gave a mixed picture. Although many were satisfied that the courses they had chosen suited their talents and aspirations and felt that the college treated them as mature young adults, there were several areas where their responses were not so positive. A number felt that the college does not offer a wide range of activities and enrichment courses outside the main courses. Some students did not feel that they are kept sufficiently well informed about their progress and that their work is thoroughly assessed. This contrasts with the inspection finding that the quality of feedback and guidance to students on their work and progress is good. The range of activities and enrichment courses is satisfactory but could usefully be extended to provide more sporting and cultural opportunities.
26. In conversations and interviews during the inspection, students' views were much more positive. They made clear that they enjoy life in the sixth form and feel well supported. They appreciate the interest and care shown to them by staff, and feel the teaching they receive and the guidance offered are good. Students are largely pleased with the courses they have chosen, and do recommend the college to others.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

27. The teaching seen was good in Key Stage 3, good with significant strengths in Key Stage 4 and very good indeed in the sixth form. A clear trend of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning is seen as the students progress through the college. In Year 7, just under two-thirds of lessons seen were good or better, and about a third were very good or excellent; the overall quality was satisfactory. In Year 11, however, the proportions had increased to nearly nine in every ten lessons good or better and approaching half very good or excellent. In lessons generally, no discernible differences were apparent in the quality of teaching of boys and girls, nor in the quality of their learning and progress.
28. The quality of teaching in English lessons observed was very good and students' achievements at this early stage in the school year were good. High expectations and close support ensure that very good progress is made, although at times feedback to students could be more thorough. The quality of teaching in mathematics and science, although satisfactory overall, and good in Key Stage 3, was weaker than in most other subjects, reflecting problems the college has had in the past recruiting suitable teachers. In both these subjects, the departments are now fully staffed with appropriately qualified teachers and the quality of teaching and learning is improving as planned changes take effect. The 'three-part lesson' is providing a very good structure to mathematics lessons, although lessons did not always finish as well as they started. In science, work was usually well planned to meet students' needs, but this was not always the case.
29. Dance and drama teaching is excellent. First-rate professional knowledge and lively explanations combine to produce very good student achievement, although the poor quality facilities detract from what could be achieved. In music and history, the teaching quality seen was very good throughout the main school. Knowledgeable staff, focusing on examination requirements in history and developing students' independent learning skills in music, ensure that very good progress is made in lessons. In religious education, the quality of teaching was good, with some very effective lessons showing attention to detail in planning and a very good pace of work. Tasks were not always sufficiently challenging, however, resulting in some underachievement. Physical education teaching and learning were good overall, with very good work in Key Stage 3. Teachers' very good expertise resulted in high expectations and very good lesson structure. The excellent relationships between teachers and students ensured students enjoyed the work. In one or two lessons, students' off-task chatter disrupted learning, however. Teaching of modern foreign languages, geography and art was good for students aged eleven to sixteen. Practice in language skills was important in successful French and German lessons, although too much speaking in English occurred in a few lessons. In geography, objectives were explained clearly to students and marking of work was very helpful to them. At the end of some geography lessons teachers did not question students thoroughly enough. Teachers' very good specialist knowledge was a key factor in successful art teaching but, in Key Stage 3, students were not always give sufficient information to enable them to make improvements. In both design and technology and ICT, teaching was satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. In design and technology, expectations were not always high enough, although planning was often good. In the best ICT

teaching, students' individual skills and knowledge improved but sometimes individual involvement and progress was not monitored thoroughly enough.

30. Appropriate homeworks were set in lessons observed and the small amount of work available for the term indicated that when it is set, it is marked. Work available from the previous year, however, showed that setting of homework was inconsistent and teacher dependent, as some parents had reported at their meeting to discuss the college.
31. One key component amongst the many strengths in teaching of several subjects, is teachers' subject knowledge. This helps in the preparation of interesting lessons and often results in high expectations, including independent work by the students, demanding questioning, a good focus on examination requirements, and lucid explanations. In a Year 11 drama lesson, for example, the knowledgeable and enthusiastic explanations of the skills of acting and how students had to transpose themselves into role, captivated the students. Work was assessed very carefully ensuring students understood criticism, but were praised and accepted what was said. A laptop computer was used to record assessments. Planning was very detailed and learning intentions were shared with the students. Work was carefully matched to the different attainment levels within the GCSE group. The outcome of these excellent characteristics was very well motivated students who made rapid and successful progress in their learning.
32. In a similarly effective Year 8 French lesson, the students responded very well to the teacher's dynamic and engaging style. The lesson was very well prepared with many interesting elements. At the start, the work to be covered was very well explained, students' understanding was continually tested throughout lesson and the 'fun' end indicated what would be happening in the next session. The students spent much of the lesson speaking in French as they learnt new constructions and vocabulary as well as reinforcing their recall of earlier work. Additional tasks were set for high attainers and demanding timescales were applied to all. The pace of work was excellent. The students' behaviour was managed very effectively by thoroughly involving all of them in enjoyable tasks. The teacher's knowledge of French and enjoyment in teaching the subject were apparent to the students.
33. In the few lessons that were unsatisfactory, and a number of others that were satisfactory but had some weaknesses as well as strengths, the most significant issues were the lack of challenge for some students and the control of a small minority of disruptive students. The lack of challenge was most apparent for higher attaining students and the outcomes of this are seen in the lower than expected proportion of the highest grades at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE results.
34. The quality of teaching and learning for students with special educational needs is good overall. Teaching and learning are sometimes very good, when learning support assistants are present or when students are withdrawn for specialist support. In some mainstream lessons, where the teacher's planning addressed the targeted needs of individual students, teaching and learning was also good. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson, the teacher differentiated tasks so students with literacy problems recorded their work through the use of flow diagrams. Learning support assistants are particularly effective because of the training they receive and their awareness of individual students' needs. Teaching and learning were always effective when there was good liaison on planning with subject teachers. In a few lessons, teachers were insufficiently aware of the needs of students with special educational needs and so planning and teaching were not effective for them. In these circumstances, students underachieved. The system of feedback on students' needs, from the new inclusion unit (LinC) to subject departments, is informal. As a result, teachers did not always have the information they needed for lessons involving these students. This hampered learning and the setting of suitable targets.
35. Good progress has been made in improving students' literacy skills. All departments in the college have been involved in discussions as to how literacy skills should be taught and this has led to improved teaching and better standards of reading and writing. Key vocabulary is emphasised in subjects such as music, mathematics and science. Numeracy has not been a focus for development across the college, although the mathematics department has been placing an emphasis on improving students' number skills and has carried out an audit of other departments' use of number. Several areas, including science, geography and design

and technology, frequently use number work and the students benefit from this. The overall quality of numeracy teaching is satisfactory. ICT skills were seen being taught well in a number of subject lessons, such as use of data loggers in science, of word processing in English, and of the Internet for research in geography. Not all departments make full use of ICT in their teaching however, and the overall quality is satisfactory.

36. The overall quality of teaching is better today than that reported in the last inspection, with a higher proportion of good and very good teaching. It remains best in the sixth form, with relatively weaker teaching in Years 7 and 8. Strengths in 1997, of subject knowledge of staff, thorough planning and good relationships, are even stronger today, and the issues in history have been dealt with most effectively. Improvements have been made in using ICT in subject teaching and the quality is now satisfactory but this remains an area for further development in some departments. Good progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning over the past five years.

### **Sixth form**

37. The quality of teaching observed across all the courses available in the sixth form was very good overall, with some excellent work. In Years 12 and 13, more than half the lessons seen were very good or excellent and none was unsatisfactory. All groups of students - boys, girls, and the few students with special educational needs - are taught equally well in the sixth form.
38. The quality of teaching seen in the thirteen designated subjects was good in seven and very good in six. The best quality was in mathematics, art, biology, English, geography and sociology. In subjects where just one or two lessons were seen, teaching was equally good, for example in economics, physics, geology, government and politics, law and AVCE leisure and tourism. The teaching of economics is of the very highest quality and students' examination results are very high. In all these subjects, the very effective teaching and high order learning skills of most of the students resulted in very good achievement. The outcome of this combination is seen in the very good examination results attained in most subjects. The shortfall in teaching time – only four hours per subject is available rather than the expected five – restricts students' development of independent learning skills to a certain extent and the way in which some aspects of syllabuses are taught. This is particularly true in practical subjects, such as biology and chemistry, where opportunities to develop investigative approaches cannot be followed through because of a lack of time.
39. Teachers' subject knowledge was a key strength in all lessons, as was the quality of relationships between teachers and students. Stemming from teachers' very good knowledge of interrelated facts and principles, came engaged students, who wanted to learn more about their subjects. Other characteristics of the very effective teaching seen included: work building very effectively on previous learning in biology; carefully structured lessons in English; clear and concise explanations in mathematics; and in sports studies, challenging discussions that were very beneficial to students' learning. Occasionally teachers spoke for too long, intent on providing students with 'sufficient information'. They did not provide opportunities to discuss what had been taught, nor did they question the students sufficiently to identify strengths and any weaknesses in their learning. Marking could improve in one or two areas as well. Students are confident, but can be rather quiet learners, who tend to respond to questions rather than initiate their own. This was more apparent in subjects where students are expected to learn a large body of knowledge in order to be successful in examinations.
40. At the time of the last inspection, sixth form teaching was 'at least satisfactory and mostly good or very good'. The quality is better today and good improvement has been made. Strengths have been maintained and areas of weakness improved upon. In 1997, high attainers were not always challenged in the sixth form but today they are, and usually achieve very well indeed.

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

41. The breadth of the curriculum is good and it provides a good range of learning opportunities for all students in Years 7 to 11. The timetable covers all areas of the National Curriculum in Years 7 to 9 including religious education. The breadth and depth of the curriculum in art is very good, and in several other subjects including English, design and technology, geography, music and physical education, a good range of experiences is provided. Other subject courses are satisfactory except religious education. Planning for religious education in Years 7, 8 and 9 is satisfactory but the curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 is shared with PSHE. As a result, the statutory requirement for religious education is not met for these years.
42. The balance of the curriculum is satisfactory overall, with a number of strengths, but also some areas for improvement. Provision for PSHE, including sex education and attention to the misuse of drugs, is satisfactory but improving. There is a shortfall in time in Key Stage 4. A team of staff have been involved in some in-service training and departments have been given time on professional development days to review where, in their schemes of work, personal development opportunities arise. Year co-ordinators have copies of the outline allocation of time and modules for the year ahead so that they can plan assembly themes to support the classroom work.
43. All students follow an ICT taught course in Years 7, 8 and 9, but provision in Key Stage 4, although satisfactory, is not fair to all students. In Years 10 and 11, eighty percent of students follow a short course with some entered for the GCSE examination. The remaining students, however, fulfil National Curriculum requirements through ICT opportunities in subject areas. For example, computer use for graphics in art is very good indeed, the Internet is used for research in history and geography, and word processing in a range of subjects. Students are offered either French or German in Years 7 to 11 but students entering the college in Year 9 from elsewhere are often unable to continue with French because of the high numbers in sets. This is unsatisfactory. In modern foreign languages and mathematics, split teaching of groups affects continuity in a few classes. The Key Stage 3 strategies for English, mathematics and science are not yet embedded in the curriculum, although progress is being made in their implementation. There is a good variety of accreditations for courses in Years 10 and 11 including a youth award course and vocational courses as well as GCSE courses. These help to match work to students' prior attainment. Arrangements for Years 10 and 11, however, include an uneven split allocation of subject time, with some subjects having three hours in Year 10 and two in Year 11 and others the other way round. This affects students in different ways in different subjects, some adversely. The taught time for religious education and science is insufficient.
44. The college provides a broad range of opportunities for all its students, including those with special educational needs. All have equal access to the curriculum. Some students are disapplied from modern foreign languages to receive extra support to meet their individual needs. The range of examination course providers offered to students extends the inclusive nature of the curriculum. The special educational needs department, learning support assistants and the LinC inclusion unit provide students with the curriculum support necessary to achieve their targets.
45. Individual teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of the small number of students for whom English is an additional language. There is, however, no whole-school planning to ensure that a consistent and rigorous curriculum is in place for such students.
46. A wide and very good range of extra-curricular activities complement and enrich students' learning. Many different clubs and activities are well attended. Homework clubs and curriculum support opportunities have a positive effect on improving and maintaining students' performance. Sixth form students assist with a 'befrienders' scheme to help weak readers. The special educational needs department organises activities and homework clubs with the assistance of learning support assistants and the LinC facility. An excellent range of visits and courses are organised by the geography department with opportunities to work in, and for, the community. The performing arts clubs are particularly popular with students in drama and dance. The art department organises visits to local galleries. Students in Year 7 and Year 9 visit historic sites and museums and Year 10 students travel to see battlefield sites in Europe. The modern foreign languages department has a very good clinic for assisting students' further understanding. Students have very rich

opportunities to visit other countries and to take part in exchange schemes. In music, a good range of opportunities exists, including a steel band. In religious studies, students visit faith communities and outside speakers visit the college to widen students' knowledge. A water-skiing group is provided and the physical education department has a full programme of activities.

47. Careers education is very good. A comprehensive and detailed departmental handbook covers all aspects of the college's provision. Effective management and organisation of an excellent careers room and interviewing facility offers students good access to an appropriate range of information, including ICT resources. Relationships with the Connexions service are good and students have access to personal interviews with a skilled adviser where inclinations can be explored in depth. The personal development programme includes modules which help students to develop the self-awareness necessary to inform their choices and prepare them well for guidance interviews.
48. Students in Year 10 are very well prepared for their fortnight of work experience. Students spoke articulately and with great pleasure of their various placements, both locally and farther afield. They were required to fill in a logbook and were debriefed on their return, with some work in English being derived from the experience.
49. Effective liaison with partner primary schools promotes the smooth transfer of students to the college. The college is involved in the 'Horizons Association', developing a European Community dimension to explore curriculum diversity and similarity of partner schools from Spain through to Russia. Events have included a festival of sport in Spring 2002 in Moscow and an imminent Performing Arts festival in St Neots.
50. Planning for the introduction of citizenship has included an audit of curriculum areas, community contacts, tutorial and assembly provision. The college is part of the county citizenship development project and is piloting some materials in 2002-2003. A very good range of modules is available through the work of the project. The college has, however, yet to resolve the outstanding issues of satisfactory coverage of the full National Curriculum in both key stages, especially in Key Stage 4, and the participation of all students in the community action dimension of the curriculum. Contributions from subject areas need to be more carefully planned to ensure that citizenship education is the key focus in identified lessons.
51. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Issues such as the weakness in the ICT curriculum and lack of use of individual education plans for students with special educational needs have been dealt with, but there are now new issues such as the curriculum balance in Key Stage 4.

### **Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

52. The provision for students' personal development is very good overall, reflecting the emphasis the college places on developing students' talents and interests. The areas of moral and social development remain stronger than those in spiritual and cultural areas but overall the quality of provision is better than that reported five years ago.
53. At the time of the last inspection spiritual development was sound. It remains so, although it is beginning to show signs of recent improvement. As at the last inspection, the college does not comply with the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all students. Students attend two year assemblies each week. On other days, they work in tutor groups. A member of staff has recently been appointed to raise staff awareness about the scope and range of the spiritual dimension, and this is starting to have a positive impact. For instance, each week now has a planned theme and tutors are given guidance on how to present the theme to their group. This theme provides the focus for assemblies in the year groups as well as the tutorial periods. It offers opportunities for reflection and in some cases the practice is making a good, positive contribution to students' personal development. Often the themes provide useful moral or social guidance. During the inspection well-planned and thought provoking assemblies on the theme of 'community' caught the attention and imagination of students. Spiritual values are explored in a number of subject areas, although the practice is not consistent, and opportunities provided are sporadic, rather than planned. In music and art, students are often encouraged to reflect on their own work, and the works of

famous musicians and artists. Good spiritual awareness is found, too, in religious education lessons, where students are encouraged to reflect on the myths of creation and the place of religion in their lives.

54. Provision for students' moral development is very good. There are clear expectations of how students should behave and respond. The college provides a framework for this through its policies and procedures, which are negotiated and agreed with students and staff. Nearly all teachers set good examples and a tone of mutual respect underpins the ethos of the college. The very good behaviour seen in lessons and around the college demonstrates the effectiveness of teachers' consistent approach, and ensures a good atmosphere for learning. Within the curriculum there are some opportunities for students to consider ethical issues. For example in geography, Year 8 students debated the politics of aid to less economically developed countries and students in Year 9 considered the ethical issues involved in developing a sustainable environment. Work in religious education lessons provides frequent opportunities for students to understand wider moral issues. Charitable giving, and other events organised to raise money, give many students practical opportunities to help others.
55. The college's provision for students' social development is excellent and contributes much to the personal development and maturity of students as they move through the college. The welcoming ethos of the college encourages students to be sociable. Staff establish very good relationships in lessons, and set role models of friendly and respectful behaviour. Disaffected students have benefited from a range of initiatives designed to promote their social skills and raise their self-confidence. Students are encouraged to collaborate positively in subjects such as physical education, music and drama. Popular extra-curricular activities such as sports and dance clubs encourage students to teach each other their skills, work together in a friendly way and to develop self-confidence and skills in performing to others. Year 8 students act as receptionists on a rota basis, helping in the day-to-day administration of the college, and some students act as librarians. Further opportunities for students to develop their social skills are provided through the year and college councils. The year councils are a valued part of college life and give opportunities for students to participate in the wider life and decision making of the college. Students are consulted over issues such as the review of the behaviour policy and the appointments of senior members of staff. The involvement of sixth form students with younger students in the college, through the befrienders scheme, is a very good feature. Students are helped to understand society in the curriculum through studying issues such as global citizenship and the social implications of the development of computers. The wealth of field trips, exchange visits and sporting competitions are other ways in which the college successfully promotes students' social skills.
56. The cultural development of students is good overall. Large numbers of students are involved in a wide range of musical and dance activities, and the college arranges an extensive performing arts festival each year. By studying the works of eminent authors, painters and musicians from different periods, students develop a good understanding of the cultures both of this country and of other western European countries. Through visits to France and Germany, students can become aware of the values and attitudes of neighbouring but different traditions. The college helps students appreciate cultural diversity through assemblies, religious education, geography and art, and organises a visit to a mosque in Leicester. However, overall there are too few opportunities for students in an almost all-white college to become aware of other cultures they will meet in society. Multi-cultural education was a weakness at the last inspection and there has been little improvement since then.

## **Sixth form**

57. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities are good. Examples of very good planning were seen in modern foreign languages, art, biology and geography and good schemes and systems were noted in many subjects, including English, mathematics, chemistry, design and technology, business studies, psychology and sociology. In all subjects, curriculum planning is satisfactory or better. Planning for religious education, however, does not meet statutory requirements and is unsatisfactory. There is no provision for recreational physical education on the timetable which results in some students not developing an understanding of a healthy lifestyle.

