

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Stoke-on-Trent

LEA area: Stoke-on-Trent

Unique reference number: 124465

Headteacher: Dr J Challiner

Reporting inspector: Mr R Palmer

31198

Dates of inspection: 31st March – 4th April 2003

Inspection number: 249771

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:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B Burton
Date of previous inspection:	10 th February 1997

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23528	A Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics	
28178	J Connor	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (11-16) Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
23480	M Harding	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
11969	J Hardy	Team inspector	Business studies (sixth form) Information and communication technology (sixth form)	
10727	R Humphries	Team inspector	Design and technology	
3943	D Innes	Team inspector	Physical education	
4757	D Morris	Team inspector	Art and design (11-16)	
31850	D Nevens	Team inspector	Citizenship (11-16) Music (11-16)	
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English Provision for pupils with English as an additional language Educational inclusion	

32147	A Wallis	Team inspector	Geography	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Thomas More Catholic College is a co-educational, voluntary-aided, comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18 years. It serves mainly the south of Stoke-on-Trent and its surrounding area, though students come from all parts of the city. The college is of average size compared with other secondary schools in England and is oversubscribed. It has 1078 students (538 boys and 540 girls), including 137 in the sixth form, compared with 946 students at the time of the previous inspection in 1997. Students represent a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Most are from economically disadvantaged areas. About two out of every five students is of non-Catholic background. The attainment of students on entry in Year 7 varies from year to year and is usually average overall. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals, about one in seven, is broadly average. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is a little higher than in most schools. No students are at an early stage of learning English. Around one in every 25 students is from an ethnic minority. The proportion of students with special educational needs, about one in every 16, is average. Most of these students have specific or moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs, about one in 50, is average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The college provides a good quality of education for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Students achieve well and raise their standards from average on entry to the college in Year 7 to above average by the end of Year 11. Standards are currently average in the sixth form and represent good achievement. Students of all ethnicities work well together. The good leadership and management of the headteacher and senior staff are important factors in the college's good improvement over recent years. Students behave very well and respond positively to the good quality of teaching they receive. Very good relationships between students and staff encourage good learning. Difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers have hindered students' progress in a few subjects, particularly information and communication technology (ICT) and French. The college has many strengths and few weaknesses. It manages its resources well and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- GCSE results are above average and indicate good achievement.
- Results in the Year 9 national tests in 2002 represented very good achievement.
- Good teaching and very positive relationships between staff and students lead to good learning.
- Provision for students' personal and all-round development is good.
- Good leadership and management have resulted in many good improvements.
- Very good attendance and behaviour and positive attitudes assist students' learning.

What could be improved

- A small amount of teaching is less than satisfactory. Difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers hinder achievement in a few subjects.
- Students have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to enrich their work in a few subjects.
- Provision in the library is inadequate to support learning well in several subjects.
- Many students in Years 10 and 11 do not participate fully in physical education lessons.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the previous inspection in 1997 is good. Standards are higher in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations. Girls still attain much higher standards than boys. However, the achievement of boys in external examinations is good in relation to their previous attainment. The quality of teaching throughout the college has improved from satisfactory to good overall. Leadership is good. Management has improved considerably and is now good. As a result, students of all social and ethnic backgrounds receive a good quality of education. The college met its challenging targets for GCSE results in 2002. Standards in the sixth form have improved satisfactorily. In respect of the four key issues identified for action, improvement is good overall. However, the college still has difficulty in recruiting specialist teachers in a few subjects. Numbers on roll have increased and the college is oversubscribed. The college has the capacity and the commitment to continue to make improvements.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	B	B	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	*	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

**National comparative data for A/AS-level results in 2002 are not yet available.*

Students' attainment when they join the college in Year 7 is average. It improves so that it is above average by the end of Year 11. This represents good achievement overall. In 2002, results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above average in English and science and average in mathematics. In all three subjects, the results were well above those of similar schools. The overall results indicated very good achievement when compared with students' previous attainment in national tests taken at the end of Year 6. Results are improving at the same rate as the national improvement. Girls' results are well above the national averages for girls. Boys' results are slightly above the national averages for boys. In work seen in Years 7 to 9, standards are above average. They indicate good achievement for boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Standards are well above average in mathematics, science and geography. They are above average in English, design and technology, history, French, and music. Attainment is average in the other National Curriculum subjects. Achievement in relation to students' prior attainment is currently very good in mathematics, science and geography. It is good in English and all other subjects apart from ICT, in which it is satisfactory.

GCSE results have been above average in all of the past three years. Results for boys were above the average for boys nationally. Results for girls were above those of girls nationally. In 2002, GCSE results were well above average compared with those of similar schools. In 2002, GCSE results at grades A*-C were well above average in English literature, mathematics, geography and expressive arts. The proportions of students attaining five or more grades A*-G and one or more grades A*-G, were both in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. They indicate excellent achievement, particularly for students with special

educational needs. GCSE results are improving at a slightly slower rate than the national improvement. In work seen in Years 10 and 11, standards are above average. They show good achievement for boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Standards are currently well above average and indicate very good achievement in mathematics and geography. They are above average in English, science, ICT and performing arts. Standards are average in other National Curriculum subjects. Students' achievement by Year 11 is currently good in English, science, art and design, citizenship, history, ICT and music. Achievement is satisfactory in other National Curriculum subjects. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, those who are gifted or talented and the few for whom English is an additional language, achieve well by the end of Year 11. Standards in a few subjects represent satisfactory rather than good achievement. This is mainly because of lack of continuity in learning resulting from difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Positive attitudes and good co-operation help students to achieve well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Very good behaviour in lessons and good behaviour around the college help to provide a friendly and purposeful climate for learning. Levels of exclusion have declined and are below average currently.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships throughout the college are very good. The Christian ethos helps students of all backgrounds to get on well with each other and with the staff. Students are tolerant and respectful of differing opinions.
Attendance	Very good. Well-above average attendance helps students to achieve well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good overall. A small amount of less than satisfactory teaching was seen, mainly in classes taken by unqualified or supply teachers. Throughout Years 7 to 11, teaching is very good in mathematics and good in English. In science, teaching is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is very good throughout Years 7 to 11 in geography. It is good in Years 7 to 11 in all other subjects, except that it is satisfactory in ICT in Years 7 to 9, and French in Years 7 to 11. Teaching meets well the needs of boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those who are gifted or talented and the few for whom English is an additional language. The teaching of literacy and of numeracy is good across subjects. Good support for students with special educational needs helps them to make similar progress to other students. Learning is good in most lessons because students are enthusiastic, behave very well, want to do their best, concentrate well and work hard to complete the work set. As a result, they acquire good skills, knowledge and understanding in most subjects. When given the opportunity, students

work well independently and in groups. They work co-operatively and productively even when the teaching is dull. However, in Years 10 and 11, many students do not participate well in physical education practical lessons.

Teaching has many positive features. Teachers make very good use of their expertise in the subject to plan their lessons well and to motivate students. Good planning of lessons helps students quickly to know what they are expected to learn and the relevance of the work to past and future studies. Most teachers set a good range of interesting and carefully timed activities that suit the needs of students of all levels of attainment in the class. Students know that they are expected to work hard. As a result, the climate for learning in most lessons ensures that progress is good and that work proceeds at a suitably brisk pace. Teachers make generally good use of marking and assessment to show students how to improve their work. They set homework of suitable amount and good quality to extend students' learning. In a few subjects, students have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to develop their work. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory, students had few opportunities to work independently and think for themselves. Occasionally, teachers did not make the best use of time available so that a few activities were too rushed and sometimes students spent unnecessary time copying down notes. In the few unsatisfactory lessons, expectations were not high enough, the work lacked pace and challenge for all students and the teacher's skills in managing the class were inadequate.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. All students have equal access to it. Provision for careers education is good. Active participation in a good programme of activities outside of lessons enhances students' learning.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. These students make good progress as a result of good teaching and support. The Code of Practice has been implemented suitably.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The few students achieve as well as other students because teachers ensure that they understand the work. None are at an early stage of learning English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Very good provision for moral development and good provision for spiritual, social and cultural development contribute well to students' all-round development. Students learn how to tell right from wrong and to be tolerant. They support actively a range of charitable causes at home and abroad.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Teachers know the students well, provide good care and support and value all students equally. Good use of assessment helps students to improve their work. Procedures for child protection and for health and safety are good.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Satisfactory. Parents receive adequate information about activities. Reports about students' progress are satisfactory. Parents have positive views about the college. Few parents take an active part in the work of the college.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher, with good support from senior staff, sets a very clear direction for the college's further improvement. Good management ensures that students of all levels of attainment achieve well and that the quality of teaching continues to improve. Management of subjects has improved since the previous inspection and is good overall.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are supportive and carry out their duties well. They have a good knowledge of the college's strengths and areas for development and have very high expectations for the college's future development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Senior managers make very good use of test results and comparative information to check if the college and different subjects are doing as well as they should. They set very challenging targets for improvement. Systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching have helped to raise standards and to share good practice.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Financial management is very good. The college uses its adequate staffing, accommodation and learning resources well to support students' learning. The use of ICT to support students' learning is good in many subjects. The college takes spending decisions carefully to seek best value and to meet educational priorities.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students like college and achieve well. • Leadership and management are good. • Behaviour is good. • Teaching is good. Expectations are high. • Students become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports about students' progress are not informative. • Links between home and college are not close.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views and confirm that the college provides a good quality of education for students of all backgrounds. They disagree with those parents who feel that reports are inadequate and that links between home and college are not close. Reports meet statutory requirements and are satisfactory. Links between home and college are satisfactory and similar to those found in many other secondary schools. Staff are ready and willing to meet parents at mutually convenient times.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is slightly smaller than in most other schools and is growing in size. It has 137 students (69 male and 68 female), of whom just over one third are in Year 13. The composition of the sixth form matches that of the rest of the college in terms of ethnic groupings and students' backgrounds. No students have special educational needs. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. About one half of students stay on from Year 11 into the sixth form. A very small number of students join the sixth form from other schools. Students' attainment on entry to Year 12 varies considerably from one year to the next, though it is below average compared with that found in many sixth forms nationally. Students have access to a wide range of AS/A-level courses and a few vocational courses in Years 12 and 13. The college operates a policy of open entry to the sixth form for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides an improving and satisfactory quality of education. It is cost-effective. Good leadership and management are helping to improve the quality of care, support and guidance for students. Standards fluctuate from year to year and reflect the different levels of prior attainment of successive year groups. Standards observed in current classes in Years 12 and 13 are similar to those reported at the time of the previous inspection and are average overall. They indicate good achievement based on students' previous GCSE performances. In most subjects, students usually attain A-level results that match predictions based on their previous attainment in GCSE examinations. They choose from a good range of A/AS-level courses. However, the range and provision of courses for students of below average attainment are inadequate and result in several students dropping out of courses in Year 12. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory in all of the nine subjects inspected in detail. Teaching is very good in geography and history, good in English literature, mathematics, business studies, design and technology, history and physical education. It is satisfactory in chemistry and computing. A-level results in 2002 were higher than in 2001 but were below the national average for that year. They indicated satisfactory achievement overall but underachievement occurred in mathematics, chemistry and physical education. The sixth form meets satisfactorily the needs of most of its students but does not provide sufficiently for lower attainers.

Strengths

- Standards in Years 12 and 13 are average and indicate good achievement currently.
- The number of students staying on from Year 11 is increasing.
- Students' very positive attitudes and hard work help them to achieve well.
- Good teaching in most subjects enables students to make good gains in their learning.

What could be improved

- A-level results in 2002 were unsatisfactory in mathematics, chemistry and physical education.
- Rates of retention are unsatisfactory because provision of courses for students of below average attainment is inadequate.
- Students do not develop their skills of independent learning well enough in several subjects.

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.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. A-level results in 2002 were below average indicating unsatisfactory achievement. Currently standards are average and achievement is good as a result of consistently good teaching of all aspects of the subject. However, assessment does not identify underachievement early enough.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. A/AS-level results were below average in 2002. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are currently below average and indicate satisfactory achievement. Teaching is satisfactory. Marking and assessment are not rigorous enough to ensure students' good progress.
Design and technology	Good. Recent A/AS-level results have been below average and indicate satisfactory achievement. Standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are currently above average and show good achievement as a result of good teaching.
Business studies	Good. A-level results were average and indicated good achievement in 2002. Achievement in the vocational course is good as a result of good teaching. However, several low attainers drop out from the course early in Year 12.
Computing	Satisfactory. Standards in computing are average. A/AS-level results match the national average and indicate satisfactory achievement. Satisfactory teaching enables students to make adequate progress in lessons.
Physical education	Satisfactory. A-level results in 2002 were below average and indicated unsatisfactory achievement. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are below average but show satisfactory achievement. Teaching is good so that students now make good progress in lessons. Too many students fail to complete the Year 12 course.
Geography	Very Good. In 2002, A-level results were above the previous year's national average and AS-level results were well above average. They represent very good achievement. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Students are achieving very well because teaching is very good and leadership outstanding.
History	Good. A-level results were below average for the very few candidates in 2002. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are average and rising as a result of very good teaching. Current students are achieving well. Their commitment to work hard and very good relationships with teachers contribute to this. Numbers have been low but are now rising.
English literature	Good. A-level results in 2002 were slightly below the national average for 2001 and represented good achievement. On this very popular course, standards are average and students achieve well as a result of good teaching and their commitment to hard work.