58. Vocational courses have been introduced since the last inspection and this is an improvement. GNVQ courses were offered to students to broaden the curriculum in 2001 but AVCE courses have proved to be more popular with students. The introduction of these courses fully addresses the issues raised in the previous report. Insufficient allocation of time, with just four hours of taught time allocated to each subject in Years 12 and 13, allows too little opportunity for independent learning, consolidation, research, extension and practical activity. The additional study period expected of each student in each subject is not planned or managed effectively as available curriculum time.
59. Students could opt into key skills lessons last year, but the very limited popularity of this arrangement led to no specific timetabled lessons for this year. Aspects of the three core competences, in communication, information technology and application of number, are addressed in many lessons, with a strong and effective focus on writing, reading, speaking and listening in virtually all. The use of information technology, except for those subjects that include a specific taught element, such as spreadsheet use in business studies and sensors and data capture in physics, is usually in the hands of the students. Internet use is frequent and valuable, as is word processing but the many other aspects of information technology receive less emphasis. All students spoken to said that they used computers at home or/and in the college at various times, but there is no planned development of their skills across each student's taught subjects. A similar picture is apparent in the application of number, with very good teaching through several subject combinations, but not through others. All students are given a mapping document, however, to help achieve appropriate coverage of key skills. Curriculum arrangements for improving key skills in the sixth form are satisfactory.
60. The provision of extra curricular opportunities is satisfactory. A range of visits is organised by various departments, such as the history department visits to Russia, English department visits to the theatre, and fieldwork in geography and biology. There are some team-sporting events, for example rugby in which a few in the sixth form become involved.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

61. The college makes very good provision for the care of all students. Staff know students well and show good knowledge of the local community and of individuals' needs. Form tutors remain with their groups for five years whenever possible and develop constructive and supportive relationships with their students. Parents' expression of the excellent support provided by year co-ordinators was confirmed during the inspection. Form tutors meet weekly with small groups of students in mentoring sessions to monitor progress and give students time to share feelings and problems. Records, including medical concerns and parents' contact, are monitored effectively. PSHE includes work on study skills, making choices and careers. Students are confident about referring problems to their form tutors, sixth form befrienders or to other adults in senior positions in the college. Induction of new students into Year 7 is satisfactory. There is, however, a lack of continuity in the specific responsibility for primary liaison as each year co-ordinator moves up the college with her/his year.
62. Child protection procedures are in place and generally comply with legislation. The designated teacher is trained and aware of the role of local Area Child Protection Committees (ACPC). Teaching staff, including those new to the college, have received training in this area. Training is currently taking place for school support services and cleaning staff to ensure that they are fully conversant with all child protection areas.
63. Health and safety procedures overall are good. They are regularly checked by governors and meet statutory requirements. This has been an improvement since the last inspection. Risk assessment policies are in place and subject areas continue to be monitored. Fire drills are performed each term, records kept and equipment checked. Fire officer visits are used appropriately to carry out specific safety checks, for example on extinguisher equipment. First aid provision is good. Portable first-aid kits are used in the physical education department for outdoor lessons and these and other staff carry portable phone systems for reporting and dealing with incidents. Elements of personal safety and health education are covered

during science and PSHE lessons and students are given information, appropriate to their age, about sex and drugs.

64. The monitoring and promoting of appropriate behaviour are very good. The rewards system recognises good work and effort; positive achievement helps raise students' confidence and self-esteem. Most teachers follow the college's policy for dealing with poor behaviour and know the procedures for appropriate action when needed. Bullying is firmly discouraged and procedures to combat it are effective. Supervision of students at breaks, lunchtime and after school is very good and the senior management team has a strong presence around the college buildings. Exclusion is used carefully and effectively.
65. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. Responsibility lies with the form tutor, supported as necessary by year co-ordinators, who meet regularly with the educational welfare officer. Parents are expected to notify the college on the first day of their child's absence. The college promotes better attendance through commendations and merits for students meeting attendance targets.
66. The inclusion unit provides individual and group support for school refusers, poor attenders, disruptive students or those with emotional and physical problems. It is open to all students at lunchtime and is fully integrated into the life of the college. Visits to extend students' education, such as to a local war museum, also assist with socialisation and encourage responsibility. Projects, such as a garden project, encourage planning and preparation for leisure activities as well as helping students feel part of the community. Outside speakers, good staffing and specialist software provide ample support for the success of such projects. The library has discreet red stickers attached to books suitable for easy reading.
67. Students' annual reports detail progress in every subject studied. Teachers' comments focus well on attainment, attitudes, behaviour and attendance. Information students and parents have about their progress, however, is not sufficiently linked to National Curriculum levels in some subjects in Years 7 to 9. Parents are invited to discuss, with the tutor, their child's performance across the curriculum and this is effective in informing both parent and student of the current level of work, in terms of the National Curriculum, and the expected target for the end of Year 9.
68. Systems for assessment are in place in all subjects. They are particularly well developed for Key Stage 4, where a very good range of appropriate data and regular discussion with students is used to monitor and review progress. Targets for improvement based on prior attainment, including Key Stage 3 results, are set for all students in most subject areas. These targets are well known by students and teaching staff. Strategies to achieve these targets are devised collaboratively between students and staff and often involve parents directly, where students are underachieving. Although the system is not so well developed at Key Stage 3, procedures similar to those in Key Stage 4 are about to be introduced.
69. Systems for recording achievement are in place and generally conform to the college assessment and marking policy. In the best departments, marking of students' work is both regular and informative, often having a significant impact on the progress made by students. Teachers' comments help students to identify the next steps in their learning and, especially at Key Stage 4, specific targets are set for individual students. In modern foreign languages, English and geography, practice is particularly good. Data is used very well to set targets linked to GCSE levels and clear advice is provided on how to achieve these targets for most major units of work. Teaching is more often than not clearly focused on these targets. Marking in some departments, though, is inconsistent, especially at Key Stage 3, where National Curriculum levels are not clearly identified and teachers' comments do not clearly address improvement strategies for students.
70. The special educational needs co-ordinator has a comprehensive record of students' needs on the register. Targets for improvement are set out in individual education plans and, in some cases, in Statements of need. Provision has improved since the time of the last inspection and regular reviews and monitoring take place which fully meet requirements. The college should have little difficulty in applying the New Code of Practice to update all records as, for example, some students' opinions and agreement are already sought. Subject teachers use the targets to plan lessons for inclusion and improvement of such students. Current procedures for recording and assessment, as well as target setting, do not relate sufficiently to National

Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 to allow measurement of progress and improvement, as well as providing a standard for comparison.

71. The very good care provided at the time of the last inspection has been maintained and strengthened. Health and safety issues have all been resolved, and the work of tutors and year co-ordinators is better than five years ago, as is the work carried out to improve attendance.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

72. Assessment of students' academic achievements and personal development is very good.
73. Sixth formers are formally assessed three times a year by all teaching staff, in addition to individual departmental arrangements. The information on attainment, effort and personal development is discussed with students before being sent home to parents. These procedures are informative and helpful, assisting in the drive to improve individual students' performance. This information is in addition to the annual report for each student.
74. Within departments, different approaches are used depending upon the best outcomes for students in each subject. Departments are encouraged to set individual students targets for improvement and many do, but not all. A consistent monitored policy is needed for target setting. The best practice currently is very good indeed. The excellent relationships between students and teachers encourage very helpful discussions that result in improvements. Targets set often result from the students' own self-assessment and subject teachers' views. Sixth form tutors have a key role in maintaining an overview of their tutees' achievements, which they carry out well.
75. Marking practices not only vary greatly between subject areas, but also within subjects. Tests are set frequently in some subjects as well as mock examinations before modules are taken. Overall, much good practice is taking place. Greater consistency within some departments is needed, however, ensuring that all staff have appropriate records of what students have attained and what their current points for improvement are.

### ***Advice, support and guidance***

76. Sixth form students receive very good support and guidance. Registration is informal and students take responsibility to sign in. Tutors maintain very full records and regularly mentor and guide students in terms of both their academic and personal development. Sixth form staff have a very good knowledge of their students through individual mentoring. They are aware of their learning needs and provide effective support throughout their studies. The excellent relationships between students and staff result in very effective communication.
77. Students value the information, advice and guidance they are given in relation to their studies. The guidance provided in Year 11 regarding their choice of course is both comprehensive and objective. Students choose their area of study on the basis of what is best for them. Tutors discuss progress of students' personal statements regularly on an individual basis. Advice of a similarly high standard is provided as they move to higher education or employment. Visiting speakers from local companies offer insight to students about their own chosen area of expertise and employment. Parents value the advice provided and, like the students interviewed, appreciate the support that ensures their children are able to settle into, and take full advantage of, post-16 work.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

78. Only a very small proportion of parents attended the meeting with the registered inspector and returned the questionnaire about the college. These parents expressed broadly positive views about what the college provides and achieves for their children. They are particularly pleased with the progress their children are making and the high expectations the college has. Areas parents would like to see improved are the closeness of the college's working with parents, the amount of homework their children are given and the information they receive about their sons' and daughters' progress. A few parents expressed concern about behaviour at the college. All views and comments were investigated during the inspection. The inspection team agreed with parents' positive views. Inspectors also agree that there is scope for the college to work more closely with parents and provide them with more helpful information on their children's work and progress. Although students have a homework timetable, subject teachers do not always abide by it, and the amount and frequency of work set is variable. However, inspectors found no evidence to support parental concerns about students' behaviour; overall behaviour was judged to be very good compared with the national context.
79. The quantity and quality of other information provided for parents is good overall. The governors' annual report to parents meets legal requirements, but the section on special education needs is barely adequate. The prospectus is informative and attractively presented. Useful booklets outlining the curriculum for the year are provided annually for each year group. The information given in the reports is adequate although targets set are not always precise enough to be useful. As the grades awarded have not been related to National Curriculum levels of attainment, parents have not always been clear about how much progress their children are making or how they are performing with regard to expectations for their age. A working group of staff, with parental involvement has resulted in a new and much improved report format that provides parents with the information they want. The homework log book is used well by some, but not by all form tutors, parents and students, and the college acknowledges that more could be done to promote this as an effective communication tool between home and college.
80. Parental involvement in the college is limited. Where it does occur, for example through parent governors or supporting their children with special educational needs, it is of high quality. Parents attend meetings in the college to discuss progress as well as any problems if they occur. They enjoy getting invitations to educational trips, presentation evenings, dance, drama and musical events and come in large numbers when they are supporting their children. They ensure that their children attend regularly and punctually. The college often seeks parents' views to make sure they are happy with what is being provided. Through analysis of parental views, the college recognises that it could work more closely with parents and aims to provide them with more helpful and regular information to enable them to help their children at home.
81. The college communicates well with the parents of students with special educational needs. Parents are supportive of the process and are involved with identifying these needs, target setting and in regularly reviewing progress. They provide valuable background information to supplement school action.
82. Good relationships exist with external agencies such as the local police force who are involved in assemblies. The college has also developed an initial teacher training partnership, which has already had a good impact on staffing and standards, for example in mathematics. In connection with a 'town centre' initiative, which seeks to promote lifelong learning and development in the business and enterprise community of St Neots, the College has developed an innovative model for its involvement as a key feature of a new specialist school bid. The college provides a good range of adult evening courses, opening up the college to community use. Local people are canvassed on the form of activities they would like the college to offer.
83. Improvement since the last report has been satisfactory. The helpful curriculum documents sent to parents, informative newsletters and good logbooks ensure that they are kept well informed, although practice should be more consistent. The college's own questionnaires to parents provide very useful information, and have done so for several years. Not all findings have resulted in action, however.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

84. The college is very well led. The principal has a very clear view of its strategic direction, founded in considerable academic study and reflection. The direction is fully supported by senior managers and governors; it emphasises the high value placed upon all who teach and work in the college and the need to strive for the best possible conditions for teaching and learning. A clear and comprehensive strategic plan reviews progress since the last inspection, sets out the college's targets, and considers the challenges which have to be faced in achieving these. The clarity of view and common purpose are communicated very effectively by senior managers to middle managers and others who work in the college. A very capable team of year co-ordinators and their deputies, supported by tutors, provide strong pastoral and academic guidance for students. Very high staff morale and commitment, and happy, highly motivated students, testify to the excellent ethos of the college. Several heads of subject departments are working very effectively to maintain and further raise the college's standards. Although there are some areas of underachievement, particularly for higher attaining students, their work has successfully promoted the college's aims and values.
85. The college has quite recently introduced a very distinctive structure for its senior management, in which a team of five directors operates under the overall guidance and supervision of the principal. A major strength is the extent to which it embodies the college's aims and values by, for example, strongly linking the roles and targets of directors to these. Each director has responsibility for a particular area of the college's work. The responsibilities and challenges of each are very clearly identified. The structure provides a high degree of autonomy and is designed to balance this with regular opportunities for meetings to share information about each director's individual areas of responsibility and perspectives on whole-college matters. The structure is viewed by all as an innovation that is still not fully tried and tested. There is a general acceptance that some areas need reviewing and improving in the light of experience: for example, the balance of individual and shared responsibilities between the directors and the principal; the way in which senior managers communicate; and the line management and monitoring of curriculum areas. The directors believe, however, that the structure has improved their effectiveness in carrying out their roles. Reservations are expressed in terms of a need to 'tweak', rather than replace the structure, which has been a very worthwhile innovation for the college. Management is effective and evolving constructively.
86. The governing body succeeds very well in helping to shape the direction of the college. It includes several members who are able to bring considerable insight into assessing the college's strengths and weaknesses and analysing its performance. For example, governors scrutinised the plans for changing the senior management structure very closely and critically before agreeing to their implementation. Many governors visit the college regularly and work hard to keep themselves fully informed about its activities and performance. They are proud of the college and have considerable respect for the teachers and students, which is reciprocated by those who work there. This occasionally leads the governors to be less critical than they might be, for example in terms of how well the college secures the highest achievement for all of its students, in all areas of the curriculum.
87. The governing body succeeds in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities well, although the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education is not fully implemented in Key Stage 4 or the sixth form, and a daily act of collective worship does not take place. Governors play a full and proper role in setting targets for the principal and scrutinising the strategic plans of the college, to ensure their appropriateness.
88. The system for monitoring teaching and performance management is effective. This provides for regular observations of all teachers, by senior managers, and feedback to departments. It is augmented by monitoring within subject departments, for which heads of department can be given additional non-contact time, although the consistency with which this is provided needs to be improved. The way in which information is used to evaluate teaching, learning and standards and for supporting the improvement of these, although satisfactory, is a less strong feature of the college. This is because there is considerable autonomy in the arrangements that particular departments have for making use of the information to support improvement. Although this often happens well, it does not always do so. The college would benefit from an improvement in the consistency with which this is managed and monitored across all subjects.

89. The special educational needs department is well managed. All staff have received training on the New Code of Practice. A college governor takes responsibility for reporting to the governing body on the working of the department and students and this is included in the annual report to parents. This addresses the weakness identified in the last report. Learning support assistants are well trained and effective; they have access to further training and morale is high. This confidence is passed on to students generally. External agencies, including the local education authority, are positive about college systems and management in the special educational needs department.
90. The college is fully staffed with qualified teachers although the turnover of staff has been high in recent years. Many staff move to promoted posts in other schools, but a significant proportion have left the profession. The match of qualified teachers to their curriculum responsibilities, and non-teaching staff to the various demands of the college and its curriculum, is appropriate and very good in most departments. However, about one in five staff have to teach for a small proportion of their teaching time outside their main subject area. Senior managers and heads of department have worked with considerable success to try to minimise the impact of this on students' achievements. Parents and students remarked that staffing problems in the last academic year, in mathematics in particular, had had unsatisfactory consequences for the students. These problems have now been resolved.
91. There have been some recruitment problems, particularly in the last academic year. Two national advertisements for a science teacher failed to attract any applicants. This year, the college does not have enough specialist teachers in mathematics, English and ICT although staff with sound expertise are teaching these subjects. A good range of technical support staff exists within the college but the shortage of technicians in science and design and technology is having a negative impact on both teaching and learning. The well-trained learning support staff work closely with teachers to aid students' learning. Administrative and clerical staff provide an efficient and very effective level of service.
92. The college has been proactive in its approach to recruitment and holds an annual recruitment fair. It also has its own supply teacher pool to draw upon. Close links with a university education department result in the college accepting several initial teacher training (ITT) students. It has also been accepted as a 'Fast Track' programme college for teachers, and has one such teacher in the mathematics department. These initiatives are having a very good impact on attracting teachers to the college.
93. Provision for professional development of staff is good. There are effective internal training courses at the start of the year and procedures for identifying whole college, departmental and individual training needs link work closely to the college's aims. Administrative and technical staff receive some joint training with teaching staff and training specific to their own roles.
94. Good policies and strategies are in place for the induction of newly qualified teachers. They are regularly observed teaching by college staff and an external advisor. They have a suitable programme of meetings to induct them into the college, its students and policies. The programme for new but experienced teachers is less formalised and while staff are invited to join the induction programme there is no requirement to be there. Staff new to the college, however, feel that they settle down very quickly through the use of an effective 'buddy' system.
95. Site staff manage and maintain facilities well for the benefit of students. There are good display facilities and litter issues are well managed. This creates a pleasant environment for teaching and learning.
96. Apart from the existence of narrow corridors which create congestion at lesson changeover times, the problems with the accommodation highlighted in the last report have now been addressed. The building remains difficult to maintain and utilise, however, with its concoction of different buildings from different times, placed together in a somewhat disorganised manner. Maintenance and refurbishment issues have been identified and prioritised. A comprehensive buildings survey and development plans have been prepared and urgent tasks have been completed. Provision for students with mobility difficulties is inadequate, however, and it would be extremely expensive to make changes to the buildings that would give disabled students, teachers and visitors full access to all the facilities available. A few areas, such as one

computing room and the area for teaching ceramics, lack the space needed for full class use and some laboratories are rather small. Design and technology facilities are split between two different areas of the college, which makes communication and a consistent approach to teaching and learning difficult to achieve. The facilities for dance and drama are poor and detract from the success of one of the very strongest departments in the college. Difficulties with floor surfaces and poor acoustics hinder what can be achieved. Facilities for science are much improved as a result of a recent refurbishment programme however, and physical education facilities are good. Students benefit from the good accommodation in both of these areas and facilities for music are very good indeed.