Work was sampled in several other subjects. Standards were above average and teaching and learning were good in the lessons observed in performing arts. Standards were average and the quality of teaching and learning were good in the lessons observed in biology, physics and art and design. Standards were below average and teaching and learning were satisfactory in the lesson seen in French. In lessons observed in citizenship within the personal, social and health education programme, very good teaching led to students using good oral skills in debate.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Satisfactory. The college provides good care and support and satisfactory advice and guidance. Students value the good quality of personal support throughout Years 12 and 13 and respond well. They are inducted satisfactorily into the sixth form. Guidance to the sixth form is largely dependent on subject staff within the college. There is little contribution from other providers of post 16 education and training. A large proportion of students do not continue their studies into Year 13. The range of students' attainment is wide and is not covered fully by the provision of mostly AS-level courses in Year 12. Students get good support from subject teachers. Although the use of assessment to raise standards and to set suitably challenging targets for academic development is improving, its use is inconsistent in a few subjects. The pastoral programme provides students with good advice about university applications and life in higher education. There is less advice for students who are considering employment. The recent appointment of a learning mentor has improved personal support and guidance.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. The good leadership of the sixth form makes an important contribution to students' improving and good achievement. There is clear educational direction for future improvements in standards and the quality of education. Good management and teamwork ensure that the very good relationships between staff and students create a friendly and purposeful environment for learning. Students have equal access to the curriculum. Strengths and weaknesses have been identified and development planning is good. Monitoring of teaching and learning is good and is helping to raise standards. The performance of all students is analysed in detail, although it is not yet used sufficiently to guide curricular planning in a few subjects.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choice of subjects suits their aspirations. • Students receive helpful information. • They settle in well. • Their work is marked well. • Teachers are accessible and supportive. • They receive good personal help. • They learn to work independently. • Most enjoy the sixth form and recommend it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have little advice about future options. • They do not know how well they are doing. • They have too few enrichment activities. • They do not feel treated as adults or that their views are taken into account.

Students' questionnaires and the many discussions that inspectors held with students show that most are happy with the work and life of the college. Inspection findings support many of

the students' positive views about the college. However, they do not agree that the courses available are suitable for all students, because they do not meet the needs of lower attainers well. Students have good opportunities to work independently in a few subjects such as geography but, in many subjects, teachers are too prescriptive and give students too few opportunities to think for themselves. In respect of the points for improvement identified by students, inspectors agree that a few students do not know how well they are doing. In most subjects, teachers make good use of assessment to keep students informed but in a few subjects, teachers are late in detecting possible underachievement. Inspectors find that most teachers, but not all, treat students as young adults and listen and act upon the points raised by students. Inspectors agree that the quality of advice and guidance about future options, though satisfactory, should be improved. Inspectors find that the range of enrichment activities is satisfactory and of similar amount and quality to that found in many other sixth forms.

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 school 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. Standards have improved well since the previous inspection in 1997 when they were average and achievement was satisfactory. Standards are now above average by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. They indicate good achievement for students of all ethnic backgrounds.

2. The levels of attainment of students on entry to the college in Year 7 vary from year to year. They are usually average, as in the current Year 7. The intake contains students of all levels of attainment. The number of students of the highest levels of attainment is a little lower than found in many schools because of the presence of a nearby selective grammar school. Standards improve quickly as students move through Years 7 to 11. Achievement as measured by performance in external examinations is very good by the end of Year 9 and good by the end of Year 11.

3. In 2002, results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above the national average. They were well above those attained by schools that have a similar proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals. The results were well above average when compared with predictions based on students' previous levels of attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 6. Results in English and science were above the national average. Those in mathematics were average. Results in the national tests have been rising at the same rate as the national rate of improvement. Over the past three years, girls have attained higher results than boys. The gap between their respective performances is wider than the national difference and reflects the difference in their levels of attainment when they joined the college. Girls' results are well above the national averages for girls. Boys' results are very slightly above the national averages for boys.

4. In Years 7 to 9, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are above average overall. They indicate good achievement for boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Standards are currently well above average in mathematics, science and geography. They are above average in English, design and technology, history, French and music. Attainment is average in the other National Curriculum subjects. Achievement in relation to students' prior attainment in the subject is currently very good in mathematics, science and geography. It is good in all other subjects apart from ICT, in which it is satisfactory.

5. GCSE results are improving at a slightly slower rate than the national improvement. This reflects the different levels of prior attainment and capabilities of successive year groups in the college. In 2002, the overall GCSE results were, for the third year running, above the national average. They indicated very good achievement compared with the results attained by similar schools. In 2002, the proportion of students attaining five or more grades A*-C was average. However, the proportions of students attaining five or more grades A*-C and one or more grades A*-G, were both in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. They indicate excellent performance when compared with the performance of similar schools and taking into account students' prior levels of attainment. Almost all students attained at least one GCSE grade A*-G. Girls attain higher standards in GCSE examinations than boys. Usually, the gap between their performances is slightly wider than the national difference and reflects the difference in their levels of attainment when they joined the college. In 2002, the difference between the GCSE performance of girls and boys was the same as the national difference.

6. In Years 10 and 11, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are above average overall and similar to those indicated by the GCSE results of 2002. They indicate good achievement for boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Standards are currently well above average and indicate very good achievement in mathematics and geography. They are above average in English, science, French, ICT and performing arts including music. Standards are average in other National Curriculum subjects. Students' achievement by Year 11 is currently good in English, science, art and design, citizenship, history, ICT and performing arts. Achievement is satisfactory in other National Curriculum subjects. It is at least satisfactory in other courses, including personal, social and health education and business studies.

7. The college's detailed records of students' academic performances show that the achievement of students of different ethnic backgrounds matches that of other students in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations. The few students for whom English is an additional language and students from ethnic minorities integrate well and make similar progress to that of other students across subjects.

8. Students who have been identified as having special educational needs achieve well throughout Years 7 to 11. GCSE results show that students with learning difficulties, including those with statements of special educational needs, achieve particularly well in external examinations. The very high proportion of students attaining GCSE passes at grades A*-G in 2002 indicated excellent achievement for those students. Students with learning or behavioural difficulties do particularly well because teachers and learning support assistants know their needs very well. As a result, these students receive suitably difficult and relevant work and much good support and encouragement.

9. The college's good systems for identifying students who are gifted or talented and providing suitable extension work and activities, enable these students to make good progress throughout Years 7 to 11. In mathematics and geography they achieve very well. This is because teachers consistently provide work of high challenge and difficulty that stimulates these students to think deeply and carefully about topics. In most subjects, however, they make good rather than very good progress in lessons. This is because the teacher often determines the work and does not sufficiently stimulate new and independent learning. In 2002, the proportion of students attaining the highest GCSE grades of A* and A was at least average in most subjects.

10. Standards of literacy across subjects are above average and improving. Students' skills in speaking, reading and writing are good enough to support their work and progress in all subjects. The few students for whom English is an additional language have sufficiently good skills in English to make the same progress as other students in subjects across the curriculum. Students of all levels of attainment read and understand factual and literary texts. Many enjoy private reading, although they do not make extensive use of the modest range of reading material available in the library. Students write with above average levels of accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Most write fluently for a range of purposes using good expression. They organise and present their written work well. In all subjects, students use the correct technical terms and spell the words accurately.

11. Standards of numeracy across subjects are above average overall. Students' mathematical skills are good enough to assist their work in all subjects. Competency and confidence in the use of number and mathematical procedures, especially graph work, assist learning in many subjects. Students apply their skills in statistics and measurement and use mathematical terms appropriately and accurately to support their work in subjects such as science and design and technology. In geography, they apply measuring techniques well and draw and interpret a wide range of statistical diagrams.

12. Students' skills in ICT are average by the end of both Years 9 and 11. Students' skills and knowledge in ICT are sufficient to support the demands placed upon them in subjects. Students make good use of computers in history and geography to extend and enhance their learning. They make frequent use of computers to carry out research on the Internet. They use their good skills in word processing and desktop publishing to present work well in many subjects. Because access to the computing facilities is not always easy, students do not have enough opportunities to practise and develop their ICT skills in a few subjects.

13. The main contributory factors to good achievement by Year 11 include good teaching, the high expectations of teachers and students and the purposeful climate for learning in the college. Students make a very good contribution to their academic attainment through very good attendance, a strong commitment to learning and their positive attitudes and behaviour. The use of learning mentors to support students is particularly helpful in enabling students with special educational needs to maximise their achievement. Standards in a few subjects represent satisfactory rather than good achievement. This is mainly because of lack of continuity in learning resulting from difficulties in recruiting suitable replacement staff for teachers who are on long-term absence. In a few subjects, and particularly in ICT, the college has experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified permanent teachers.

14. The college sets challenging targets for performance in external examinations. It bases these targets on students' previous attainment and comparisons with appropriate national comparative information. It met its suitably challenging targets for performance in GCSE examinations in 2002. It has set a particularly challenging target for 60 per cent of students to gain five or more grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 2003. This target is eight per cent higher than the college's average GCSE performance over the past three years.

Sixth form

15. The college operates a policy of open entry to courses in the sixth form. Accordingly, levels of attainment on entry in Year 12 are below those found in most sixth forms nationally. Attainment varies considerably from one year to the next, according to the number of high attainers who decide to continue their education at the college or choose to go elsewhere. In recent years, attainment in A-level examinations taken at the end of Year 13 has varied from above average to below average. A disappointing feature has been the dropout from courses by a sizeable minority of lower-attaining students. The college is aware that it needs to provide more suitable courses, including a wider variety of vocational ones, and better guidance to meet the needs of these students.

16. Standards of work seen in classes in Years 12 and 13 of subjects inspected and sampled, in scrutiny of coursework and written work, and in discussions with students are average overall. Nine subjects were the focus of the inspection. In geography, standards are well above average for the large number of students, nearly one third of the sixth form, who study the subject to A/AS level. In English, which is studied to A/AS level by more than half of all students, standards are average. In the other seven subjects, standards are above average in design and technology, average in history, computing and physical education and below average in chemistry and AVCE business studies. Achievement is good overall. It is very good in geography. Students of all ethnic backgrounds are making good progress in most lessons and achieving standards that are generally higher than expected from their previous attainment in GCSE examinations.

17. A-level results at the end of Year 13 have reflected the different levels of prior attainment of successive year groups. Overall, they were average in 2000 and below average in 2001. Results rose in 2002 but were below the previous year's national average. A-level

results in 2002 for subjects that entered ten or more students were above the previous year's national average in biology, geography, and general studies. They were well below average in mathematics and chemistry and below average in English literature and physics. The overall A-level results in 2002 indicated satisfactory achievement compared with students' prior attainment at GCSE examinations. However, students underachieved in A/AS-level examinations in mathematics, chemistry and physical education.

18. Comparison with national averages for the college's results in AS-level examinations taken at the end of Year 12 in 2002 is not very meaningful. This is because many students have chosen to resit these examinations during Year 13 in attempts to attain higher grades than their provisional ones. This worked particularly well in geography, for example, in which many students succeeded in January 2003 in raising their provisional grades to A and B grades. Outstanding results occurred at the end of Year 12 in performing arts, in which all five entrants attained A grades at AS level.

19. Achievement currently in Years 12 and 13 is good overall as a result of good teaching and students' positive attitudes, hard work and motivation to succeed. Standards of literacy and numeracy are average and appropriate for students' work in all subjects. Students of all ethnic backgrounds make good use of their competent skills in literacy and numeracy to support their work well across subjects. When given the opportunity, as in geography, students make good use of their computing skills to develop their work.

20. Although students' achievement is good, they do not always make progress as quickly as they did in Years 7 to 11. This is partly because teachers in a few subjects tend to teach at the students. These teachers provide insufficient opportunities for students either to think for themselves or to develop their skills of independent learning and research. Not all teachers make the best use of assessment to adjust the programme of teaching or to set targets. The limited resources available in the library for sixth formers to carry out private study and research restrict their progress in a few subjects.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

21. Students have good attitudes to college. They are keen, enthusiastic and attend college regularly. They support extra-curricular activities well. Many participate in the college's musical productions. Students have fewer opportunities to be involved in more formal musical activities but those involved are enthusiastic and committed.