97. Resources available are generally good, and in both music and modern languages they are very good. For example in music there are thirty computers with midi keyboards and score-writing software, which are used well by students. Music has a good range of tuned and untuned percussion instruments although no instruments reflecting other cultures. The college as a whole has a large number of computers, over 300, but the way they are arranged results in there not being sufficient for every pupil to have access in some computer bases. Many computers are now getting old which limits their ability to run modern software. In mathematics, poor access to computers restricts the use made by students and in science, only recently have data loggers started to be used. Staff benefit greatly from the use of laptop computers which are very effective in helping teachers to plan learning, and to record assessment information. A few staff have yet to come to terms with using this excellent facility, provided for each teacher.
98. The library is a good, well-used facility. It is well managed and library ICT resources are the best used in the college. It is well stocked and regularly updated and its use by students is very good. The sixth form make good use of the library facilities in their non-taught lessons. The range of journals and periodicals is very good, enabling students to read articles in French, keep up to date with science developments and to appreciate issues in cross country running!
99. The leadership and management group, together with the governors, have a good understanding of best value principles and these principles are reflected in their work. College and department improvement plans are appropriately challenging and costed. The college does compare its academic performance with that of others, and is aware, for example, of the current need to focus on the achievements of high attainers. Parents and others are consulted on their expectations of the college, and have been for some years, and all in the college community - students, and teaching and support staff - have a voice that is heard. The vocational course curriculum changes in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form show how the college assesses its own provision against others as well as the needs of the community. Appropriate competition is part of the college culture.
100. A governors' committee oversees financial planning, and, together with the full governing body, decide spending priorities. The governing body is kept well informed with regular financial data being made available by the college's finance team. The committee carries out rigorous scrutiny of expenditure and has oversight of value for money tendering. Financial management is secure and targeted funding is spent appropriately. The bursar and director of support and services have only been in post a short while, but have challenged a number of existing practices, resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency. After best value reviews, services have either been out-sourced (catering) or provided in-house (maintenance) depending on the outcome of the review. Over a number of years the college has accrued a significant surplus, which was in excess of £600,000 in the 2001-02 financial year. These funds were earmarked for use in an unsuccessful private finance initiative (PFI) to rebuild the college. Since the failure of this initiative the governors have used the surplus for a number of projects, including "Operation Facelift", which aimed to improve the existing accommodation; the restructuring of the leadership and management group; and financing the LinC inclusion project, all of which have been successfully implemented. The carry forward for this financial year in the main college budget is greatly reduced to a realistic financial reserve of three percent considering the current staffing climate and the size of the school.
101. The strong and clear vision referred to at the time of the last inspection is as good today, five years later. Delegation of responsibilities, monitoring and support although not as effective as in 1997, is in transition with the potential to be very successful indeed. Governors remain a strength of the college. A daily act of

collective worship has not been instigated but the health and safety concerns have been resolved. Resources are better than five years ago, with much better ICT facilities and improved accommodation, from which students benefit. These generally positive improvements, with good maintenance of important strengths, indicate good improvement in the leadership and management of the college over the past five years.

102. The college students' behaviour and attendance are very good; GCSE results are improving - at a similar rate to that nationally - and attainment at A-level is well above average; teaching and achievement in the main college are good and very good in the sixth form; and the college has an excellent ethos and very good leadership. Management is effective. Not all high attaining students achieve as highly as they should and Key Stage 3 standards have been too low, although now much higher. These overall very positive characteristics of the college, considering the cost of educating the students, indicate that the college provides very good value for money.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

103. The sixth form is very well led and managed, with clear areas of excellence. The leadership structure has a Year 12/13 co-ordinator and deputy, under the director for the upper school. This very successfully provides both an individual identity for the sixth form and cohesion with whole-school aims and values.
104. In a number of subjects staff work closely together evaluating teaching and learning but this is not true for all areas. Although teaching is very effective overall, better monitoring and support for improvement of teaching and learning could further enhance students' achievements.
105. A limited number of aims and values in the college's strategic plan relate specifically, or exclusively, to the sixth form. However, many of those relating to the whole college are particularly well achieved in the sixth form. Considerable efforts have been devoted to improving the curriculum, to widen the range of students who would benefit from studying at Longsands. There has been some success in extending the range of advanced vocational opportunities, although the college was disappointed that a further extension of intermediate courses did not attract the additional students that were hoped for. Sixth form curriculum management is very good in almost all areas, but the statutory requirement to follow the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education in the sixth form is not met.
106. A very high proportion of those who do attend indicate that they are very happy there and would recommend their sixth form to other students. Retention rates are good. A recent increase in the number dropping out from Year 12 was partly due to the college seeking to improve the range of students for whom it catered by allowing some who were not sure about enrolling to undertake a probationary period. The sixth form is a cohesive unit, with very strong relationships, although some students feel that more could be done to encourage students from the two years to integrate.
107. All staff share a very high commitment to value all students in the sixth form and to provide the best environment in which all can flourish. The sixth form is the area of the college in which its aims are most strongly and consistently secured, with a very high proportion of very good and excellent teaching and learning, very good achievement and a very high order of care for each and every student.

### ***Resources***

108. Most of the staff teaching in the sixth form are very well qualified subject experts. They are a key component in the success of the sixth form, working closely with students, sharing their expertise. Non-specialist teachers deliver law and psychology, although this is not having a negative impact on students' achievements. The college's support staff provide a very good administrative service for managers working in the sixth form, and are very effective.

109. In all subject areas, resources are good, facilitating teaching and learning. This is equally true for practical and classroom based areas. The one exception is access to ICT in some subject lessons. This issue results from the realisation of the value of computers across the sixth form and the increasing demand to use modern technology.
110. The sixth form have their own common room and work rooms, with good access to ICT in their study areas. They also make good use of the library facilities in their non-taught lessons appreciating its role as an information centre. The library is well stocked for sixth form study. Facilities are generally well managed and appropriate, providing the accommodation needed to give the sixth form its separate identity and 'spirit' as well as remaining part of the college as a whole. Although the atmosphere in the sixth form area is relaxed and informal, it has a palpable and strong work ethic.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

111. To improve further the quality of education students already receive, the governors, headteacher and staff should:
- (1) Provide suitably challenging work for the most capable students in all classes, so that they can achieve at least the level expected of them. This will be particularly important in the few classes of over thirty students.  
(*paragraph 33*)
  - (2) Raise the standard of teaching where it is unsatisfactory or just satisfactory so that students learn and achieve well in those lessons. Weaknesses that should be overcome are:
    - Not matching work to the capabilities of all in the class
    - Insufficient questioning to identify what students understand
    - Inconsistent setting of homework
    - Ineffective management of a small minority of difficult students(*paragraphs 29, 30, 33*)
  - (3) Consider the time allocated to some areas of the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 so that a good balance is achieved and teachers are not restricted in the strategies they can employ. This applies especially to science and religious education  
(*paragraphs 42, 43*)

### Sixth form

- (1) Review the allocation of time for sixth form courses and the size of groups to ensure that best use is made of time and teaching expertise  
(*paragraphs 58*)

### Areas the governors may wish to include in their action plan

- The poor accommodation and facilities for the highly successful and popular dance and drama department have a negative impact on achievement (96)
- A substantial shortfall in the number of technicians for practical subjects (91)
- Inconsistent marking practices, including some teachers not making effective use of information to target work better to the needs of students (69)
- Implementation of the college's systems for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is inconsistent (88)
- ICT is not planned for in some subject schemes of work and gaining access to computers is not always easy (35, 97)
- Departmental planning has few references to how students for whom English is an additional language should be catered for (45)
- A daily act of collective worship does not take place (87)
- Statutory requirement for the teaching and learning of religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are not fully met (87)
- Insufficient opportunities for students to take part in recreational and physical activity in the sixth form (57)
- Curriculum planning includes fewer references to the multicultural aspects than is desirable in this predominantly white community (56)
- Curriculum arrangements for citizenship, although developing, do not fully meet statutory requirements (50)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	150
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		60

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 -11</b>							
Number	7	49	56	31	7	0	0
Percentage	5	33	37	21	5	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	5	27	20	3	1?	0	0
Percentage	9	48	36	5	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 the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1331	250
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	55	3

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	221	9

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	42

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.4
National comparative data	8.1

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	142	124	266

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	86	96	90
	Girls	103	94	88
	Total	189	190	178
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (77)	71 (74)	67 (69)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (40)	44 (45)	26 (30)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	104	108	99
	Girls	112	102	96
	Total	216	210	195
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (78)	80 (72)	74 (76)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	49 (46)	47 (56)	35 (31)
	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	142	135	277

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	75	136	140
	Girls	90	133	135
	Total	165	269	275

Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	60 (68)	97 (100)	99 (100)
	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	School	43.9
	National	39.0

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

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

### 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 / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations	Year	Male	Female	Total
	2001	37	46	83

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	37	46	83
	Average point score per candidate	22.6	19.5	20.9
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	32	43	75	6	5	11
	Average point score per candidate	24.4	19.2	21.4	9	14.4	11.5
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***

***Exclusions in the last school year***

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1188	39	0
White – Irish	7		
White – any other White background	15		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5		
Mixed – White and Black African	2		
Mixed – White and Asian	3		
Mixed – any other mixed background	9		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	4		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1		
Black or Black British – Caribbean			
Black or Black British – African	2		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	3		
Any other ethnic group	4	3	0
No ethnic group recorded	333		

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

***Teachers and classes***

***Financial information***

**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	90
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.6

**Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	32
Total aggregate hours worked per week	754

**Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74%
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 2	N/a
Key Stage 3	27
Key Stage 4	22

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	4,439,880
Total expenditure	4,636,008
Expenditure per pupil	3,010
Balance brought forward from previous year	875,329
Balance carried forward to next year	679,201

***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	30
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	31.4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1585
Number of questionnaires returned	99

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	23	67	8	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	37	56	4	3	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	15	58	19	4	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	10	51	34	5	0
The teaching is good.	16	71	6	4	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	18	59	16	6	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	45	46	4	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	45	46	6	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	14	55	22	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	22	59	7	5	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	23	60	9	3	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	49	14	5	8

### **Other issues raised by parents**

Sixty-one parents attended the meeting held before the inspection for parents to express their views about the college. Their opinions reflected the positive responses on questionnaires to a great extent. They expressed great satisfaction with the very good care their children receive within the pastoral systems. Negative views were also similar with specific concerns that the most capable were not always achieving what they should and that the teaching of mathematics in the previous year had had a negative impact on some results achieved.

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- The very effective leadership and management of the department
- Very good teaching leading to students' current very good progress
- Very good performance at GCSE in English literature
- Improved national test results in Year 9 in 2002

#### Areas for improvement

- The achievement of the most capable students
- Development of students' oral skills

112. Key Stage 3 English results in the 2001 national tests were in line with the national average but below average compared to similar schools. Results for students achieving level 7 were below average, indicating underachievement by the most capable students. Girls' results were better than those of boys. Over the four years to 2001, results fluctuated greatly but the overall trend of improvement was below that seen nationally. Results in 2002 were much higher and a significant improvement.
113. 2001 GCSE results in English language were above the national average for A\*-C grades and in line with the average for similar schools. For A\*-G grades they were well above both the national average and that for similar schools. For A\* and A grades results were below the national average. Girls' results were above those of boys, by a similar amount to that found nationally. Comparing results within the college, English language standards were better than those for mathematics and science. A\*-C results for 2002 are significantly higher.
114. In English literature, GCSE results for 2001 were well above the national average for A\*-C grades overall. Achievement was very good and better than in most other subjects.
115. Standards of attainment observed during the inspection were above average in Key Stages 3 and 4, with some work of a high standard, indicating very good achievement. This would support the view that 2001 GCSE results were depressed by staffing difficulties during that year. Both boys and girls are now making clear and substantial progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of English throughout the main school. The careful planning of schemes of work and lessons enables students to develop knowledge and skills. This shows in students' writing. By the age of fourteen, lower attaining students are writing effectively in a range of forms. They benefit particularly from the attention given by their teachers to spelling, punctuation and drafting, so that their final versions are extended and well organised. Higher attaining students are able to write in sophisticated ways. For example, students are able to analyse contemporary fiction and evaluate how the writer has used language to generate both interest and tension. By the age of sixteen, further progress is made. Students research, then argue and inform in their writing, aware of their audience. They use quite extensive vocabularies. Low attaining students write simply about what they have read and seen, but with clear understanding. Middle attaining students make capable comparisons between a variety of texts on the GCSE syllabus. High attaining students produce original writing of real quality. A good example of this was seen in work responding to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Students analysed the use of language to create effect and illustrated their knowledge through very well-structured and imaginative writing. ICT is used in students' writing but greater use could be made of the college's good computer facilities. Students are taught to draft, edit and experiment with presentation in ways which motivate and encourage progress. There is an overall difference in attainment between boys and girls, with girls writing at greater length and more accurately, but the highest attaining boys and girls do equally well.

116. Attainment in reading shows that students are making very good progress in improving their reading skills, particularly in Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 9 students can comment perceptively upon a range of print and media texts. For example, they can identify the ways in which argument and debate are presented in newspapers and on television. Through well-chosen materials and approaches, students of all abilities come to understand the distinctions between fact and opinion, controversy and rational argument. By the age of sixteen, students confidently read and analyse the effects of poetry, stories, theatre, media and information texts. A lower attaining group read and analysed a very difficult poem by William Blake and appreciated the importance of language in the text. Middle and higher attaining students compared and contrasted stories with good command of critical vocabulary. They had an appreciation of genre and intention. High attaining boys and girls, for example, in a lesson examining the use of language in Shakespeare's 'A Winter's Tale', commented on form, tone, imagery and effect with maturity and insight. Students follow a programme of independent reading but several, of all ages, lack confidence in reading aloud. When they do so, they lack both fluency and expression.
117. Standards of speaking and listening are average and achievement is satisfactory. Students are insufficiently practiced in using talk to develop and refine ideas and perceptions. Whereas there are very clear procedures to help students extend their writing, strategies to support progress in speaking and listening are not as well developed. In some lessons, grouping is varied to provide a range of opportunities for discussion and presentation and this is improving both speaking and listening.
118. Standards of teaching in English are very good and lead to very good learning. Scrutiny of students' work shows very good progress recently with very effective, focused teaching but, over the past eighteen months achievement has been good rather than very good. Current systems and approaches, however, augur well for students' continuing very good achievement. No discernible differences were apparent in the teaching of boys and girls; both genders were given appropriate attention and support in the lessons seen. Students with special educational needs were known by staff and taught as effectively as their peers, although additional support staff would have been helpful in some instances.
119. The quality of teaching seen ranged between satisfactory and excellent, with many very good sessions. English teachers plan carefully and collaboratively. Lessons have clear objectives. Much is expected of students and they respond positively to the challenges set and the close support given. This was especially the case in an excellent lesson where some very good extension work was set for the most capable students. Homework is used well to consolidate students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers mark students' work regularly. At its best, particularly in Years 10 and 11, assessment informs students clearly about standards achieved and the necessary steps to take to develop and improve. Occasionally feedback offered only vague encouragement and lacked constructive criticism on how to improve. Teacher-student relationships are very supportive, with teachers providing very good role models. These features of very good teaching are reflected in students' learning. Students of all abilities learn how to read and write for a variety of purposes. They are taught to appreciate the techniques and purposes of different genres and media, and learn concepts and vocabulary to discuss and evaluate them.
120. The planned curriculum for English is good. The Key Stage 3 strategy has been taken on board and is having a good impact on the quality of teaching, and on the students' achievements. Schemes of work cover the requirements of the National Curriculum clearly and in detail. ICT is now explicitly provided for, which was an area for development highlighted in the previous report. Literacy development is central to the English curriculum and is embedded in the planning and conduct of lessons. In a carefully planned and progressive way, a wide range of literature from a number of cultures is introduced, although there is little to encourage a multi-cultural perspective.
121. The leadership and management of the department are very good. A strong collaborative ethos has been established in the department, and responsibilities and roles are delegated and monitored effectively. For Years 10 and 11, good use is made of assessment data to track students' progress, set targets and influence curriculum planning. Students' prior attainment is analysed with meticulous care in order to ensure that they are in the appropriate set and that their progress can be effectively evaluated. Students, especially in Key

Stage 4, have a very good idea of their own strengths and weaknesses and are usually given relevant advice. These procedures are satisfactory but still developing for students in Years 7 to 9. Accommodation for English is satisfactory although several teachers do not have a permanent teaching base and several classrooms are only just large enough for the few classes of over thirty students.

122. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have improved, as has the teaching. Monitoring and evaluation procedures have improved considerably and now involve the regular moderation of students' folders and notebooks. Further opportunities for sharing the very best teaching practices would be helpful. Gifted and talented students are now identified, although extension work for these students in lessons is still the exception - and is needed. Support is good for those students with special educational needs.

### Literacy

123. Standards of literacy across the college are good. A detailed policy and an active working group, representing all departments has been a significant factor in this good progress. There has also been good in-service training for all staff and a suitable priority attached to it in college development planning. Teaching in other departments contributes valuably to the development of students' literacy. Explicit support for reading and writing demands are given in all subjects but most notably in modern foreign languages, mathematics, music and history, where students' vocabulary is developed well.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- A new teaching team, with well-qualified and enthusiastic staff
- Good teaching overall
- Increasingly effective leadership and management
- Improved Year 9 national test results in 2002

### Areas for improvement

- Poor GCSE examination standards
- Insufficient use of useful Key Stage 3 strategy materials for low attaining students
- Insufficient use of data to set targets and influence organisation and teaching
- Too little monitoring and evaluation to plan and manage development

124. In 2001, results of the national tests at the end of Year 9 were average compared to schools nationally. They were well below average when compared with similar schools. Girls attained higher results than boys, the difference being above the national average. When these students joined the college, their Year 6 attainment in mathematics was above the national average. In 2002 results of the tests at the end of Year 9 show a considerable improvement and are substantially higher than the previous year. The boys attained better results than the girls. The results over the past five years have fluctuated around the national average, but the results for 2002 show a considerable improvement on all previous years.
125. Standards of attainment in the current Year 9 are average and improving, with significant strengths as well as some areas of weakness. Students' skills in numeracy are generally as expected, considering the students' capabilities. High attaining students in Year 9 quickly recalled the methods of addition of fractions with different denominators, and extended these ideas in some effective investigative work. Many average attaining students were fluent when recalling their times tables but some were not and this restricted their ability to make progress. In Year 7, numeracy and other skills were being developed in 'starter' activities. These activities were always well managed and students attained good standards.

126. The most capable students are not always given work at an appropriate level. For example, gifted and talented students in Year 9 completed an addition of fractions exercise very quickly but were not immediately given appropriate extension work. The current organisation makes it difficult for teachers to cope effectively with the full range students in their classes. For example, work on number sequencing was very easy for some and they could have moved on far more quickly to develop high order mathematical skills. For other low attaining students it was too difficult. Overall, however, good progress is being made currently across the key stage, with work well matched to needs in many classes and effective teaching, but with sound achievement over time. The situation is much better today than that indicated by the low test results in 2001.
127. Results in GCSE at the end of Year 11 in 2001 were just below the national average with girls attaining much higher standards than boys. Attainment in mathematics was significantly worse than for other subjects in the college showing underachievement. The results for 2002 were similar to those of 2001. Girl's results were again well above those of the boys. No students attained the highest A\* grade.
128. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are variable, but are now average and improving because of some skilled teaching. Year 10 higher attaining students expanded simple algebraic expressions and were moving on to expanding pairs of expressions to create quadratics. These students were then reversing this process and factorising the expressions. This showed a good level of achievement for these students, and well above average attainment. Some low attaining students in Year 10, however, working on percentages and directed number were not effectively taught and the students misbehaved and underachieved, attaining low standards. Overall, students' achievements, although variable, are satisfactory now but have been unsatisfactory over time.
129. The overall quality of teaching observed in Years 7, 8 and 9 was good. Most teachers are using the 'three part lesson', based on the national numeracy strategy. Starter activities are well planned. The final session or summary is not so well used but is improving as teachers develop their skills. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 although the three part lesson is not as embedded for these year groups. In a few classes, the effectiveness of teaching was reduced by large class sizes, making it difficult for the teacher to respond to the learning needs of individual students. Students at the extremes of prior attainment and those with special educational needs were less successful where teaching weaknesses were apparent. Teaching by the new staff team of both groups was satisfactory overall, but further improvements in some classes are needed to raise standards further. No significant differences were observed in the teaching of boys and girls that could explain the fluctuating success of both genders over the past two years. Teachers had a balanced approach and questioned and challenged boys and girls equally.
130. In most lessons, teaching was enthusiastic, well planned and with a variety of activities. These lessons had good pace, often with activities being carefully timed, and teachers had good command of the subject. The impact on learning was significant in these classes and the behaviour and attitudes of the students was good. In a small number of classes, where teaching was indifferent or poorly planned, the behaviour of the students was worse than expected and learning was much less effective. In all year groups, teachers emphasised the importance of the use, understanding and spelling of correct mathematical terminology. In some classes students were required to write explanations for their answers, resulting in a good development of literacy. Students could discuss and answer questions about their work and most were willing to contribute to class discussion. Attitudes and behaviour in the majority of classes were usually good and students were willing to learn. Overall, the relationships between staff and students were good and the working atmosphere was positive and supportive. In all year groups, additional support staff were assigned to some classes. These staff made a valuable contribution to the quality of teaching and learning. However, they need to be involved more in the planning process and be more aware of the lesson aims and objectives before the lesson starts.
131. The mathematics curriculum is good and improving. A good start has been made on using the national Key Stage 3 strategy. Planning is more rigorous, but the 'springboard' programme, designed to help low attaining Year 7 students is not yet used and should be. Students benefit from teaching by specialist mathematicians,

but the teaching of a few classes is split between two staff which causes curriculum continuity and learning problems. Schemes of work are good and show how ICT can be used to enhance students' learning, although insufficient use is currently made of computers in mathematics lessons. Very good use is made of the staff laptop computers for curriculum planning and record keeping.

132. Some teachers' marking last year was cursory and gave little indication to the students as to how they should improve. Marking is now much better and good overall, moving closer to the excellent departmental policy. The use of pupil performance data is satisfactory, but much better in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. In Years 7 to 9 specific targets for individuals are planned to be set later in the year. Students in Years 10 and 11 have GCSE target grades based on previous test results that are helping to raise standards.
133. During the year 2001 to 2002, the college experienced serious problems with mathematics staffing which resulted in some students underachieving and attainment that was too low in GCSE examinations. A number of parents talked to the inspectors about the problems and how their children had been disadvantaged by them. Since September 2002, following great efforts by the college in using initiatives to attract staff in shortage subjects, the department is now fully staffed and teachers relatively new to the college teach over half the timetable. A start on monitoring and evaluating the work of the department has been made, of both work and lessons, but systems are insufficiently rigorous or effective. Test and examination results show that attainment of students has declined since the last inspection. However, the major improvements in staffing for the current year, which are resulting in satisfactory and good teaching of most lessons and satisfactory or good learning and progress overall, the positive impact of the current leadership and management of the department on raising standards, and the effective implementation of a range of well-written departmental policies, indicate that progress since the last inspection is just satisfactory.

#### **Numeracy:**

134. The mathematics department places considerable emphasis on numeracy. Students are increasingly confident in basic number work. For example they can spot patterns in sequences and many effectively use fractions and decimals. They have a good knowledge of terms such as prime, factor and multiple. In other subjects a recent audit, still to be completed, has resulted in a higher profile for development in numeracy. For example, the languages department ran its own briefing session on how numeracy can be used as part of the language curriculum and geography makes extensive use of statistical representation, co-ordinates and the use of scales. Numeracy standards are good.

#### **SCIENCE**

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

##### Strengths

- Good student attitudes to science and work
- Very good relationships
- Some very good teaching
- Improved and good standards in 2002 end of Year 9 tests

##### Areas for improvement

- Improve monitoring of the work of the department in order to improve the quality of teaching and standards
- Match work better to students' prior learning, particularly for high attainers
- Use ICT more to support learning
- Increase the time allocation in Years 10 and 11 and technician support

135. Students enter the college with knowledge skills and understanding that are above average. The students' results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 in national tests were close to the national average, but well below the average for similar schools. The number of students achieving level 7 was below the national average. The average point score for students dropped over the period 1997-2001, and the trend in results is below the national trend of improvement. Results have fallen more for boys than for girls. However, there was a significant improvement in the results in 2002, where the proportion of students gaining levels 5, 6 and 7 increased from 67 percent to 82 percent. The proportions achieving the higher levels 6 and 7 increased from 26 percent to 39 percent.
136. In the GCSE dual award science examinations, the 2001 results for Year 11 students were close to the national average. The proportion of A\* to B grades overall, was close to the national average, but the percentage of A\* grades was lower. Students performed less well in science than in mathematics or English. The progress of these students was unsatisfactory in 2001 since they had achieved above average results in their end of Year 9 tests in 1999. GCSE results in 2002 were broadly similar to those of 2001. Difficulties over appointing science teachers for the past two years, which affected students' achievements, have now been resolved.
137. Current work seen in lessons and in books indicates students are making good progress achieving well overall in Key Stage 3, although the work sample from last year shows an inconsistent picture with some poor as well as good work. Standards of attainment are above average. The work of the current Year 7 is good. Books for Years 8 and 9 were sometimes untidy and the work was not always sufficiently challenging for high attainers, a situation the department is aware of and, through curriculum and teaching changes, is making improvements. Where teachers commented constructively on students' books, they responded well, improving the quality. Books of Years 10 and 11 are of a satisfactory standard. They contain good science notes and diagrams, with detailed and accurate information, which once learnt would enable students to attain good high grades at GCSE. There was little evidence of students' own notes and opportunities for extended writing or other challenging tasks, however, work that could be demanding for high attainers. Marking was better of the biological sections of the course than the physics and chemistry. Attainment overall in Key Stage 4 is above average.
138. In a mixed ability Year 7 lesson on conductors, students showed they had the oral and writing skills to explain and describe their work. Students in a middle band in Year 8 were eager to answer questions and showed a good understanding of the differences between elements and compounds. The new setting arrangements in Year 9 enabled a high attaining set to work at an excellent pace, achieving very high standards as they discussed ideas of mass, weight and pressure. In Years 10 and 11, the standards students achieve vary with the quality of the teaching. In a high attaining Year 11 band, below average standards were attained because the aims for the lesson were not sufficiently clear to the students. They had prepared presentations on the electromagnetic spectrum but had only included factual information. One group had made a video, which enabled them to demonstrate their capacity for higher level presentation skills, but overall achievement was unsatisfactory. In a lower attaining band, average standards were attained, representing very good achievement, because the lesson was well planned and managed; students used chemical formulae and balancing chemical equations. Each group has different teachers for biological and physical sciences so they have a variety of experiences and reach a satisfactory level overall. Given their starting point, students' progress over time has been unsatisfactory in Key Stage 4, but current work is at least satisfactory.
139. The teaching seen during the inspection was satisfactory overall, with good quality in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory quality in Key Stage 4. Some very good lessons were observed and a few that were unsatisfactory. In the unsatisfactory lessons, and some that were satisfactory, teachers had either not planned their work well enough, or did not match tasks sufficiently to students' prior learning. Sometimes teachers did not assess students' understanding or encourage them enough, with the result students did not progress as well as they might. In most lessons, however, students' learning was satisfactory or better and in Years 7 to 9 it was good. In nearly all lessons, relationships between teachers and students were very good. This produced a supportive learning atmosphere in which students were confident to explore their understanding of ideas. Teachers used their very good subject knowledge to respond thoughtfully to student

contributions. They managed their classes well, especially when they had groups of thirty doing practical work. The students were eager to learn, and responded very well to a demanding pace and intellectual challenges. Homework was used appropriately, with set tasks testing class work, or improving their knowledge and understanding, and teachers showed that they expected it to be done. Numeracy is promoted well in many science lessons. Students plot graphs and use formulae to solve problems. Language support is satisfactory, with the proviso that more extended writing by the students would help to challenge the higher attainers. The use of ICT is satisfactory, with examples of word-processed reports, spreadsheets and sensors used to capture data in experiments. The use of data loggers is underdeveloped because teachers find gaining access to computers difficult for some lessons.

140. Despite every effort on the part of the college, recruitment difficulties over the last few years have affected the quality of teaching and learning from Year 8 upwards. Recent appointments of a new head of department, suitably qualified staff, the improvement in the 2002 end of Year 9 tests, coupled with finer setting arrangements in the current Years 9 and 10, augur well for better progress during the current year. The recently implemented programme of target setting and the computerised bank of student performance data is helping with monitoring and improving achievement.
141. The management of the department has been satisfactory over a difficult period of several years, with high staff turnover and recruitment problems. A new head of department had just been appointed at the time of the inspection. Department managers have worked hard to identify issues, support new developments and broaden teaching skills. Monitoring of the work of the department is insufficiently rigorous, however, and needs to improve in order to identify and address the inconsistencies within teaching. Curriculum planning is sound with schemes of work that respond to National Curriculum and GCSE syllabus requirements. In Years 10 to 11, the time available is a little below that expected for dual award science, and this affects students' progress. Technicians are very helpful, effective and efficient in supporting the management of the department, teaching and learning. The technician time available is insufficient, however, and this restricts the number of practical classes the students can undertake and their achievements. There have been good recent improvements to the science accommodation but some laboratories are still rather small considering the class sizes that occupy them.
142. Current improvements, as seen in the much higher Key Stage 3 standards, are well founded on a secure science staff team, a clear direction for the department and a good understanding of where further work is needed. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, however, as recent developments have not yet had sufficient effect.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- The good quality of teaching and learning that leads to good achievement and makes a significant contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- The use of computers within an overall very rich curriculum
- Achievement of boys in ceramics
- Students' very positive attitudes and enthusiasm for learning

### Areas for improvement

- Make learning and assessment objectives clear to students
- Improve the quality and use of sketchbooks in lessons and for homework tasks
- Set more demanding work at times for higher attainers

143. When students enter the college, their attainment in art is broadly average, and therefore below their attainment in the core subjects. Their high levels of literacy skills and their enthusiasm and very good

attitudes to learning contribute to their good, and sometimes very good, progress in lessons and across Key Stage 3.

144. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above average across the range of art, craft and design components that make up the curriculum. The work of students currently in Year 9 is above expectations. The curriculum is very rich and provides a wide range of activities. Students have the chance to work with clay, use computers and print on fabric. A Year 7 class was observed practicing basic drawing skills. They worked carefully from observation, using and applying what they had learnt in primary schools to new situations. In a Year 9 class, students experimented with different techniques for joining, shaping and building clay in preparation for making a model of an animal, where the learning emphasis was to use and apply the information gained through direct observation. Students were keen to use sketches and photographs of their own pets for this work and quickly realised the importance of making a series of drawings and/or photographs taken from different viewpoints. In this area, and elsewhere, sketchbooks are underused for this type of research, to note the results of the experimentation if appropriate and to reflect and comment on the work of craft workers and artists.
145. Students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well as they progress through the key stage. However, students would make even greater progress if learning and assessment objectives were made explicit in lessons and at the end of each unit of work. Teachers do not routinely use National Curriculum levels either to monitor students' progress year on year or to help students monitor their own progress. Consequently, higher attaining students are not always set work that enables them to demonstrate higher levels of achievement. Extension activities are needed within the scheme of work that are more demanding and require added challenge and depth.
146. Students can choose from drawing and painting, ceramics or textiles in Years 10 and 11 and a small number of students take two of these courses. Like the national results, those in the college represent students' attainment across all courses. They show the percentage of students gaining A\*-C grades in the 2001 GCSE examinations to be above the average. A smaller percentage of students gained the highest grades than nationally. The 2002 results were lower than in previous years and are being remarked. Prior to 2002, the overall trend has remained consistently above the national average and there has been good achievement. A large proportion of students opting for ceramics are lower attaining boys and they achieve very well indeed – one and sometimes two grades higher than in their other subjects.
147. Teaching and learning are good, and often very good. Teaching is most effective in Years 10 and 11, where teachers use the structure of the examination syllabus well, to plan and assess students' work and monitor the progress they make in lessons and in their homework. In Years 7 to 9, however students are not given enough information about their progress to help them take an increasing responsibility for their achievements. Teachers manage students' behaviour very well. So, as students move up the college, their very good attitudes to learning become more focused and their concentration improves. A strength of the teaching is in teachers' excellent subject knowledge and their wide range of specialist skills. Since the last inspection, the use of computers has improved, for example introducing a new unit of work which gives students access to an archive of artists' work. Overall the subject makes a good contribution to the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
148. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The subject has been very professionally managed and led throughout a long period of uncertainty over staffing. The areas for development have been appropriately identified. As a result, the improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have been raised and staff training has enabled teachers to recognise where computers can be used to enhance learning. The use of sketchbooks is underdeveloped, however, particularly in Years 7 to 9, as they were at the time of the last inspection.

## **Dance and Drama**

149. Dance and drama are taught as part of the college's arts provision. Standards are very good at GCSE level in both subjects where three quarters of candidates attain the higher grades A\*-C. In drama, one in three

students were awarded A or A\* grades and in dance, two in five. Standards seen in lessons match this closely, although the poor quality of specialist accommodation prevents the highest attainment. Teaching observed was excellent. It is informed by first-rate professional knowledge of drama and dance techniques, dramatic history, and lively explanations and focused encouragement of students. As a result, students learn very well, co-operate with each other in groups effectively, and engage thoughtfully with the requirements of performance to an audience. In a typical example, a group studied the central elements of myth and legend, going on to examine and discuss together the decorative features of a Greek vase, before using what they had understood to create their own varied physical group arrangements as a starting point for drama. The lively atmosphere of commitment and bubbling enthusiasm, skilfully engineered by the teacher, was matched by the high quality of collaborative work shared at the end of the lesson.

150. Management and planning of lessons are very good. Both subjects make a significant contribution to the cultural and social life of the college. The extensive programme of visits to and by theatre and dance companies also adds greatly to students' cultural experience.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Good, sometimes very good, teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 which results in very good GCSE results in graphic products, particularly for high attainers
- The support provided for GCSE coursework enables students to improve their work and achieve well
- Very good pupil attitudes to their learning supports good progress and achievement throughout the college
- Management of the department

### Areas for improvement

- Improve the quality of planning and increase teachers' expectation of what students can achieve for Year 7 food and textiles courses
- Improve access to computers for food and textiles lessons

151. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 have been very high and well above those reported nationally. Current work indicates that standards are above the national expectation. By the end of Year 9, students have developed a range of knowledge and skills in both designing and making. Project work in food, textiles, resistant materials and graphics contains a good range of research and analysis techniques in well-structured exercises, which enable all students to learn and use new skills. Most students produce a good range of well-drawn solutions to design problems, and computers are used to produce questionnaires and record and present the results of surveys in graphs. Flow diagrams are used to explain production methods and students evaluate their work well. Good practical skills were seen in the waistcoat project where a range of fabrics and applied decoration techniques were used very effectively to produce well-made final products. Students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, are well supported by the structured approach used to develop knowledge, skills and understanding. When compared to their earlier attainment, the achievement and progress of all students by the end of Year 9 are good.
152. GCSE results for design and technology subjects overall, have been well above the national average for a number of years, but in 2001 results fell to just above the national average. In 2002 results improved and returned to the 2000 level. Results in graphic products have been higher than in food technology, systems and control and textiles technology. Examination success in 2001 was equally good in the proportion of A\* to C grades attained and A\* to G. The results for graphic products continue to be well above the national average, as is the proportion of A\* and A grades, indicating that high attainers are challenged successfully. In 2001, the results for boys and girls were above their respective national averages but girls' results were considerably higher than boys'. Overall, students do as well in design and technology as in the other GCSE subjects they take.

153. Current work in Year 11 indicates that standards are above those expected for students of this age. The structured approach used to address coursework is enabling all students to access the requirements of the examination well and as a result the quality of research, analysis, and development and evaluation of ideas is very good. For example, the annotation of work when analysing and evaluating the quality of food packaging showed very good understanding of packaging requirements. Students develop a good range of knowledge and skills and understand how materials, ingredients and components can be used safely, effectively and sometimes creatively. Presentation of work is often very good and, for higher attaining students, excellent. There is very good use of computers for research and presentation of work and this is often carried out in the students' own time. Practical work is good overall across the ability range. All students, including those with special educational needs, and students of low prior attainment, make good progress in Years 10 and 11 and achieve well.
154. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall but this includes some good and a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good overall with most observed lessons being good or very good and a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge and in most lessons planning is good, appropriate teaching methods are used and expectations of behaviour and performance are high. This enables all students, including those with special educational needs, to acquire knowledge and skills, and use these effectively by working at a good pace. Students generally make good progress even when teaching is satisfactory as they show high levels of interest and concentrate on their work. In the best lessons this is enhanced by very good demonstrations of simple techniques and skills, which inspire students and enable them to achieve good results in their own work. For example, the use of cut and paste techniques to disassemble and enhance the presentation of photocopied images in a Year 10 graphics lesson. However, learning is less successful when teachers' expectations are too low. For example, in Year 7 food and textiles lessons, where staff, following the programmes of work, did not build on students' prior knowledge. Pupil management is very good and leads to very good relationships. A positive feature of most lessons is the support given to individual students. Work is constructively criticised and clear guidance is provided. Aspects of literacy, numeracy and the use of computers are being included in students' work, but overall would benefit from more detailed planning for the progressive development of these skills in all design and technology subjects. Homework is used effectively to enhance coursework particularly in Years 10 and 11, where students spend considerable time improving the presentation of their work, often by using computers.
155. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students like working in design and technology subjects, have positive attitudes to their work and settle to work quickly in most lessons. They respond to the structured and sympathetic support they receive and this creates a good environment for learning in all classes. Students develop their skills and confidence and this leads to improved personal development. As students move through the college they organise themselves and their work more effectively and higher attaining students often use their skills and knowledge creatively in individual projects.
156. Curriculum time is used well throughout the college. Good, developing programmes of work result in effective coverage of National Curriculum requirements. However, in Years 7 to 9, the programmes of work for food and textiles do not always provide sufficient pace and challenge and engage students in designing and making skills through the use of materials. The use of computers to support design and technology work is developing well. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are very high compared to the work currently taking place, and the criteria used need to be reconsidered. Assessment procedures for Years 10 and 11 are good. Students' work is regularly assessed and this keeps students informed about their progress and enables them to improve their work.
157. Leadership and management of the department are good. The department has sound priorities for development. Documentation has been improved and programmes of work are being reviewed and developed. Teachers are suitably qualified but technician support is insufficient. Staff use available rooms well but the large size of some teaching groups is affecting the work being included. Accommodation and resources are being used well but access to computers for food and textiles continues to be restricted. There have been substantial improvements in most areas identified in the last inspection and therefore, overall, improvement since the last inspection is good.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- Good and very good teaching leads to good learning and achievement, particularly for high attaining students
- Students' very good attitudes enable good progress to be made
- Very good extra curricular provision widens and deepens the knowledge and understanding of students
- Very good, helpful and constructively critical marking

### Areas for improvement

- nil

158. When teachers assessed work at the end of Year 9 in 2001 and 2002, results were above average. Students enter the college with standards of attainment which are slightly above average. By the end of Year 9, their level of achievement is good and their standards are above average. Higher attaining students show good understanding of geographical skills, vocabulary and concepts, make good progress and achieve well.
159. GCSE results at A\* - C in 2001 were above the national average and those for 2002 are similarly high. A significant proportion of A\* - A grades are attained in geography. The subject is popular, and many proceed to undertake further study in the subject in the sixth form. Boys and girls do equally well.
160. The overall standard of work of students in Years 7 to 9, seen during the inspection, was above average. Students generally develop a good understanding of geographical skills, ideas and the location of places. Most students in Year 9 can accurately describe the factors that influence climate and where settlements develop but only higher attaining students can begin to explain these factors. Most students in Year 7 have a sound understanding of the basics of Ordnance Survey map reading. Lower attaining students are less secure in their understanding of how to calculate distance from a map. Students' fieldwork skills develop well between Years 7 and 9, due to the emphasis put on local studies within the schemes of work and the wide range of visits and opportunities for learning outside the classroom. Written work is good and there is a good body of recorded work in students' course books. Greater use of ICT is now in evidence compared with the last inspection, for example in work undertaken in Year 10 on hydrology cycles. Students' ICT skills are generally good and by Year 10, they are confident to undertake detailed Internet research involving the investigation of floodplains and their implications. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 was also above average, and students achieve well in relation to their previous learning..
161. The quality of teaching is good overall and some very good teaching was observed. Teachers are well prepared and have good subject knowledge. Learning support, where deployed, is effective. Lesson objectives are explained clearly and usually displayed on the whiteboard to support subsequent plenary sessions. Some of these sessions are too teacher-dominated and do not allow sufficient opportunities for students to feedback on what has been learned. Questioning is very focused and teachers' expectations are clear. The focus on GCSE requirements is helpful in achieving good results. The best lessons are broken down into short, varied activities interspersed with lively discussion. These discussions enable teachers to check students' progress and are a particularly strong feature of lessons in Years 10 and 11.
162. The quality of teachers' marking is very good. Work is marked consistently and promptly, and usually gives points for students to improve upon. Marking shows an appreciation of the needs of individuals and contributes well to the good learning that takes place. Students are involved in setting their targets and this helps maintain the good pace of learning, especially in Years 9, 10 and 11. Teachers know their subject well, providing clear explanations and pertinent examples. Students' interest is heightened by this quality of

teaching and they are motivated to learn further. The examples provide colour to discussions, particularly in terms of local topography and fruitful comparisons to other continental areas. Students are encouraged to use ICT when appropriate.