22. Students have good attitudes in their lessons. Most students are very well motivated. They concentrate well and work hard. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment take a pride in their work. They keep their books very neat and well presented. Students' positive attitudes promote good learning and achievement. Students are generally very co-operative. They tolerate unsatisfactory teaching and usually continue to behave well even when, on a few occasions, they are clearly bored and frustrated. At times, teachers talk too much and, when too much listening is required, the concentration of a few students sometimes wanes.

23. Although younger students join in physical education lessons with great enthusiasm and extra-curricular activities in physical education receive good support from many students in all years, a large proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 are reluctant to be involved in physical education lessons. These students offer excuses and prefer to be spectators.

24. Behaviour is very good. It plays an important part in students' good and often very good achievement. Behaviour is usually very good in the classroom. Students get on with their work without fuss. This helps them to make good progress. Behaviour around the site is good. Students are courteous and polite. Behaviour in the dining hall is very good. Students form orderly queues and there is a good social atmosphere. Behaviour as students move around the college site is good. Conduct on the corridors and stairs is orderly. Rates of fixed-term exclusion have been above average. They have declined considerably and are low during the current year. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last two school years.

25. Students who spoke with inspectors do not consider bullying to be a problem. A very small number of parents were concerned about the college's response to bullying. The college has appropriate procedures in place to deal with bullying. However, while reported issues of bullying are thoroughly investigated there is less attention paid to identifying situations where bullying can occur.

26. Relationships between teachers and students and among students are very good. Mutual respect and support help to ensure good progress in most lessons. For example, in physical education, students listen carefully to each other's opinions. In a Year 8 personal and social education lesson, students listened well to each other's views on relationships and had obviously reflected upon these issues. Students have mature attitudes. They recognise that the opportunity for discussion of topics such as genetic engineering within a Catholic ethos gives the college an extra dimension. Personal development is good. The main reason that it is not very good is that teachers quite often dominate lessons and do not always provide enough opportunities for students to develop their social skills and independent learning through group work and collaboration.

27. Attendance is very good. The rate of attendance was well above average at 92.9 per cent last year. The rate of unauthorised absence was low. Students continue to attend very well during the current year. This regular attendance promotes continuity of learning, rapid progress and enables students to produce very good coursework. It is a major factor in students achieving very well in Years 7 to 9 and obtaining above average GCSE results.

Sixth form

28. Sixth-form students have good attitudes to college and their studies. They are keen to succeed, are very purposeful and highly motivated. Students are hard workers and usually make the most of the opportunities available to them. However, they have few opportunities to be involved in the wider life of the college. Students are co-operative and willing to help each other. A few students in Year 12 are reluctant to seek help. For example, Year 12 art and design students behave very well but a few lack the confidence to discuss their work. Behaviour is very good, students are courteous, trustworthy and provide good role models for younger students. One fixed-term exclusion of a sixth form student has taken place during this school year.

29. Students are tolerant and thoughtful of others. They support charitable causes well. Their Lenten charity efforts during the inspection included raising money for cystic fibrosis research, inspired by the needs of a former student. They were also supporting a local special care baby unit.

30. Relationships are very good. Students value the friendly and focused dialogue with staff. The mutual respect of staff and students is evident. Personal development is satisfactory. It is very good in geography because teachers encourage students to research the subject, develop skills of collaboration and make presentations. The skills acquired help students to perform well in A/AS-level examinations. Personal development is less prominent in many other subjects because teachers often dominate the lessons as they did lower down the college. As a result, students are often too passive in their learning and do not acquire the full range of advanced learning skills to maximise their performance in external examinations.

31. Students attend regularly. Very good attendance ensures continuity of study and helps students to achieve well. However, a sizeable minority of students of low attainment do not complete the courses they have embarked on. This dropout from courses is not a reflection on students' attitudes but occurs because the courses are not always matched well to the capabilities of the lower-attaining students and are sometimes a result of insufficient guidance. Many students continue to study a reduced number of subjects and try very hard even when they find the subjects very difficult.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

32. The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are good throughout Years 7 to 11. The quality of teaching observed has improved well since the previous inspection, when it was satisfactory. In Years 7 to 11, teaching was good or better in four out of every five lessons observed. The proportion of lessons observed that were very good or better has improved since the previous inspection from around one in 14 to nearly one in three. The proportion of teaching observed that was less than satisfactory has declined from one in seven to one in every 25 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11.

33. In the three core subjects, teaching throughout Years 7 to 11 is very good in mathematics and good in English. In science it is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is very good throughout Years 7 to 11 in geography. It is good in Years 7 to 11 in all other subjects, except that it is satisfactory in ICT in Years 7 to 9, and French in Years 7 to 11. In ICT and French, the college has experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified replacement or supply teachers. Students' achievement in Years 7 to 11 is generally better than the overall good quality of teaching that they receive in the different subjects. This is because the large majority of students have very positive attitudes to work, behave well and attend regularly. Most students are conscientious in completing the work to the best standard possible.

34. The quality of learning throughout Years 7 to 11 is good. Students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment acquire good skills, knowledge and understanding of the work in most subjects. They respond purposefully to teachers' high expectations by working hard and with enthusiasm. Most students are very keen to do their best. Very good relationships among students and with their teachers contribute to a good climate for learning in the large majority of lessons. When given the opportunity, as seen in most geography lessons, students enjoy working independently and thinking and deciding things for themselves. Even when the teaching is uninspiring, students usually concentrate well on the tasks set, work co-operatively and productively and complete the work at a good pace. However, in physical education, particularly in Years 10 and 11, several students do not participate actively and do not always bring their kit. Students make good use of ICT to support their learning in a few

subjects such as geography. In several subjects, they improve the detail and presentation of the work by good use of such computing skills as word processing and through researching topics on the Internet. However, they do not make enough use of ICT to extend their learning in subjects such as science and music. Students have an adequate awareness of how well they are doing. However, in a few subjects, they cannot relate their attainment to the different levels of the National Curriculum or to potential GCSE grades.

35. Teaching has many strengths. Teachers make very good use of their expertise in the subject to plan their lessons well and to motivate students. They are confident in giving explanations to the class and in asking and answering questions. Good planning of lessons helps students quickly to know what they are expected to learn and the relevance of the work to past and future studies. Most teachers provide a clear display of the aims of the lesson, usually on the board. They set a good range of interesting and carefully timed activities that suit the needs of students of all levels of attainment in the class. Teachers and students have suitably high expectations. Students know that they are expected to work hard. As a result, the climate for learning in most lessons ensures that progress is good and that work proceeds at a suitably brisk pace.

36. Features of the many very good lessons observed were present in a geography lesson in Year 9 for students of below average attainment, in which students made very good progress. They were learning about the different diets of people who live in economically advantaged areas of the world and those who live in the less economically developed countries. The teacher's well-planned introduction, using trays of food to illustrate different diets, caught students' interest immediately. Excellent relationships between the teacher and the class enabled lively and purposeful discussions to take place. Students participated actively and confidently, knowing that the teacher valued their opinions. By ensuring that all students contributed to the discussions, the teacher helped all students to improve their work. Very good planning of this lesson and the good use of key words and a range of learning resources meant that students, including those with special educational needs, enjoyed the variety of activities and having to think for themselves.

37. Most teachers make good use of a wide range of learning resources, often including ICT, to promote students' learning. In many mathematics lessons, for example, teachers stimulate students' interest and assist their understanding of complex work through logical and colourful demonstrations using the interactive computing whiteboards. Across subjects, teachers set homework of suitable amount and good quality. This helps students in all years to improve their work through a good range of different learning activities that include research, investigations, development of writing skills and revision.

38. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory rather than good, several of the features of good teaching were present. However, a few shortcomings were also evident. Often, in these lessons, the teacher took too dominant a role and did not encourage students to do enough thinking for themselves. In a Year 11 science lesson, for example, the teacher managed and controlled the class well, but did not provide work of sufficient difficulty to ensure that students of all levels of attainment were challenged suitably. The teacher dismissed suggestions from students about adopting different approaches to the recording of the work, which they felt would aid their revision. As a result, few students played an active part during whole-class discussions. Scrutiny of students' work indicates that much of it involves copying down notes supplied by the teacher. In a Year 11 French lesson, the teacher's very good expertise in the subject encouraged students to work hard but they had few opportunities to work independently. In a Year 8 French lesson, students made satisfactory rather than good progress because they spent too much time copying writing and the work carried out in groups did not ensure that all students focused closely on the tasks. In a few lessons, teachers did not use time well or as planned so that a few activities

went on for too long and reduced the usefulness of the revision session held towards the end of lessons.

39. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was observed in a few subjects. Most of this occurred in classes taken by unqualified or supply teachers. In these lessons, the work lacked suitable challenge and difficulty to keep students' attention. The pace was slow and students found the work boring. Occasionally, this resulted in unsatisfactory behaviour by a few students. Consequently, students lost concentration and interest in the work and made unsatisfactory progress.

40. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. Very good help provided by learning support assistants enables students to acquire confidence and to participate actively in the work in most mainstream classes. Joint planning of lessons by the teacher and the learning support assistant ensures that students receive work of appropriate challenge, interest and difficulty. Accordingly, these students make good or better progress in most lessons. In a Year 7 mathematics class containing students with learning difficulties, for example, progress was good because the efficient teamwork of the teacher and the learning support assistant ensured that students worked at a fast pace and productively throughout the lesson. The learning support assistants have a good awareness both of the specific needs of individual students and the requirements of the different subjects. They provide sensitive and effective support and guidance that give students access to the same learning opportunities and experiences as others. When it is necessary to withdraw one or a few students from class to receive intensive work, staff ensure that the work matches students' individual needs well. These students benefit from intensive work in literacy that enables them to keep up with the work of the full class. Some of this work, however, takes place in less than ideal circumstances, for example, in public areas such as the library.

41. The college has identified the students who are gifted and talented. It has developed a very good programme of extension activities within and across subjects. This provides high attainers with good opportunities to extend the breadth and, particularly in geography and mathematics, the depth of their knowledge and understanding of topics. Effective use of booster classes and very good links with local universities enrich the learning experiences of these students and raise their aspirations. Teachers know the needs of the gifted and talented students and prepare work and activities that help them to make similarly good progress to that of other students.

42. The few students for whom English is an additional language make progress at the same rate as other students. They have good enough skills in English to play a full part in all lessons. Teachers take good care to ensure that these students have work of suitable difficulty and that they understand fully what needs to be done. Students of different minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as other students because staff make them all feel equally valued.

43. The teaching of literacy is good across subjects. Teachers in most subjects encourage students to develop and extend fully their speaking, reading and writing skills. The college's literacy policy is having a positive influence on teaching across the curriculum. In most subjects, teachers help students to develop their reading skills. They encourage reading aloud in English, science and geography. In all subjects, class teachers direct students' attention to important vocabulary. This helps them to use the correct terms and to spell the words accurately. Support for students' writing is evident in many subjects. Teachers show students how to construct their written work in English, science, French, history, geography and ICT. Careful marking of students' work for spelling and punctuation errors occurs in mathematics, art and design, geography and design and technology. As a result of this widespread good practice, students' standards of literacy are improving

44. The teaching of numeracy is good across subjects. In mathematics, the good use of methods suggested in the National Numeracy Strategy enables students of all levels of attainment to improve their mathematical skills. Students develop their numeracy through a variety of mental 'warm-up' sessions at the start of all mathematics lessons in Years 7 to 9. The provision of additional teaching support assists the lowest-attaining students in Year 7. Teachers provide many opportunities for students to make good use of their above average skills of numeracy to develop their work in many subjects including science, design and technology and geography. In ICT, teachers plan lessons well to enhance students' number skills and help students to make good use of key mathematical words and formulae.

45. The teaching of ICT across subjects is satisfactory. It is good in a few subjects such as history and geography. In subjects such as science and music, teachers provide few opportunities for students to use ICT to extend and enrich their learning. However, in many subjects, including English and mathematics, teachers make very good use of computing resources such as electronic whiteboards, to add variety to the work and to stimulate students' learning. Since the previous inspection, the use of computers to support learning across all departments has increased considerably and has had a positive influence on the quality of teaching and learning.

Sixth form

46. The quality of teaching in the sixth form has improved since the previous inspection. The good quality of teaching and learning helps students to achieve well in the courses taken currently in Years 12 and 13. Teaching was good or better in about three quarters of lessons observed. It was very good in just over one quarter of lessons seen. None of the teaching observed in the sixth form was less than satisfactory. In the nine subjects inspected in detail, teaching is very good in geography and history, good in English, mathematics, business studies, design and technology and physical education. It is satisfactory in chemistry and computing. The quality of learning for students of all ethnic backgrounds is good. Students of all levels of attainment make generally good progress in most lessons. However, a sizeable minority of lower-attaining students have dropped out of courses because the curriculum did not meet their needs.