163. Students' attitudes towards geography are very good and are a major reason for the good learning that takes place. Behaviour is very good because of the challenging yet supportive teaching. Teachers expect students to work hard and they work well together when required to do so. Discussion is always orderly and individuals' views are respected.
164. The department is led and managed very well. A clear sense of direction and commitment to improvement is shared by all teachers, with a very good emphasis on improving attainment. Assessment information is used effectively to set targets, to monitor progress and to give students ideas on how to improve. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Schemes of work have been revised for Years 7 and 8 and these now provide greater learning challenges for students of all abilities. Accommodation has improved and is conducive to independent learning. There is more consistent use of ICT including statistical analysis, for example in river study work in Year 10. Considerable effort has been made to refine and consolidate target setting for students in each year group. The outcome of these developments has been to encourage much more independent learning, particularly for middle and higher attaining students. The department has the capacity to continue to raise standards.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- The standards attained by students in Year 9 and at GCSE in Year 11 are well above the national average and high attainers do particularly well
- The willingness of boys and girls to work hard to achieve their challenging targets contributes significantly to the high standards achieved
- Very good teaching and learning
- Teachers have high expectations of students and use skilful questioning to develop historical knowledge and understanding

### Areas for improvement

- Improve the range of teaching and learning strategies, especially in Years 10 and 11
- Ensure that ICT is used more in teaching and learning and that all aspects of the National Curriculum are covered in sufficient depth.

165. In 2001, the results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above average compared with schools nationally. This maintains the trend in above average performance since the last inspection.
166. The current standard attained by students at the end of Year 9 is well above average. Students are able to produce well-structured extended answers. In essays on the abolition of slavery in Britain, students demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the topic. When investigating factory conditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students evaluated the usefulness and reliability of a range of historical sources very successfully.
167. Students in Year 9 are achieving very well in relation to their attainment in Year 7. They have very good literacy skills, which helps their study of history. As they progress through the college they develop further their ability to write structured answers and begin to support arguments with quotations from sources.

168. In 2001 GCSE results were well above the national average with significantly more students achieving the highest grades of A\* - A. Boys and girls did equally well, whereas nationally girls performed better than boys. The results in 2001 reflect the trend in well above average results since the last inspection.
169. The current standard attained by students in Year 11 is well above average. Both boys and girls produce well-structured written work that shows a depth of knowledge and understanding. In their work assessing the success of the Treaty of Versailles, students were able to put forward well-reasoned arguments that were effectively supported by good examples of the Treaty's failures. Students analyse and evaluate a range of sources. This was demonstrated well in their work on the USA's involvement in Vietnam.
170. Both boys and girls in Year 11 achieve very well, maintaining their very good attainment at the start of the course. Throughout Years 10 and 11, students further develop their knowledge and understanding of the complex historical events studied as part of the modern world course. They improve their ability to analyse sources by taking more account of a source's context and support answers effectively with relevant quotations from the sources.
171. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have clear and appropriate lesson objectives that are shared with the class. This helps students' progress by keeping them focused on the learning outcomes and gives them a sense of achievement at the end of the lesson. Students are supported in their study of history by the emphasis given to the importance of literacy. In students' history books and in classrooms, there are spelling lists of key words. History teachers also advise students on how to scan read sources, structure essays and use a range of connectives. Another characteristic of lessons is the teachers' high expectations. This is reflected in the challenging targets set for each pupil and the determination with which both boys and girls work to achieve them. However, some younger students do not always understand the target set, for example when asked to consider the context of the source. Teachers often skilfully use question and answer sessions that involve all the students, but in a lesson on the USA in the 1920's this activity went on too long and only involved a minority of students.
172. In the very good lessons, teachers interacted well with students and used humour, games and role-play to good effect. For example in a lesson on trench warfare, students enjoyed the challenge of a game of 'Blockbusters' which was used to test their knowledge, and in a lesson on the Reformation the teacher took the role of a Roman Catholic priest to explain effectively about indulgences and absolution. The very good teaching of history is also characterised by the teacher's expert use of students' responses and the modelling of answers by both students and teacher which then serve as exemplars. These strategies helped students studying an extract from a leaflet produced by the Nazi propaganda leader, Goebbels, to make significant gains in their ability to analyse and evaluate a complex historical source. The thorough revision programme in Year 11, and practice examination questions, help students consolidate their learning and improve examination performance. Throughout their time at the college students have the opportunity to participate in some interesting and beneficial visits, for example to Ely and Ypres, Belgium. However, the department should research ways of ensuring that all students who wish to go on the popular battlefield trip are able to participate and review the current way in which students who do not make voluntary contributions are subsidised.
173. To develop further the quality of teaching and learning, schemes of work need to cover areas such as the 'Cold War' in greater depth, and more opportunities should be provided for students to use ICT to carry out historical research, draft work and present findings in a variety of ways. As identified in the department's development plan, teachers should continue to develop the range of teaching and learning strategies needed for students to be active learners. Also, in the planning of lessons, more account needs to be taken of the targets for students with special educational needs. The history department is very well organised and the teachers work effectively as a team. Department managers provide clear leadership, and help to set the high expectations that are a feature of work in history. Since the last inspection the department has made good improvement.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

#### Strengths

- Above average standards in all years
- Good, and sometimes very good, teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11
- Good attitudes and behaviour of students, particularly in Years 10 and 11
- Good leadership and management

#### Areas for improvement

- Improve the quality of some teaching and learning, ensuring that work develops from students' prior learning, and achievements are more carefully monitored
- Ensure that students not following specialist courses in Years 10 and 11 receive the full National Curriculum entitlement

174. In 2001, teacher assessments indicated that students' standards at the end of Year 9 were below average. These assessments underestimated actual standards. Teacher assessments were much higher in 2002 and further improvements have recently been made to the department's procedures for assessing current Year 9 students. The standards that these students are showing in their work are above average. When using software such as spreadsheets, for specific tasks, such as organising the records of a garage, the great majority can select, organise and present the information with expected levels of capability. They can customise a word-processed document, using a range of formatting tools, so that it is suitable for business use. A few students show well above average capability, for example in the way they use a spreadsheet for modelling situations, using advanced tools such as the random number facility. Students achieve satisfactorily in generally maintaining, but not further improving upon, the above average standards with which they enter the college.
175. No students were entered for GCSE in 2001. A small number took the examination in 2002. The college was disappointed by their results, which were not as good as in their other subjects. It accepts that this was because the students had to follow the course in disadvantageous circumstances, due to time not being allocated during the normal timetable, which meant that lessons had to take place after school. Two classes are taking after-hours classes in the current Year 11. The standard of work from these classes, from the small sample seen, was generally above average and achievement was satisfactory. Many can use advanced word processing techniques, for example customising toolbars for others to use when making their own business resources such as business cards, application forms and fax covers. Year 10 students are benefiting from lessons within the normal timetable, and their progress and achievement are better.
176. In all years, students with special educational needs generally achieve as well as others, usually because of the good individual attention and support that they receive from teachers, and the high willingness of students to help each other. The highest attainers' achievement is also generally in line with that of other students, because they usually have the opportunity to work independently, at the level of which they are capable. In a minority of lessons however, full account is not taken of their earlier experience and existing capability, so that they do not progress as far or as quickly as they might. Although boys are often more confident than girls, there is no untoward variation in their respective achievement.
177. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 it is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Teaching and learning are best in Years 10 and 11, where they are good and sometimes very good. In Years 7 to 9, the best teaching is planned to ensure that students make advances in their knowledge and understanding, as well as skills. For example, Year 9 students improved their ability to create PowerPoint presentations for a particular audience. Students are given opportunities to work well together and make independent choices of which software to use. Good questioning allows students to show and test what they know and includes a large proportion of students by, for example, encouraging some less confident girls to participate. Good strategies are used to gain students' attention. Many lessons however, while satisfactory, have weaknesses that prevent learning from being as consistently good in these years as it is in Years 10 and 11. Basic management techniques, such as requiring students to turn away from computers during explanations, are not employed, so that these are not fully heard by many.

Students are not always fully monitored to ensure that they are working with sufficient pace, or sharing equipment properly. In some lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, there is little diagnosis of students' prior learning, or planned work to meet the range of individual needs. Consequently, while teachers usually provide at least adequate individual support so that the great majority learn satisfactorily, few students make good progress in these lessons. In Years 10 and 11, students have good opportunities to build upon their existing knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers use questioning well to identify needs and provide good inclusion, through individual monitoring and support. For example, lower attainers are able to work at their own speed, but are well monitored to ensure that this is appropriate. They are encouraged not to worry about learning from making mistakes, so their confidence to experiment is enhanced. Higher attainers are given scope to move on quickly, but their work is regularly checked to guard against over-confidence, which could cause them to move on too quickly.

178. The attitudes and behaviour of students are good overall. There is some variation between years, ranging from satisfactory in Years 7 and 8, to very good in Year 10. In Years 7 to 9, students are often noisy when working, even though conversations are predominantly about their work. A substantial minority needs regular reminders to pay attention to instructions and explanations, although this is usually because they cannot resist continuing with their own work. However, classes quickly quieten down and give their attention to teachers when asked and students are courteous to each other and to adults in the room. They often work well together so that, when they have to share computers, this is not a great disadvantage. In Year 10, there is very good concentration and commitment to work. In Year 11, students volunteer to attend classes outside normal school hours and most manage to do so regularly in these difficult circumstances.
179. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Recently it has accelerated, with some very significant steps being taken. Several areas were identified as being in need of improvement in the last report. The great majority have been attended to in part, but most require further improvement. Due to better opportunities in Years 7 to 9, which provide a better grounding, standards are now higher in Years 10 and 11. The college is aware of the need to improve further opportunities in Years 10 and 11, to consolidate this. It took a satisfactory interim step by providing additional lessons outside school hours, even though students did not achieve as well as they might in these. It has now significantly improved its curriculum by very recently introducing two GCSE courses, one a short course, the other an applied GCSE, taught within the normal timetable. The great majority of Year 10 students take one or the other. The college now meets its statutory responsibility by providing at least some computer work in all subjects. It still does not have a clear picture of the opportunities that it provides across the curriculum however, and mapping remains an urgent requirement. While some subjects, particularly art, music and business education, provide good opportunities, most subjects still need to improve further, particularly mathematics and history. Improvements in assessment procedures for Years 7 to 9 have recently been introduced and the need to continue these is well understood in the department. Teaching is now more specialised, although there is a need to ensure that all staff are fully acquainted and confident with the areas that they teach. There has been considerable improvement in technical support, so that this aspect no longer distracts those responsible for the curriculum and standards. Resources have significantly improved, so that the ratio of computers to students is now good. Many computers are now reaching the end of their effective life, however, and a planned replacement programme is needed.
180. Some instability in leadership and management since the last inspection has affected the performance of ICT as a subject and its presence across the curriculum. Following very recent changes however, leadership and management are now good, with a potential for becoming very good when new developments are more firmly established. In a very short time, much important improvement work has been undertaken and there is a clear and accurate vision of what needs to be done in the future. Because of this and the extent of support being provided by senior managers, the commitment and capacity for future improvement are very good.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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

#### Strengths

- Good or very good teaching and learning in many classes
- Above average results in end of Year 9 teacher assessments and well above average French GCSE results
- Very good management and team work within the department
- The rich programme of extra-curricular activities and support for learning

#### Areas for improvement

- Improve access to ICT facilities and increase the use of ICT in teaching and learning
- Reduce the number of split classes in Years 7 to 9
- Enable all students who join the college late to continue taking French if that is their National Curriculum modern foreign language

### French and German

181. Students' attainment in French upon entry to the college in Year 7 is very uneven and consequently the classes taking French are taught as beginners. Half the students begin German in Year 7 instead of French. There were no teacher assessment results available discretely for French and German, but in 2001 teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 in modern foreign languages show that just over half of students reached the expected standard (Level 5 or above). The girls achieved much better than the boys. In the 2002 teacher assessments of standards in modern foreign languages over two-thirds of all students reached the expected standard or above and nearly one third reached levels 6 or 7. The girls again outperformed the boys. These results indicate that standards in modern foreign languages rise very rapidly during Years 7 to 9. Students achieve very well to reach above average standards at the end of Year 9.
182. In a French top set in Year 9, students could understand a lesson conducted mainly in French and could pick out details about people's personality from a recording. Their pronunciation was good and the homework they had just completed was accurate and contained compound sentences. Year 9 work showed that high attainers can produce long texts, which contain a good range of structures and tenses. Some of this work was word processed and contained imported aspects. In German the written work of higher attainers contained examples of work at levels 5 and 6. The essays and dialogues contained a range of tenses and there was some good use of conjunctions and time phrases. In a Year 9 class of low attainers, with several students with special educational needs, most students could pronounce well and could fluently give reasons why they liked certain people.
183. GCSE results in French in 2001 were well above average when compared with the national results. The students achieved well in relation to their starting point in Year 10. Girls performed better than boys. The results in French in 2002 are even higher and again girls performed better than boys. GCSE results in German in 2001 were just above average, but with fewer than average grades A\* to B. The achievement of these students in German was unsatisfactory. The performance of boys was higher than that of girls. In 2002 GCSE results in German rose significantly. Girls did much better than boys and achievement overall was very good.
184. Current GCSE students achieve well in French in relation to their attainment on entry into Year 10 and attainment is above average. A Year 10 top set had good reading skills and were able to skim and scan texts with speed and accuracy. They could follow a lesson conducted entirely in French at normal speed and were able to talk with accuracy and fluency about issues relating to the advantages and disadvantages of shopping in large supermarkets. Their knowledge of grammar was good. In a Year 10 lower set, with several students with special educational needs, students could give long and complicated directions around school with good accents, when supported appropriately. The work in their books in Years 10 and 11 shows that many students develop their writing skills very well and are able to use a range of tenses and structures. Recordings of students' oral work for GCSE reveals that the most able can speak at length and with very good fluency on prepared topics.

185. Students achieve satisfactorily in German in relation to their attainment on entry into Year 10, and attainment is broadly similar to national averages. The standards observed in a Year 10 top set were above national expectations. Students showed a good ability to cope with unknown vocabulary and some were able to talk fluently about part-time jobs. Most students in a Year 11 top set had above average listening skills and were able to recognize different tenses. Their writing was also above average and they made good use of time phrases and conjunctions. In one Year 11 middle set, however, pronunciation was generally poor and knowledge of vocabulary and grammar was weak. The standard of writing was also low with many spelling mistakes and failure to use capital letters appropriately.
186. The teaching and learning of French and German are good overall with many very good or excellent lessons. Teaching of both languages was very good in Key Stage 3. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are well aware of National Curriculum and GCSE requirements. They have high expectations which ensure that students work and behave well. They identify the aims of lessons and always write them up on the board for reference. This ensures that students clearly understand what they have to learn. All lessons include opportunities to practise the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Good use is made of homework to consolidate and extend class work. Teachers consistently develop general literacy skills by focusing students' attention on language patterns and the need for accurate spelling. This is raising standards because students are becoming more aware of how language functions generally. Nearly all students participate well in lessons and settle down quickly to do written or reading tasks. Boys generally perform as well as girls and in some lessons they are very enthusiastic learners, although in one Year 8 French class boys were off-task during part of the lesson. In some lessons, the teaching would have been more effective if greater use had been made of the foreign language as a normal means of communication. Teachers mark students' work regularly and students are set targets on how to improve. Occasionally, when too much of a lesson was taught in English, a minority of students was poorly motivated and made little effort to learn.
187. Modern foreign languages is very well managed and the large team works very well together. Departmental documentation and the schemes of work are very good. There has been stability of staffing over recent years, which has helped to raise standards. Accommodation and resources are very good, but access to computers is unsatisfactory. Some good use is made of the library and boxes of readers in classrooms to develop reading skills. A very good programme of GCSE support and trips abroad also help to raise attainment. The teaching of languages in several split classes in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory. It is also unsatisfactory that some late newcomers to the college are not able to continue learning French and have to start German, which puts them at a disadvantage.
188. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Teaching and learning have improved significantly. GCSE results in French and German have risen consistently from year to year and are now well above the national average. The use of ICT is included in schemes of work and all staff are computer literate, but it is not used much to enhance learning. An effective common approach to teaching and assessing students' work is used and there is a good departmental system for setting targets.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Students gain very good practical skills because of the high quality specialist teaching
- GCSE results are consistently well above average, indicating very good achievement
- Students enjoy the subject and are eager to learn
- The very good range of musical and music technology resources enhances students' creativity

### Areas for improvement

- Increase number of instruments from cultures other than western, to introduce students to a wider variety of musical experiences
- Improve consistency of instrumental tuition and adopt a fairer charging system

189. Teacher assessments for 2001 show that, by the age of fourteen, attainment was above national expectations. In GCSE examinations for 2001, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades A\*-C was significantly above average. This has been the trend for the last three years. Results in 2002 continue to be high with boys and girls doing equally well.
190. In Year 9, standards are above average. This represents a very good level of achievement given students' musical attainment on entry to the college. Higher attaining students have a good vocabulary of technical musical language, which allows them to appraise accurately the music they hear and perform. They can control sounds effectively with an awareness of the different parts within their group. In one Year 9 lesson dealing with theme and variation form, two girls created a simple canon with a melodic ostinato; they recorded it into the computer software so that they could later modify it. Lower attaining students can use the computer software and tuned percussion instruments to give reasonably accurate performances of a variety of simple pieces. The quality of singing is generally good. Students with special educational needs and musically talented students also make good progress because of the very well planned materials used in lessons.
191. Very good access is available to computer equipment and this is used well by Year 9 students, who can create record and refine their pieces. Instrumentalists are actively encouraged to use their chosen instruments in lessons and as a result of this become good independent learners.
192. Literacy skills are improving with very good use of key words and musical vocabulary by all students. Numeracy skills are also taught well with every opportunity taken to create links to mathematics such as relating octagon to octave and even reference to factor pairing in one Year 7 lesson. Opportunities to reflect on the spiritual nature of song lyrics are created in some lessons and students responded well to this. Despite the very good resources, not enough music and instruments are available from cultures other than western, which reduces the student's experience of the range of musical styles found in modern society.
193. By the age of sixteen, students achieve very well and standards are well above average. Higher attaining students are good instrumentalists and singers. They can follow traditional musical notation and use this to notate their own compositions. They understand how to apply the key components of melody and harmony into their compositions. Students use the music software well and they value their access to the equipment. In one Year 11 lesson, several students created melodic note rows and manipulated them to extend their piece in the style of Serialism music. They demonstrated a clear understanding of this genre of music.
194. Students learn very well because the teaching is generally very good. Teaching is characterised by excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject which is passed onto the students very well. Students enjoy music lessons because they are challenged by the teacher's high expectations. They are keen to learn and strive to do well in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Through the use of music technology and instrumental tuition, students are taught to be good independent learners. They are supportive of each other and work well at a good pace. Listening skills are taught well and lessons have a high practical focus. In all lessons learning outcomes are clear and lessons end with a plenary to reinforce learning. The teachers build students' confidence with regular use of praise. In the better lessons whole class question and answer sessions are incorporated to assist the recall of information from the previous lesson. They have a variety of well-planned sequential tasks which ensures all groups of students are challenged and make progress. Occasionally practical activities last too long and are not broken up with enough performance opportunities; as a result the pace of learning slows down. In some practical lessons, students do not get regular opportunities to explore their own improvisation skills. The quality of the instrumental tuition offered is too variable.
195. The leadership and management of music are good, with a clear vision for improving the subject. The new schemes of work are moving the department away from the more traditional theory-based syllabus towards a new, more creative and fully inclusive curriculum. The staff team contribute to this vision with secure subject knowledge and a commitment to improvement. The organisation of the instrumental tuition and the extra-curricular activities is generally good. However, the charging for instrumental tuition is unfair and

results in some students paying more for certain lessons, depending on the instrument they choose to study. The department is aware of this inconsistency and is reviewing the system. Departmental staff are monitored but there is no formal system for monitoring the instrumental tuition, and this is needed. Documentation and assessment procedures are good with all Year 11 students aware of their predicted and target grades. Assessment procedures in the lower college are satisfactory, but being improved to achieve better links to National Curriculum levels. The key and successful focus for the department recently has been raising the profile and popularity of the more practical aspects of music and this has attracted student interest and raised standards.

196. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. The ICT provision has improved significantly and there are now thirty computers with sequencing and score-writing software. The quality of resources is now very good. The more talented musicians are challenged in lessons through the introduction of extension materials. A much wider range of extra-curricular musical activities has been introduced. Strong links have been developed with the performing arts department culminating in a recent arts week. The accommodation is very good and all health and safety concerns raised in the last inspection have been addressed.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Very good teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9
- Very good extra-curricular provision
- Very good student attitudes to the subject

### Areas for improvement

- Use assessment data more rigorously in Years 7 to 9
- Improve the showering facilities for students

197. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 recorded standards that were well below those attained nationally. Inspection evidence suggests that these assessments under-estimated students' attainment. The standards achieved by students currently at the end of Year 9 are at nationally expected levels and some are above. Standards on entry are variable though overall average or a little below. By the end of Year 9, boys show average co-ordination in rugby tackling skills, with the majority displaying competent skills in passing and travelling with the ball and applying the rules of the game. Girls display an average standard in dribbling, dodging and using open and reverse stick in hockey. Higher attaining boys and girls show above average attainment in games skills.
198. Students overall are achieving very well over the key stage in relation to their prior attainment. Their very good attitudes have a positive impact on their learning. Higher attaining girls in Year 8 display good levels of problem solving and planning, whilst average attaining students show competence in teamwork activities and in modifying ideas when plans fail. In Year 7, boys' skills are developing steadily helped by their participation in games with Year 9 boys in after-school activities. Girls showed good levels of physical effort and achievement, working as a group to increase agility when passing a ball and learn when to use the chest, bounce and shoulder passes in netball. They worked confidently together and showed a developing sense of teamwork. Good levels of performance were evident in competitive team play in many games activities. Lower attaining and special needs students show good application in their studies and are achieving sound techniques of footwork control in football. The majority of students understand the need to warm-up before vigorous exercise. They know how to prepare for specific activities, for example in stretching the relevant muscles.
199. Results at GCSE have been maintained at, or slightly above, the national average since the last inspection. In 2001, the proportion of candidates attaining A\*-C grades was just above the national average although a

smaller proportion attained A\* and A grades. All students attained in the A\* to F grades at GCSE. Results for 2002 were slightly down on the previous year as a result of a reduced entry standard and because of staffing disruptions during the year. There was little difference between the performance of boys and girls. Students' attainment at GCSE in physical education is comparable to the standards they reached in their other subjects.

200. Current standards at the end of Year 11 are at nationally expected levels. Standards in football and netball for GCSE students are above average. In a Year 11 mixed netball lesson, students learned the skills of a good performance, such as using the space well, anticipating actions, attacking and defending. Boys showed high levels of skills transference in dodging and sprinting while girls displayed confident footwork. All attained good levels of individual performance because of the gender challenge. Higher attaining students in football displayed a high standard of teamwork and communication skills as they developed confidence in coaching. Achievement for different attainment levels is good. For example, in rugby, lower attaining students benefit from individual and small group teacher support to increase their awareness of passing, tackling and marking, while higher attaining students work together to refine their techniques of fast play. A few students' knowledge and understanding of their own safety is limited in that, for example, they do not tie their footwear properly on hard court areas. This had a detrimental effect on the quality of movement seen in a few lessons.
201. The standard of work seen in students' folders shows a wide spread of attainment in GCSE classes, with average standards overall. In a Year 11 theory lesson, students showed a satisfactory understanding of factors affecting participation in sport. They responded well to questioning and group work. Textbooks and displays are insufficiently used, however, which is impacting unfavourably on their attainment. Students' involvement in extra-curricular activities helps to consolidate basic skills. Lower attaining and special needs students make good progress because of the regular opportunities for discussion, investigation and problem solving. Students support and encourage each other in activities.
202. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good and very good in Years 7 to 9. Strengths lie in teachers' expertise and very good relationships with students. They explain what students are going to learn and demonstrate techniques clearly to all levels of attainment. Tasks set are interesting and enjoyable; activities are challenging and competitive. Students are managed effectively in groups reflecting stages of development. A good balance between introduction, practice of new skills and consolidation of learning is carefully planned in most lessons so that work progresses at a good pace. In a minority of lessons, a few students are chatty and off-task which affects concentration, and results in poor quality of movement overall. Where teaching is excellent, clear effective instruction is given, expectations to acquire new techniques are high and teachers' make very good use of questioning. Effective evaluation takes place in well-focused group discussions and through observing student demonstrations. In some lessons, teachers do not sufficiently involve non-participants in evaluating others' performances and planning does not include sufficient time for students to apply what they learn in a small-game situation. The opportunity to take a shower after a lesson is insufficiently stressed as an integral part of fitness and health.
203. Effective leadership and management set the tone for the department. Teamwork and commitment of staff to extra-curricular and competitive sport is a strength. Improvements since the last inspection have been good. Clear guidelines on assessment and schemes of work are developing, with the introduction of student target grades. However, National Curriculum assessment levels are not fully linked to schemes of work. The quality of indoor and outdoor sporting accommodation is very good. The extensive playing fields are efficiently used. Students' showering facilities lack privacy, however, and this needs to be resolved.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Good subject knowledge of experienced specialist teachers

- Good relationships between experienced staff and students
- Good teaching leads to high standards in GCSE classes
- Good planning of new time allocation in Years 7 to 9

#### Areas for improvement

- Extend the current Key Stage 4 provision to meet statutory requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus
- Extend the use of levels in assessment of students' work to encourage self awareness and hence higher achievement in Years 7 to 9
- Ensure work is matched to students' prior learning

204. Results for the GCSE examination in 2001 for those students who chose to study religious education as a GCSE option were above the national average and higher than results in other subjects. This represents good progress for these students in the light of their prior attainment. Results in 2002 were higher than in 2001. There were no formal teacher assessments of students in religious education in Year 9 in 2001 or 2002. Insufficient curriculum time was allocated to teaching the locally Agreed Syllabus over the two year period up to 2002 and so students were unable to reach expected standards. The curriculum time is now satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and standards are much higher.
205. Students in Years 10 and 11 share their timetabled allocation for religious education with a planned programme for personal development. This arrangement means that students are unable to cover the required syllabus, and so cannot attain the expected standards. The college therefore fails to meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education for all students in Key Stage 4.
206. Current standards of work of students in Year 9 are above national expectations. For example, in a lesson seen on questions of belief in God, the teacher presented a variety of positions adopted by people to make sense of our existence. Higher attaining students brought a number of factors that influenced attitudes into their explanation and evaluation of deism, atheism and humanism. Most students were able to name and explain these viewpoints, and lower attaining students developed a good understanding. By the end of Year 9, students will have made good progress in meeting the expected levels of the locally Agreed Syllabus and are likely to be attaining well above average standards. Students in Years 7 and 8 wrote clearly about their experience of religion. Higher attaining students, referring to issues they had encountered in the world involving religion, explained their personal views. Attitudes to the subject and work were very good overall. Students with special educational needs made good progress along with their peers.
207. In Key Stage 4, as well as the core provision for all students, students have a full GCSE option. The Year 11 GCSE class was working well to meet high anticipated target grades. In one observed lesson, higher attaining students were successful because their observations and evaluations of creation myths and the evidence from Genesis were articulated confidently in discussion and writing. Most students were aware of the apparent contrast between the explanations of science and Genesis. Standards of work seen in Year 11 in the core course fall below national expectations, however, as there is insufficient depth in the reduced core course. The inadequate provision of time contributes to standards in the core being below average and achievement unsatisfactory.
208. During the inspection, teaching was at least satisfactory, often good, and sometimes very good. Teaching was very good in a core religious education class in Year 11 due to the clear planning, well-paced use of video resources, and effective pupil management. As a result the students, for example, displayed a very good understanding of the moral issues involved in a debate about euthanasia. Teaching was only satisfactory, however, when, for example, in a Year 7 lesson on the big question of myths and the creation story, some students remained for too long on their drawing and colouring task, and some higher attaining students did not have sufficient opportunity to reflect on their work. The work set for the class did not meet the wide needs of the mixed ability class. As a result, some students achieved less than they might have. Overall, however, students with special educational needs, and those who are identified as gifted and talented, are recognised by teachers, although there are not always planned activities to meet their needs beyond the work of the whole class. Effective use of ICT was seen in students' carefully presented

coursework in Year 11. The department schemes of work plan for the regular use of library resources and ICT.

209. The department is well led and managed, with good curriculum planning. New schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 have been developed within the framework of the Agreed Syllabus. Plans are well advanced to use level descriptions in the assessment of students' work, to bring department practice in line with other subjects. The religious education curriculum is enriched through visits to places of worship and other religious significance. Similarly, students' learning benefits from the planned use of opportunities afforded by ICT, a range of texts in the library to promote further study, and invitations to people of different faiths to speak to students of their experiences, beliefs and faith. Since the last inspection, time allocated for religious education for students in Years 7 to 9 has improved, but not for those in Years 10 and 11. Results in the GCSE examinations for the option groups have been sustained. A new suite of rooms, soon to be completed and furnished, will provide a good learning environment and allow for the efficient use of the department's artefact, text and video resources. Progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory, however, because Agreed Syllabus requirements are not met.

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

In the inspection, 13 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 all courses completed in 2001.

### *GCE A level and AVCE courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	21	100	96	38	46	6.6	6.6
Biology	21	95	88	38	34	6.1	5.3
Business Studies	19	100	92	37	32	6.0	5.5
Chemistry	10	100	43	50	90	7.0	5.9
Communication Studies	6	50	93	0	31	1.7	5.5
Economics	10	100	89	90	36	8.6	5.5
English	30	90	92	30	30	5.2	5.3
French	2	100	89	100	38	9.0	5.6
Design and Technology	12	100	91	75	30	8.0	5.4
General Studies	56	88	85	30	30	5.2	4.9
Geography	10	80	92	40	38	5.6	5.7
German	4	50	91	0	40	1.0	5.8
History	26	100	88	35	35	6.2	5.5
Mathematics	16	100	87	38	43	6.3	5.8
Other Sciences	7	100	90	29	30	6.9	5.2
Other Social Studies	13	100	87	54	34	7.1	5.3
Physics	6	100	88	100	40	9.3	5.7
Business (Voc, double subject)	11	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11.5	10.5

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS**

### **MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES**

The focus was on the AS/A-level courses in mathematics, biology and chemistry.

The college also teaches AS/A-level courses in physics and geology, which were sampled. In 2001, six students took the physics A-level. All gained A/B grades, which is very high performance in comparison with the national average. Achievement was very good, with students gaining significantly better grades in physics than in their other subjects. In geology, seven students took the examination, gaining well above average grades. This was also very good achievement, when compared with their grades in other subjects.

Two physics lessons were seen, one each in Years 12 and 13. In both lessons, teaching and learning were very good. In the Year 12 lesson, students' attitudes were very good and in Year 13 they were excellent. Standards of

work were in line with expectations in both lessons. In Year 12, teaching was very effective in ensuring that all students understood the principles of energy and kinetic force, so that they made very good gains in learning and confidence. In Year 13, a highly energetic and motivating teaching style strongly encouraged students to approach their learning of Newtonian law in a genuinely investigative way.

Two geology lessons were seen, one each in Years 12 and 13. In both lessons, teaching, learning and the attitudes of students were very good. In Year 12, standards were above average and in Year 13 they were well above. In both lessons, teaching was characterised by a distinctive and humorous style that were highly effective in generating positive relationships and encouraging students to take part in individual activity with enthusiasm. The lessons were challenging and strongly helped students to improve geographical skills underlying the study of geology.

## Mathematics

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

### Strengths

- Above average results in recent examinations
- Well-qualified staff, matched to the curriculum and to meet the needs of the students
- Very good quality teaching and relationships, leading to very good achievement in lessons

### Areas for improvement

- Time available for independent learning is not used to maximum effect

210. Results in A-level mathematics have improved over recent years and were above the national average in 2001. Results at the highest grades A and B were slightly below the national average and overall achievement was below that in most other subjects taken at the college. Boys did better than girls. In 2002, the first year of the new A-level syllabuses, results indicate an improvement, particularly with a 32% increase in higher grades on the previous year.
211. Current standards at AS and A-level are above average overall. Students just starting the course in Year 12 come with a wide range of prior attainment. Most were able to use the remainder theorem successfully and, although some weaknesses in relation to coordinate geometry were apparent, successful teaching soon corrected initial errors. In Year 13, the students had developed good skills in the differentiation of the exponential and log function and were effectively learning the methods of integration by substitution. In all the work seen, students were confident and capable at all levels of the syllabus. Students' achievement over time has been good, making good progress from their attainment at GCSE.
212. In lessons seen during the inspection, students achieved very well as a result of teaching by staff who were clearly knowledgeable in their subject. The teaching and learning observed was very good. Staff had prepared well and were sufficiently knowledgeable to respond to individual problems with the mathematics, taking account of different levels of attainment. Explanations were clear and concise and provided the students with clear direction for their learning. The students were confident in their work and confident in the staff. The whole atmosphere of the classes was one of positive learning and a mature approach to the work.
213. Relationships are very positive and support students in their work. In Year 12, where the students had less experience of sixth form life, there was evidence that the students had adjusted well to the transition. In response to questioning they said they were very happy at the college, felt that they had made the right decision and considered that the advice and guidance that they had received prior to the start of the course had been accurate. Year 13 students appreciated the way their concerns over staffing difficulties last year had been quickly resolved.
214. Leadership of the department is good, showing clear commitment to improving provision and standards in mathematics. Management is sound but there are remaining difficulties with the staffing and organisation of the courses. The time allowed, four sessions per week, is insufficient to complete all the modules of work

that the students will need to cover. Although a fifth 'independent learning' session is included this tends to be used for practice work in topics already covered rather than for extending the knowledge into new topics. The recent decision to change to a modular syllabus may solve this problem if the distance-learning package is applied effectively. It is not yet clear how students will be guided to choose from the considerable number of modules on offer. The current timetable requires a considerable mixing of staff and students, with a consequent imbalance of group sizes. So far, effective coordination of work is preventing difficulties from occurring.

215. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good, with better results and staffing difficulties now resolved.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Results showed a marked improvement in 2001 and were well above average
- Very good, challenging teaching, based on very good subject expertise, emphasises development of students' study and research skills
- The subject is very well led to ensure consistency in marking and monitoring student progress
- Students' attitude to their learning is very good. They share ideas freely and are keen to explore and apply the theory they are learning

### Areas for improvement

- The time allocated limits the kind of practical work students can undertake
- Available data on student performance is not always used to gauge individual progress

216. The A-level results in 2001 showed a marked improvement over the previous year. Students achieved results well above the national average, with boys and girls performing equally well. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade.
217. The standard of work of current students is also well above average. In Year 13, students are performing according to predictions based on their GCSE grades in the subject. In the lessons seen, they were doing well because teachers identified a clear focus for the activities they undertook. In one lesson, supportive relationships enabled students to take intellectual risks as they thought about the limitations of a practical investigation they were designing. In another, students were enabled to discuss ethical and moral issues surrounding research they had done on aspects of applied genetics.
218. Students in Year 12 are only just starting their course. They are aware of the need to work more independently and feel that they will enjoy the challenge. In the lesson seen, students appreciated the opportunity to do practical work for themselves and showed a keen interest in thinking about the application of the theory they had done, on the structure of carbohydrates, to the investigation.
219. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. The main features of the teaching are very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, enabling teachers to plan stimulating lessons that are conducted at a brisk pace. They asked focused questions in an open atmosphere that enabled students to respond thoughtfully. In one Year 13 lesson, students had a very probing discussion on the effects of respiration on the amount of oxygen produced during photosynthesis.
220. Written work gives the students opportunities to link their work to examination requirements; they develop the skills they need to enable them to tackle their work successfully.