47. Learning is good in most lessons because students have positive attitudes to work. They listen carefully, concentrate well and respond enthusiastically to the tasks set. Very good relationships with teachers enable students to work productively and usually at a fast pace to complete the work set. Students acquire good knowledge, skills and understanding in most subjects, particularly when teachers encourage them to participate actively in the work. In a few subjects such as geography and history, they develop very good skills of independent study and research. However, in several subjects, including English literature and chemistry, teachers tend to be too directive and provide students with too few opportunities to think for themselves or to conduct independent research and study. In many lessons, as seen in personal, social and health education, English literature, geography and history, students use their good speaking skills to debate and discuss their work in suitable depth. Students enjoy solving problems and thinking for themselves, as observed in lessons in business studies and design and technology. Students have an adequate awareness of how well they are doing.

48. Teaching in Years 12 and 13 has many positive features. Students' co-operation and willingness to learn ensure that teachers organise and manage their classes very well. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the specialist subject to motivate students and to plan lessons well. They provide good explanations of the work and informed responses to students' questions. Most teachers set work that is of appropriate difficulty and challenge for

all students in the class. Teachers help students to prepare well for examinations by showing them how best to answer different types of questions.

49. Many of the features of the good or better lessons observed were present in a very well-planned geography lesson in Year 13 on the topic of international migration. The immediate availability of a wide range of easily accessible learning resources caught students' interest and stimulated very good learning. The short starter activity encouraged students to think for themselves and to explain the factors linking population and migration. In this lesson, students made very good use of computing websites to research information and to select and classify relevant material. Very good relationships between the teacher and the class ensured that students worked co-operatively and very well in groups. Students in this class are clearly used to discussing their work and findings in considerable depth. The teacher took great care to ensure that students understood the examination requirements of the work they were undertaking. Students contributed positively to their learning by arriving at the lesson well prepared for the work to be done so that no time was wasted.

50. In the lessons that were satisfactory, teachers did not always give students sufficient opportunities to work independently. Occasionally, the teacher's planning did not make the best use of the time available, so that a few activities had too little time and all the work set was not completed well. In a satisfactory Year 12 chemistry lesson about halogens, for example, the teacher's outline of the work to be done was too brief to ensure that students of all levels of attainment in the class could respond well to questions. Although students spent useful time on group activities and investigations, the practical work was too rushed. As a result, they had few opportunities to make notes about their work or to apply what they had learnt to make predictions and test them. In a satisfactory ICT lesson in Year 13, students completed the work set and made adequate progress. However, they had to do little thinking for themselves and spent too long copying down notes and diagrams prepared by the teacher. In a few other lessons in other subjects, there was too much reliance on students copying down notes rather than developing their note-taking skills.

51. Although students are achieving well in most subjects they do not always make the fastest possible progress. This is because not all teachers use assessment consistently and effectively to promote students' learning. Consequently, in a few subjects, students do not have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what are realistic targets for future improvement and grades in examinations.

52. The teaching of the key skills of literacy and numeracy is good in Years 12 and 13. Students' basic skills are sufficient to meet the requirements of the courses they are studying. Students enhance their work by practising and applying their ICT skills well in a few subjects and particularly in geography.

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

53. The quality and range of opportunities for learning are good in Years 7 to 11. They reflect the college's mission to ensure that everyone in the college has the opportunity to develop their talents fully.

54. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 includes all the National Curriculum subjects, religious education and one lesson every week of personal, social and health education. The teaching of citizenship occurs in these subjects. The curriculum is generally well balanced and broadly based. However, there is no provision for a second language or drama.

55. Since the previous inspection, the time given to teaching has increased with the introduction of five lessons of one hour each day. This has given more flexibility in organising the curriculum. The number of split classes has decreased. The separate personal, social and health education lesson has been introduced, which provides good opportunities for personal development. The successful implementation of the National Strategies for Key Stage 3 has strengthened the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 through a positive response to the guidance for teaching and learning.

56. The literacy policy has a positive effect on teaching across the curriculum. In most subjects, staff help students to develop their reading and writing skills. However, the college library offers a modest range of reading material. It has little effect upon raising the standards and profile of reading across the college, although it provides good resources for students with special educational needs.

57. The numeracy policy is set out clearly in a 'Numeracy Handbook'. Teachers have received formal training to raise awareness of the National Numeracy Strategy. As a result, teachers now plan for the inclusion of numeracy in schemes of work. Mathematics Challenge and master-classes provide good opportunities for extending the gifted and talented students.

58. Students are placed in broad ability forms within two half-year groups. These groups are determined according to students' levels of attainment after testing in Year 7. The forms are used for teaching most subjects in Years 7 to 9, although a few classes are grouped according to levels of attainment in mathematics and English. These arrangements provide well for the range of students' needs. Higher-attaining students receive additional opportunities for extension work through the division of the upper half-year group into two groups and by the creation of 'express' classes for the highest attainers in each year. This is good provision for these students. It does not compromise equal opportunity for all students, as all follow the same curriculum but at an appropriate pace.

59. In Years 10 and 11, all students study GCSE English language and literature, religious education, mathematics, physical education, science and vocational courses in ICT. In addition, students choose from a suitable range of other subjects that include humanities, expressive arts, French, technology, business studies and physical education. Most students get their first choice of subjects. Overall, students receive a broad and largely balanced curriculum with good opportunities for all to access it. The ICT course is relevant to local employment opportunities and is welcomed by students and parents. The time given to ICT is more than is found in many schools. The time provided for physical education is lower than found in many schools.

60. Provision for students with special educational needs has improved substantially since the previous inspection and is good. Individual education plans are now in place for all students on the list of special educational needs. The allocation of support is coherent. The number of learning support assistants has increased considerably. The good programme of professional development for learning support assistants leads to a National Vocational Qualification. This is a particularly successful initiative, as seen in the close co-operation and good working partnership between class teachers and learning support assistants that enable students with a variety of learning difficulties to make good progress in lessons.

61. The extensive and varied range of extra-curricular activities enriches students' learning experiences and personal development. The college has paid attention to the need to try to include all students in such activities. During their time at the college, all students are expected to participate in some activity. Notable features are the annual Arts Week with visiting artists and the drama productions in which many students participate. Students take an active part in the sports clubs, the study support clubs and revision opportunities. The liturgical celebrations that are highlights of the college year and religious life involve many students and have special music written. The citizenship requirements for responsible participation in the life of the community have extended the extra-curricular programme. The community links programme is a successful feature and supports students' work in citizenship. Students benefit from many links, such as the connections with Stoke City Football Club and Longton Rugby Club. They give service back to the wider community, for example, through the 'Monday Club' for those with learning disabilities. This has been a very positive feature of college life for many years.