221. Students have a positive approach to learning. They are very attentive and respond well to challenging teaching. They enjoy studying biology and chose it for positive reasons. They make good use of a very well organised supported self-study scheme, which enables them to use Internet sites for research work.
222. The very good teaching and learning result from work in the subject being very well led and managed. There is a commitment to build on prior learning and work standards are moderated across the department. Restrictions in time allocation for the subject, and limited technical support, reduce the type of practical work which can be offered to students. Although students' progress is monitored closely, a better understanding of value added data would make the process even more effective.
223. Improvement since the last report has been good overall, maintaining the strengths noted at that time.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Well above average results in 2001 at A-level, with good achievement over several years
- Students' attitudes to learning chemistry, particularly in Year 13, are extremely positive and so they work hard and enjoy the subject
- Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of chemistry is very good, which is very helpful to the students
- Very good relationships between teachers and students enable good learning to take place

### Areas for improvement

- Only four hours of teaching each week restricts the quality of practical work and the time available to discuss problems
- Insufficient questioning of students, who are rather quiet in lessons, to assess their understanding
- Inconsistent practice in marking students' work and insufficient recording of their achievements
- Insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning

224. A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average. All students passed, with half attaining either grade A or B. In 2002 results were lower, with about a third of the students attaining A or B grades, although all students passed. Boys' and girls' results were broadly similar and students did well considering their GCSE grades.
225. Current standards of the small number of students in Year 13 are below average overall, with a great range in the class, from potential top grades to those struggling to pass. Their achievements are good, considering their GCSE attainment. High attainers, for example, appreciated the mechanism for cyanide ion attack on aldehydes and the importance of this reaction for introducing a carbon atom. During well-organised practical work students showed good, confident skills. Some lower attaining students, however, tended to 'follow the recipe' rather than think about the background theory, for example when considering the rates of oxidation of aldehydes and ketones.
226. The small group in Year 12 are at an early stage in the course and are attaining average standards overall, with the potential to attain the full range of AS grades. Their achievements are good. They found the move from GCSE to AS studies to be a major leap in the standard required, but appreciated the support they had received. In an experiment where mole ratios were worked out from reacting masses, in order to determine the stoichiometry of the reaction, all students understood the general principles involved. A few high attainers showed good appreciation of proportionality.
227. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers' very good subject knowledge results in clear and explicit explanations, where one aspect of the syllabus is related to another. The strong emphasis on practical activity is very helpful to students, although time is short with just four hours' teaching time available rather than the expected five. The shortage of time and technician support means that practicals cannot be as extensive as they might be and discussions about what has been learnt often have to be curtailed. Students'

independent learning skills are therefore not able to develop as fully as they might. The starts of lessons were effective and set a good pace, with a brief summary of previous work as well as clear learning objectives. Lessons did not always finish tightly, however, with demanding plenaries where teachers found out what the students had learnt.

228. Teachers' use of anecdotal historical references, such as Venetian glass during the formation of 'silver mirrors', made work interesting. Relationships between students and teachers are of a high order and help maintain motivation and enthusiasm for the subject. Students' attitudes, generally, are excellent. At times teachers spoke for too long without questioning the students and the quiet majority focused on writing and remembering rather than understanding. A greater emphasis on assessing students' knowledge and understanding is needed.
229. The course is well planned, and effectively split between two teachers. Each has their own very good, detailed notes but few central paper resources are available. Problems are set regularly and students are expected to ask if they do not understand how to answer particular aspects. Few records of students' attainment were available and insufficient marking of students' written answers is being carried out, with too little helpful and constructive criticism. Students' notes are often detailed and well presented, but examples of poor notes were seen. Current practice does not ensure that all students' work will provide a good resource for successful revision. Although outcomes in terms of students' achievement are good, sustained since the last inspection, management of the subject is satisfactory overall. No monitoring of teaching and learning is taking place in order that students and staff can build on current success.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The college teaches AS and A-level product design, which was inspected as a focus subject.

### Design and technology – product design

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

#### Strengths

- Good achievement in examination results as a result of good specialist teaching
- Very good marking and assessment procedures that inform students and enable them to achieve to their potential.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work

#### Areas for improvement

- Too little emphasis is placed on individual drawings and illustrations in coursework projects

230. Relatively small numbers of sixth form students take design and technology courses. Currently Year 13 students are engaged in the A2 course for product design (graphics with materials), and this is the second year for the AS course for product design in Year 12. Students join the course with a variety of design and making experience because of the different design and technology subjects taken at GCSE, but the majority have achieved the higher grades in their GCSE courses. At the time of the inspection there was no past coursework to be reviewed as this was being retained by the examination board. Little current coursework was available because the inspection took place in the third week of the academic year.
231. Attainment at A-level was well above average in 2001 and similar results were recorded in 2002. All students gained A to E grades and most in the A to C range. In 2002, almost all those entered for the first time at AS level gained A to C grades. Grades reflect students' potential attainment, as measured by their performance at GCSE, and this indicates that students' achievement is good.

232. All students in Year 12 make good advances in knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, they are good at analysing existing products and, after research and evaluation, were able to develop their own ideas for seed packaging and use a range of hand drawn and computer generated graphical techniques to present their work. Students develop good knowledge of materials and how products are constructed. They develop understanding of the technical processes used in the plastics industry and are able to experience some of these processes first hand by using injection moulding and vacuum forming machines within the college. In Year 13, students are researching and developing their ideas for individual projects. This work is at an early stage but the quality of research, analysis of problems, development of ideas and the presentation of work varies considerably. Although ideas are beginning to form there is insufficient use of sketches and simple drawings to express and communicate ideas. Too much time is spent on producing presentation sheets of finished drawings rather than expanding the substance and content of developing ideas. Students effectively make use of computers in their work.
233. Students show a very positive attitude to their work and, overall, are making good progress at this stage of the course. They are closely monitored and given regular, detailed oral and written feedback about their individual performance. This is very effective in enabling students to develop and improve their work and for their personal development. Behaviour in lessons is very good and there are very positive working relationships between students and teachers.
234. Teaching is good. Shared teaching of the A-level courses is planned and executed very effectively between the two teachers who share the teaching for both year groups. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and this is used well to plan and deliver well-structured courses. Students and resources are managed well. Teachers have high expectations and offer comprehensive guidance against clear criteria, which enables students to develop and improve their work. A good range of teaching methods uses well-prepared teaching resources and time effectively. For example, a good demonstration of a computer graphics programme enabled students to combine and edit images and compare its use with cut and paste hand techniques in their packaging exercise. Students work hard on their research and evaluation and, because of teachers' very good individual advice and support, they are able to develop a good range of knowledge and skills and apply these in individual and sometimes creative work.
235. Leadership and management of the course are good. Staff work cooperatively and use their individual areas of expertise well in the allocation of coursework modules. Courses are well documented with developing, detailed programmes of work and as a result, provide structured and well-organised experiences for students.

## BUSINESS

The courses focused upon in this area were the AS/A-level in business studies and AVCE in business.

The college also provides an AS/A-level economics course, which was sampled. In 2001, ten students secured well above average results in the A-level. Their achievement was very good, when compared with the grades they gained in their other subjects. A Year 12 economics lesson was seen, which built on earlier learning about demand theory and introduced supply theory. Teaching, learning and student attitudes were excellent and the standard of students' work was above average. The lesson was characterised by the very rapid pace of learning, the challenging nature of tasks given, in which students applied existing knowledge in a new context, and the enthusiasm with which they tackled these.

### Business Studies

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

#### Strengths

- Good teaching, including lesson planning, leads to students' good achievement

- Teachers have good experience of business and industry, and their enthusiastic approach keeps students interested and well motivated
- Leadership and management of business courses are very good
- Teachers have supportive relationships with students and monitor their progress well by setting targets

#### Areas for improvement

- Students do not use ICT enough to analyse financial data or draw graphs
- Visits and work placements, to enrich students' learning of business, are underused

236. A-level standards were above the national average in 2001. All students passed, and the proportion gaining the top grades of A and B was above average, and in line with the college average. Results in 2002 were lower, partly due to staff changes, with girls achieving slightly better than boys. Results were in line with teachers' expectations based on students' GCSE grades. In the new AS-level examination in 2002, boys and girls made good and sometimes very good progress from their GCSE starting points.
237. Current AS and A2 students achieved well in lessons. Work seen is broadly in line with national expectations at this stage, except that most students do not use ICT enough to set up spreadsheet models of costs and profits in cash flow charts and investment appraisal, or to draw clear, well-labelled graphs. Year 12 students showed a good grasp of differences in types of costs, and break even, but were less clear about the effects of the market on costs. The small sample seen of Year 13 portfolio projects was of a satisfactory standard. Students evaluated specific business problems in local companies clearly, though not always in sufficient depth. Students' research questionnaires were well planned, and higher attaining students analysed them thoroughly with the help of computer-produced graphs. Students are making good progress from their attainment at GCSE.
238. AVCE students completed the course successfully in 2002, in line with teachers' expectations. This maintains the good trend from previous years' GNVQ results. Current AVCE students are making good progress. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students were actively engaged in plotting product life cycles of famous business brands, and applied extension strategies effectively. Students' coursework notes on financial accounts were neat and well organised, and, when questioned, most students defined fluently key concepts such as break even. Students who had not taken GCSE in business found it difficult to explain some strategies, such as why firms need to launch new products to ease cash flow problems. Lower attaining students did not use word processing enough to draft their evaluations, which often lacked detail. Year 13 students had a very good grasp of the straight-line method of depreciation and calculated essential business ratios quickly and effectively.
239. Teaching and learning were good in the lessons seen. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm underpinned class discussions, and lessons had clear aims and good pace. In a very good AS-level lesson, the teacher asked well-focused questions to consolidate previous learning and apply concepts to topical case studies, which developed students' problem-solving skills well. Students' enthusiastic responses helped them to develop good critical understanding of the consequences of poor motivation in different businesses. Lessons were well planned, with a variety of theory and practical tasks, such as forthcoming group presentations of financial solutions to problem scenarios. Teachers' very relevant and topical experience helps to motivate students and give them a real interest and enthusiasm for business. In a very good Year 13 lesson, students were enabled to develop good critical awareness of how investors use key ratios to analyse large retail companies' profitability, and to grasp the complex financial relationships quickly. In the AVCE lesson seen, students were encouraged to work independently. Most included relevant research from web sites and part-time jobs, which is good practice.
240. Teachers have supportive relationships with students. Their thorough assessment procedures are closely linked to examination requirements. Marking of class assignments and the regular homework set was constructive, clear targets being given to help students improve. Students' progress is well monitored over time, with their performance frequently measured against predicted grades.

241. Leadership and management of business courses are very good. The co-ordinator has re-written schemes of work to meet examination requirements fully, but schemes do not include sufficient planned opportunities for closer links with local business, such as through work placements and visits. A clear sense of direction has been shown by the well-planned introduction of new AVCE, AS and A2 courses during a time when there were several disruptive staff changes. Staff are now well deployed and overall improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The inspection focused on the AVCE course in ICT, which is the only subject taught in this area.

### Information and communication technology

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **good**

#### Strengths

- Students learn well because of the good quality, specialist teaching
- Good relationships between teachers and students create a good climate for learning
- The vocational course offered is well matched to the students' abilities

#### Areas for improvement

- Too few students carried on into the second year of the course this year
- Insufficient dedicated computer rooms
- The department does not provide opportunities for students to gain first hand experience of ICT use by outside organisations

242. This two-year advanced vocational award AVCE course was started in September 2001 and so there are not yet any results. The retention rate has been poor, with the majority of students failing to continue into the second year of the course.
243. Overall, the standards of students' work are at expected levels for the course. The attainment of students in Year 12, at this early stage in the year, is varied. The majority of students start the course with little formal experience of classroom ICT. Scrutiny of work from the previous year shows that, by the end of the year, their work is similar to that of students who have been studying the subject for much longer. Therefore, their achievement is good in relation to previous knowledge. Students' keyboard skills are generally good and the course contributes well to the development of students' key skills.
244. Discussion with students shows that they have a good attitude to the subject. They demonstrate a good level of interest and are keen to discuss their work. Students understand the use of database and spreadsheets but have had limited opportunity to incorporate these procedures into their projects. They feel they were well advised about the courses and the requirements. They are aware of health and safety issues and some of the social and moral implications of the use of ICT. None have had the opportunity for first hand experience of ICT situations in organisations beyond the college.
245. Students learn well because the teaching is generally good and on occasions very good. Teachers use their specialist knowledge well to demonstrate and explain procedures. They have high expectations, which result in a high pace of learning in lessons. When students are working independently, teachers circulate well advising them on the next stage of learning. Lessons are planned with a balance of theory and practical work, and a variety of sequential activities that challenge the students and ensure they make good progress. This was clear in one Year 13 lesson, where students created their own validation rules within spreadsheets. Through the very good teaching, students understood how to use the validation and verification tools and create input masks in a very short time. In all lessons, learning outcomes are clear and lessons usually end with a summary to reinforce learning. The lessons are planned to match the needs

of all learners very well. Students receive good support and guidance from the teachers during practical lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, with all students feeling confident to contribute freely to discussions. Occasionally the start of lessons is delayed because the teachers have to travel from room to room rather than remain in dedicated teaching rooms.

246. The leadership and management of ICT are good. The recently appointed ICT co-ordinator has a clear vision for developing the subject and has already made some significant improvements. There is also a competent network manager. This enables the co-ordinator to have more time to focus on students' learning. The course is well managed, and on-going evaluation is leading to planned changes in emphasis for the coming year. The staff team share the plans to move the subject forward, raise standards and encourage students to complete the course. The impact of the lack of a curriculum based GCSE IT course is being addressed and should improve future standards on entry to the post 16 course. The new schemes of work are ensuring full coverage of all units of study but do not plan opportunities for students to gain first hand experience of ICT used by outside organisations.
247. The AVCE course was not running at the time of the last inspection so comparison is not possible. However, the fact that the course is now offered is a distinct improvement. The ICT facilities have improved significantly with over 300 computers now available throughout the college. Therefore improvement since the last inspection is good. However, access to computers for sixth form students' individual study is limited because of the shortage of dedicated computer rooms. This means that there are only 15 computers available most of the time to enhance all sixth form students' independent learning.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The inspection focused on the AS/A-level in sports studies.

The college also offers AVCE courses in leisure and recreation and travel and tourism, both of which were sampled. There were no results for these subjects in 2001. One lesson was seen in each subject, both in Year 13. In the leisure and recreation lesson, teaching and learning were very good and student attitudes were good. The standard of their work was however, below average. In the lesson, which investigated different groups of customers, the very small number of students in the group made it difficult for them to contribute a wide range of information from their research. However, the class size meant that very good individual participation took place. The well-structured lesson made strong links with earlier work, students' experiences outside of college and coursework requirements, promoting very effective learning. In the travel and tourism lesson, which was about customer service, teaching and learning were very good, student attitudes were excellent and the standard of work was in line with expectations. Teaching was very supportive and strongly assisted students, so that learning about customer service in the travel industry and the related technical vocabulary was very strong.

### Sports Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in sports studies is **good**

#### Strengths

- Good teaching focuses on the skills required for examinations
- Students' attitudes to work and relationships with staff are excellent
- Cross-curricular links with science are raising students' confidence
- Students achieve well in coursework

#### Areas for improvement

- Encourage independent learning through more group evaluation and discussion and use of materials for research
- Provide a sports and recreational curriculum for sixth form students to enhance the practical understanding of the sports studies course

248. A very small number of candidates followed the A-level course in 2001, all achieving in the grade range B to D. Comparison with national figures or other subjects in the college would be inappropriate for this size of entry. AS level results have been variable over the past three years and only a quarter of the students completed the course to A-level in the last two years. Higher attaining students attained above average levels in coursework assignments.
249. Inspection evidence shows that the standard of work in Year 13 is generally at the expected level. The quality of students' written work varies. The highest attaining students have a good command of a range of technical language and plan, analyse and present personal projects with increasing accuracy and understanding. Average and lower attaining students demonstrate weaknesses in using a wider range of reading sources in their research and as a result, their writing lacks a systematic, analytical approach.
250. Students in Year 12 are making good progress. Most students join the AS level course with a Grade C at GCSE and achieve well in planning, presentation and writing skills. Cross-curricular links with science are improving numeracy and thinking skills. For example, in a lesson where sports studies and physics students jointly analysed practical performance, they applied a range of theoretical principles to calculate 'power and work' with increasing confidence. Their reciprocal approaches showed refinement in performance and in working out mathematical formulae to gain an understanding of biomechanics. In discussions, students use technical vocabulary. Most are able to relate their own experience of participation in sport to make connections with the new concepts they are learning.
251. Overall, the teaching and learning of AS and A-level sports studies are good. The most effective teaching involves the use of good resources and discussion, so that students extend their thinking and analytical skills. Teachers show a consistent focus on the need for good presentation of assignments using ICT and on note taking to prepare students well for examinations. Some teaching, although well structured, had less emphasis on students' oral presentation. In these lessons, students were less responsive as they lacked the ideas other groups gain from discussion and personal research. The good range of materials and texts in the library to support research and investigation are underused in students' written work.
252. Students have a very good attitude to study. Their excellent relationships with each other and with teachers contribute well to their good achievement overall. Most students express themselves clearly on an individual basis but limited time for collaborative discussion, because of the reduced teaching contact time for A-level courses, is having a detrimental effect on students' independent learning. This holds back achievement in the higher grades and preparation for higher education.
253. Management of the department is effective. AS and A-level courses have been successfully developed since the last inspection. Staff share the commitment to improvement of standards through regular assessment and feedback to students. Numbers taking A-level sports studies remain small. There is no sport and recreation curriculum for the sixth form to extend fitness opportunities or, for example, take a Community Sports Leadership award. A few students are involved in college teams and their expertise offers a good practical base for the A-level course.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

The college provides the AVCE in health and social care, which was sampled. There were no results for this subject in 2001. In a Year 13 lesson, teaching, learning and student attitudes were good. There was a mix of attainment in the class, with the balance below average. In recapping upon earlier learning about the interaction of genetic and environmental factors in human nature, the teaching successfully encouraged the students to take a thoughtful approach. Some opportunities were missed for providing opportunities for research, but the tasks given provided well for the individual needs of higher and lower attaining students.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was upon AS/A-level courses in art and design and textiles.

The college also provides AS/A-level in music and AVCE courses in performing arts and media studies. All of these were sampled. There were no results for the sampled subjects in 2001. In a Year 13 music lesson, teaching and learning were very good and the standard of students' work above average. The attitudes of the students, who clearly expected to enjoy the lesson, were excellent. Strong guidance on how to improve their analytical skills very effectively helped them to analyse critically the strophic techniques employed in some pieces of music. A Year 13 performing arts lesson, in which students studied the semiotics in "Cromwell, the Musical" was excellent in the quality of its teaching and learning and student attitudes. The inspirational quality of the teaching, and commitment to high level creative thinking of the students, promoted a lesson of exceptional quality and well above average standards of work. Because some media studies lessons were cancelled, due to staff illness, it was not possible to observe one in this subject. However, some tutorial meetings for individual students, were seen. On-going work was discussed and guidance given about how to improve. These provided very effective individual support and guidance and were very helpful in assisting the students to become independent learners.

### Art

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

#### Strengths

- The very good combined skills and expertise of teachers across a range of disciplines
- The quality of work reviews and guidance given to students resulting in very good achievement
- The good quality of research and the presentation of students' personal studies
- Breadth of the curriculum including many visits to galleries both locally and abroad

#### Areas for improvement

- Opportunities sometimes missed for students to respond critically and analytically to questions

254. The college offers the AS/A-level courses in art and design and textiles. The point score of students taking A-level and AS examinations in recent years was similar to the average. Some students did not attain the higher grades predicted on the basis of their prior attainment; others did better. Overall the combined point score for art and textiles examinations was similar to students' attainment in their other subjects. Many students continue their studies in arts-related courses and progress into higher education.
255. Students can choose to work in a range of art disciplines, including print and textiles, painting and drawing. Standards of work by students currently in Years 12 and 13 are similar to previous years and close to what is expected. Between twenty and thirty students are entered each year, although numbers in current groups are smaller than in previous years. Most students who take the AS course go on to take A-level. Recruitment and retention of students is very good.
256. Achievement is very good overall across students' time in the sixth form. In Year 12, and a few weeks into the course, students are not confident communicators. The subject requires high levels of independent learning skills that some students struggle with initially. Whilst they attain high standards in practical work, they have limited skills to talk about and make connections between their own and others' work. By Year 13, the high quality advice and guidance from teachers, together with students' careful preparations, result in high standards of analytical and critical thinking that have positive benefits on the standard of both written and practical work. In particular, the work of students taking the fine art course showed their good understanding of contextual information gained through their wider reading and visits to exhibitions in this country and abroad. These assignments add significantly to their intellectual development.
257. Teaching and learning are very good overall. The strengths are in teachers' excellent subject knowledge and their wide range of specialist skills. Their enthusiasm for the subject is infectious and this stimulates the students, encouraging them to experiment and try new combinations of materials and media. The marking and assessment of their work, together with high quality tutoring, gives students a clear idea of how they

are progressing and where improvements are necessary. Occasionally lesson time was used for routine tasks that could have been completed outside the lesson. As a result, neither the expertise of the teacher nor the time was used to best advantage. Opportunities for students to respond to questions in a critical or analytical way are not always offered.

258. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Through a long period of uncertainty over staffing, the subject has been very professionally managed and led by an acting head of department. The reduction in the taught time for the subject will require careful and regular monitoring - of teachers' plans, students' work rate and their achievement in examinations.

## HUMANITIES

The inspection focused on geography, history, psychology and sociology, all of which are offered at AS/A-level. The college's AS/A-level courses in government and politics, law and religious studies were sampled.

In 2001, thirteen students achieved well in securing well above average results in the government and politics and law examinations. No students were entered for religious studies in 2001. In a Year 13 government & politics lesson, teaching, learning and student attitudes were very good and the standard of their work was above average. The high quality of resources used and of the individual support given to students, very effectively assisted them in developing independent thinking. They were able to analyse critically the strategies used by candidates seeking party nominations for US presidential elections. A Year 12 law lesson provided very good teaching and learning. Student attitudes were very good and the standard of their work was in line with expectations. Very knowledgeable and confident teaching successfully engaged the interest of students who were using the Internet to study the judiciary. The religious studies lesson included students from both years. Teaching, learning and student attitudes were very good and the standard of their work was above average. All this, and the good use of quality resources, engendered much very high-level discussion of the ideas underlying various approaches to ethics, which was very effective in promoting understanding.

### History

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

#### Strengths

- Above average results at A-level represent students' good achievement
- Good teaching, with some very good features, enables students to develop the skills required for studying history at this level
- Good learning is supported by excellent student attitudes and good resources

#### Areas for improvement

- Assessment involves insufficient setting of targets to build on students' individual strengths
- Monitoring of teaching in parallel groups is too informal

259. Students come into the sixth form to study history with a very good background of results from GCSE. They maintain good achievement throughout the course and achieve above average standards in Year 13. A-level results in 2001 were above average. The current Year 12 and 13 students' achievement is good, across the wide range of their potential, and very good for weaker students.
260. Teaching is good, based on the very good subject knowledge of teachers. Some very good characteristics of teaching were high expectations of students' written work and attitudes, good use of resources and an enthusiastic approach. Teachers concentrate on making sure that students steadily acquire the skills they need to learn well in this subject. They develop organising and analytical skills through glossaries, sorting exercises and presentations. Students draft and redraft their responses to questions. They are able to read for a purpose and identify major arguments, such as the changing attitudes to Lenin over the last few years, or the variety of views of possible changes to parliament put forward at the Putney debates. When they

express their own views on a subject, they show that they have researched and identified facts to support their views. Teachers assess students' work by grade or mark and give feedback informally to students. They monitor their files, as necessary, but do not set individual targets for improvement. Students are involved in their own assessment after unit tests.

261. Good teaching and learning are supported by a wide range of resources as well as class texts, including relevant seventeenth century English and nineteenth and twentieth century Russian sources such as written documents, maps, photographs and engravings. Students interpret these well in general, although some students find seventeenth century English challenging to understand, partly since they last covered the period in Year 8. Visits are also used to enhance students' understanding of historical context. A particularly relevant and rewarding example is the recent joint trip, with the geography department, to Russia. In discussion with students, they expressed some lack of confidence that they would be able to cover the necessary three new units of study in each year of the course, considering the reduction in taught time now available. This, and the recent changes to AS and A-level, have caused anxiety. Clear direction from an experienced head of department, supported by the expertise of staff teaching the subject, has helped Year 13 retain high levels of enthusiasm and interest and the determination of the majority to aim for higher education in a variety of subjects, including history. Monitoring of the two groups in Year 12 does not take place formally to gauge the equality of what students receive. Overall, the good standards from the time of the last inspection have been maintained.

## Geography

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

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good; teachers have good knowledge and their enthusiasm for the subject enhances learning
- Relationships between teachers and students promotes a learning culture
- Student attitudes are excellent, they are well motivated, read widely and have good study skills
- The quality of fieldwork and investigative studies is high

### Areas for improvement

- Written comments in marking are not always as detailed as those in oral feedback, so students do not have a record of how to improve their work further

262. Standards of students in the sixth form are above average and evidence indicates that they are rising. The A-level results reported in 2001 were average and the AS level results just above the national average. The unconfirmed results for 2002 indicate that students' attainment is much higher. Geography is a popular subject at AS and A-level.
263. The judgement from observing students in lessons and from a scrutiny of samples of files and investigative studies, confirms that the standards on the AS and A2 courses are above average and current students are achieving very well. In Year 12, despite the students being only two weeks into their AS course, they were confidently preparing for their first fieldwork study of Cambridge. They acquired information about population, housing, employment, wealth and transport from a wide range of sources. Some of these were given to them and others they had collected from wider reading or individual research. They could select relevant data, then analyse and present it in a variety of forms that support the judgements made. They were confident in expressing their understanding and opinions.
264. Students starting the A2 course were critically analysing a range of information relating to coastal features. They were confident in describing coastal features and gave sound explanations to support descriptions. In looking at work, it is clear that students use the Internet effectively to gather information and that they make secure judgements interpreting this and data they gather from practical and fieldwork. From looking at investigative studies, students clearly demonstrate independence of thought both in the areas and topics

chosen and in the way they draw several geographical strands together. Fieldwork evidence is gathered, analysed and presented effectively to support judgements and conclusions.

265. Overall, teaching is very good. Lessons are well structured and paced. Teachers use a combination of exposition, questioning and discussion. They use effectively a wide range of resources such as texts, photographs, maps, and data, as well as students' existing knowledge and research findings, to extend their understanding and identify challenging issues. All teachers have good knowledge and their enthusiasm for the subject has a direct impact upon students' learning. Teachers and students are considered equal partners in learning and this is reflected in the very positive relationships in all lessons. Indeed students commented upon the very good support they get from all members of the teaching staff. Teachers use questioning very well to extend understanding, challenge explanations and help students reflect on their own achievement. Oral feedback is of a high quality and students are constantly given information and strategies for improving their work further. In an AS lesson, the teacher skilfully used students' responses to aid understanding of the differences between describing and explaining and how this is important when addressing examination questions. The quality and range of practical and fieldwork is very good. Students' work is marked regularly and usually includes an evaluative comment on the quality of the work. The best marking also provides guidance on how the student might improve work further. However, at present, this practice is inconsistent across the team.
266. Students learn very well. They are very keen and interested in the subject and respond well to the very good teaching. In discussions, most students talk with confidence about the aspects of the course they have studied. A valuable contribution is made by those students who also study geology and this expands understanding for all. Many students read and research topics independently as is evident in discussions when they offer comments and sometimes express challenging opinions that enhance the quality of debate.
267. The subject is led and managed very well and improvement since the last inspection has been good, with an overall rise in results and achievement. Teaching of the various topics and themes is divided to reflect both strengths and interests, but all teachers contribute to the very successful fieldwork activities. Resources overall are good and the enthusiasm of teachers to provide up-to-date case studies, and their constant research for additional and relevant material, contributes significantly to teaching and learning. The regular use of ICT and the resources of the college are also important factors that enrich learning. The study and resource room attached to one of the main subject classrooms is well used and appreciated by the students. The lack of up-to-date computer facilities here is a drawback, however. The college holds a good range of newspapers, periodicals and journals. Teachers use these effectively to enrich lessons and students are encouraged to use these resources for both prescribed tasks and independent study.

## Sociology

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

### Strengths

- Very good teaching led to examination success of first cohort
- Very good relationships between staff and students
- Teachers' very good subject expertise supports students effectively

### Areas for improvement

- Opportunities are sometimes missed when students could benefit from the advantages of ICT
- Students' independent learning skills are not being developed as well as they might be

268. Sociology was first introduced in 2001. For the first cohort of students, who had continued into Year 13 at the time of the inspection, results in the AS level examination for 2002 were above national expectations. These students made good progress in sociology in the light of their prior attainment. Students benefit greatly from the enthusiasm and professional experience of their teachers.

269. Although only a short time into their course, students in Year 12 showed that they were making a sound start. In one class, they pointed out characteristics of advertising aimed at boys and girls, which tended to reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes. Observations made by some girls that their own success contradicted these anachronistic attitudes suggested a secure start to their study of sociology. In another lesson seen, their good start was confirmed as they successfully wrestled with challenging and difficult concepts, for example the perspectives from which traditional Marxists and New Criminologists analyse and interpret social phenomena.
270. Standards of work of current students in Year 13 are above national expectations. The files of the sample of work from this group showed a systematic strengthening of understanding of case studies, different methodologies and traditional perspectives. This was confirmed in a lesson seen where students began by readily articulating the key tenets of a traditional Marxist structural analysis of social relationships in a capitalist society. By the end of this lesson, having considered several scenarios drawn from notable case studies, they were able to move on to draw attention to the potential weakness of a traditional, simple structuralist perspective.
271. During the inspection, the quality of teaching was overall very good, and excellent on occasion. In a lesson observed in Year 12, the teacher structured and focused the lesson around clear ideas and objectives. There was pace and challenge, leading through students' discussions to a clear finishing point which reinforced their early learning in the subject. The impact of teaching can be seen in the well-informed and organised work in the students' files in Year 13. In a Year 13 class, the teacher's subject expertise drove the students on from past learning. Through the consideration of a case study new to them, they reached higher levels of analysis through the teacher's skilful presentation, pace and challenge. There were no noticeable differences in standards attained by boys and girls, nor by students of minority ethnic origin.
272. The principal teacher of sociology leads and manages the subject very well through an excellent understanding of syllabus and examination demands. As a result, the guidance for students is very clear. However, the use of ICT could usefully be extended, to include analysis and graphical representation of data. The need to fit syllabus requirements into four hours a week results in very productive, but teacher-directed learning outcomes. The department should consider how to extend students' independent learning in this context.

## Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **satisfactory with some good features**

### Strengths

- Teaching is good and helps the pace of students' learning
- Attitudes to learning are very good and this has a positive effect on the standards that students achieve
- Programmes of study are well matched to the aptitudes and learning needs of students of middle and higher attainment

### Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for learning outside the classroom are limited and this reduces the students' awareness of applied aspects of the subject
- Induction arrangements should be refined to meet the learning needs of those students whose attainment on entry to the course is below the national average

273. Students have the opportunity to study psychology via a one-year AS level or a two-year A-level programme and both options were inspected. The A-level is a new course and there were no results to report for 2001. Unconfirmed data for 2002 indicates that results are likely to be below the national average when measured by the proportion of students gaining A and B grades. The figure for those gaining A-E grades was closer to but slightly below the national average.

274. Results in the 2001 AS level were close to the national average. The proportions gaining higher grades has declined slightly in 2002, according to unconfirmed examination results. These standards represent satisfactory achievement when judged against the attainment of students beginning their sixth form studies, which was slightly below the national average.
275. Retention rates within the AS programme are unsatisfactory. The department has not monitored sufficiently the attainment of students on entry, to ensure that both the AS and A-level programmes match their aptitudes. Induction arrangements are underdeveloped and are over-reliant on guidance given once the AS level programme has commenced. Nevertheless, the majority of students interviewed felt they were adequately supported in their studies and welcomed the fact that staff gave freely of their time outside lessons.
276. In the work seen, the standards that students achieve are around the national average. During Year 12, students make satisfactory progress in their comprehension of case study material, for example dealing with theories of authority and obedience. Those of middle and higher attainment make good progress with their note-taking skills. Within Year 13, students are more aware of the limitation of research methodologies and the need to debate different perspectives thoroughly when dealing with such issues as cognitive development.
277. The quality of teaching is good and some very good teaching was observed during the inspection. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. For example, in a lesson mapping out the principal characteristics of schizophrenia, students were given a sound framework for both identifying the breadth of symptoms and the relative merits of varying approaches to diagnosis. Good assessment and recording procedures are in place and these ensure students know what they have to do to improve.
278. Opportunities to deepen understanding through revision classes and visits to national conferences are limited. At present, guidance does not focus sufficiently on the career paths within psychology and students are not given the opportunity to experience applied aspects of the discipline, for example within education and clinical fields.
279. Leadership and management are satisfactory and there is a suitable vision for the development of the subject. Schemes of work are well articulated. Non-specialist staff are managing the course well but, as the subject becomes more popular, it will be important that specialist teachers are appointed so that the department continues to meet the needs of all students. Resources are well selected and of good quality and texts are up to date. This supports learning well. The library is well used and higher attaining students are making increasing use of relevant web sites for their studies. There are no specialist rooms for the teaching of psychology.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The inspection focused upon English. The college also offers AS/A-levels in German and French, which were sampled.

Four students took the German A-level in 2001, all of whom passed, although none gained A or B grades. Overall achievement was lower than expected, with the students gaining significantly better grades in their other subjects. In French, two students gained high grades, doing significantly better than in their other subjects. In a Year 13 German lesson, students considered the attitude of Germans to Ausländer. Teaching, learning and student attitudes were good, although the standard of their work was below average. At times, the students were reticent in giving ideas, but good use of taped resources and prompting by the teacher encouraged better participation, so that understanding of the Germans' attitudes improved well. A Year 13 French lesson provided very good teaching and learning, with very good student attitudes and above average standards of work. A well-structured lesson and strong support by the teaching, based upon very good relationships, generated student confidence and interest when revising verbs and tenses.

### **English**

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching, characterised by very good subject knowledge and diverse, well-organised activity in class, which holds student interest and builds well on their enthusiasm
- Excellent student attitudes to work, leading to very good independent thinking and generation of mature critical reflection on texts
- Very good continuity between prior learning and experience in the first year of the course, enabling students to consolidate and develop rapidly the skills acquired earlier

Areas for improvement

- Advice given to students, to help them know what to do to improve, sometimes lacks clarity and specific focus

280. The AS and A-level courses offered by the college were inspected.

281. Students' results in 2002 show a considerable improvement on previous years. Their attainment in 2001 matched national standards overall. Over the last three years, nearly all students obtained a pass grade. In the same period, the proportion of those obtaining higher grades (A and B) declined from half to one in three. Boys have done better than girls at the higher grades, and in comparison with other subjects taken, but the gap has narrowed. The latest results provided by the college show that all students obtained a pass grade, and more than half obtained the higher grades. Furthermore, girls' attainment at this level has risen considerably.

282. Work seen during the inspection confirms this improving trend, particularly where the attainment of girls is concerned. Attainment is generally above average. Students' writing is fluent, assured and represents an improvement on that previously reported. They make good use of computers to locate information as well as to order their thinking logically and communicate their understanding in a coherent manner. In response to well-organised and stimulating teaching materials, they interpret literary texts confidently. Students readily infer underlying meaning and go beyond a literal interpretation of their reading. When analysing dramatic literature, ranging from Shakespeare to Tennessee Williams, they demonstrate an astute grasp of characterisation and imagery, explaining their understanding with logic and good judgement. They discuss ideas sensibly, demonstrating from the first stages of their AS level course, the ability to build on knowledge and skills from their previous experience. Stimulated by the sensitive encouragement and high expectations of teachers, students develop an assured capacity to examine and refine further their initial reactions to poetry and novels. By the second year of the course, students are well taught to understand and apply critical concepts capably, at the same time as conveying their own reactions with candour. For instance, in a comparison of Daphne du Maurier's novel 'Rebecca' with Susan Hill's sequel, technical critical concepts such as 'narrative voice', and 'structure' were deployed, whilst at the same time personal judgements were explained and justified in terms of how they differed from those of some critics. The achievement of current sixth form students is very good.

283. The quality of students' response is excellent. They demonstrate considerable pride in their conscientious and clear presentation of written work. Their discussion is characterised by thought and concentration, the willingness to express ideas independently, and a readiness to persuade others to share them.

284. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers make very good use of stimulating resources and exercises, which capitalise well on students' enthusiasm and interest. Well-structured lessons, a variety of activities, high teacher expectations and dynamic questioning based upon very good subject knowledge, all serve to stimulate students consistently. For instance, one group of students in the early weeks of the new course were particularly receptive to the challenges set them. They analysed and discussed types of language and expression and their responses to it, demonstrating independence, analytical thought and honesty about their own reactions. This was also further developed in the effective method of mixing independent work with individual tutorial style coaching, resulting in a tight focus on the needs of individual students and effective support to extend their understanding. This has had a particularly beneficial effect upon the improved standards reached by girls over the last year. Written assignments are conscientiously and helpfully marked

with encouragement and a clear identification of students' strengths. Comments do not usually, however, give more specific advice about what to do in order to improve further.

285. In addition, students' learning is improved by their regular use of a well-stocked library, which effectively promotes their independent reading and Internet research skills.
286. The sixth form course is very well managed, to make certain that teachers work beneficially together as a team. This ensures that they cover complementary but well-defined elements of the course; drawing upon a well-organised range of materials, ideas and common teaching methods. Standards have improved as a result of these developments and combined methods, which stimulate and extend students' understanding. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

## **OTHERS**

287. The college also enters students for the general studies AS/A-level examination. In 2001, 56 students achieved results that were above the national average, but below the general level of grades gained in their other subjects. The college provides tutorial support for the students currently planning to take the examination, but there are no lessons.