62. Provision for personal development has improved since the previous inspection and is good. Senior managers have worked hard at this aspect, particularly as development of the whole person is at the heart of the mission and ethos of the college. Provision for personal and social education and teaching of the course are good. Appropriately, form tutors teach these lessons. The programme has a suitably strong emphasis on citizenship and moral education. Health education is satisfactory and pays appropriate attention to educating students about the use and misuse of drugs. The college is very careful to teach sex education within the Catholic ethos. Students are encouraged to value family life and to develop strong morals. The school nurse visits in Year 9 but has insufficient time to cover all the elements of the sex education programme fully.

63. Careers education is part of the personal and social education course in Years 10 and 11 and is of good quality. The 'be real' game in Year 10 is very successful in promoting students' awareness of life outside of the college. The external careers service focuses interviews on lower-attaining students and students with specific problems. It has had limited involvement with year groups or classes. The careers co-ordinator works hard to overcome these shortcomings by providing individual interviews for average and higher-attainers. Students appreciate the very good personal support provided by the college's careers co-ordinator. All students in Year 10 have the opportunity to experience the world of work and have a period of work experience. A small number of lower attainers access work experience combined with college of further education courses and a reduced programme of examination courses. The work-related curriculum is satisfactory overall but has few vocational courses.

64. The college has generally good links with other educational institutions. Good pastoral links with feeder primary schools help students to settle in quickly. Good curricular links with primary schools in subjects such as science and music assist continuity of learning. There are few active partnerships with post-16 providers. The college uses its close proximity to several universities well. Gifted and talented students access many interesting university led activities. As a result, these students' aspirations are higher.

65. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Spiritual development is good. This is a college in which students grow and flourish. Assemblies have clear spiritual themes, such as consideration of the complexity of the individual and the different roles we play in different circumstances. The requirements for daily collective worship for all are met either in assembly or in tutor time. The resources for form prayers are of good quality. The use of these resources is variable, sometimes good and sometimes perfunctory. The college responds well to special circumstances such as bereavement and the current war in Iraq. Daily voluntary prayers for peace were said in the

college chapel, where staff and students joined together. The occasional, special liturgies throughout the year add a special dimension to students' spiritual experience. Students learn about beliefs and values. In many subjects, they have good opportunities to consider what is inspiring in human achievement and the natural environment and to take part in creative experiences. Many teachers take great care to provide an uplifting environment in the classroom as seen, for example, in the geography area.

66. Provision for moral development is very good and is a strength. Its effectiveness appears in the good, and usually very good behaviour of students. They have a good knowledge of the clear code of behaviour because it is in their planners and staff explain it well to them. A fair balance of rewards and sanctions supports this code. The 'Discipline for Learning' policy rewards good behaviour and effort immediately. Students respond positively to this approach. The college has high expectations for students to exercise personal responsibility in and out of lessons. Staff set a good tone by the very good quality of their relationships with students and by their personal example. The college takes care to promote the principles that challenge bullying and racism, and to teach the equal dignity of all. The policy for racial equality is partly in place and needs further development. In many subjects, the teaching of moral aspects of topics is good, as seen in English literature, geography and history. Students learn to take care of equipment, for example, in music and physical education. They receive encouragement to have regard for the care and safety of others, as observed in physical education and science. The college has a strong tradition of generosity to a range of charities, local, national and global. During the inspection, students as part of a Lenten effort were seeking to provide relevant support for an agency assisting the humanitarian consequences of the war in Iraq.

67. Provision for students' social development is good. It results from the caring and supportive aims and pastoral practices of the college. Very good relationships between students and staff have a positive influence on students' good responses to each other. Students' very good behaviour and the good range of extra-curricular activities allow students of different ages and ethnic backgrounds to mix together well and to be mutually supportive and understanding. Much of the work in subjects such as history, geography, music and expressive arts and religious education promotes the development of social skills, through group work that requires good co-operation and collaboration among students.

68. The college promotes good cultural development for students, particularly in history, geography, art and design, music and expressive arts, religious education and French. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to experience a wide range of cultural traditions and styles. It helps students to gain a good awareness of the richness and value of cultural diversity. Extra-curricular provision, including study and field trips, Arts Week, liaison with higher education and religious institutions and college productions, enriches students' cultural experiences. As a result of the introduction of citizenship into the curriculum, students are more aware of how opinions and values can be affected and enriched by cultural identity, background history and environment. Occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to help students to prepare for living in a multicultural society, by failure to draw on the different traditions represented by the students themselves.

Sixth form

69. The sixth form provides students with a satisfactory choice of courses to meet their needs. However, quite a high proportion of students do not continue with their studies beyond AS-level. Good provision of AS/A-level courses meets well the needs of higher and middle attainers. However, the provision of courses to meet the needs of students of below average attainment is not adequate to meet their needs fully. The college's policy of open entry for students of all levels of attainment into the sixth form and the lack of rigorous entry

requirements for advanced courses mean that a sizeable minority of students of low attainment enrol on courses that prove too difficult for them to complete. This results in quite a high dropout rate from a few courses such as business studies and ICT. The provision of vocational courses has improved, but does not provide a sufficiently wide range of courses for students of all levels of attainment. All students study religious education and have the opportunity to take the diocesan certificate or diploma. They have the option of gaining qualifications in general studies and key skills. The key skills course of literacy, numeracy and ICT has not proved as popular as the college had hoped. It attracted so few students that the current course has had to be abandoned. The sixth-form timetable is organised carefully to accommodate the subject choices of individual students. Most students follow the combination of courses that is their first choice.

70. Opportunities for students to enrich their learning outside the classroom are good. Students have equal access to all aspects of the enrichment programme. All students participate in a programme for personal development that includes such useful topics as money management, careers advice, work experience, procedures for university entrance, techniques for interview, first aid, driving skills, citizenship, ICT and cooking on a budget. Individual careers guidance is available through the external careers service and from sixth-form staff. Students visit institutions of higher education and a careers convention. They have access to a wide range of careers publications about employment and higher education in the sixth-form area. They have access to further resources in the careers library.

71. Students in Year 12 receive a course on counselling skills so that peer group counselling can take place. As part of the sixth-form induction course, all students attend an outdoor pursuits centre to develop team-building skills. A small number of students enrich their learning experiences through participation in the Young Enterprise scheme. The head boy and head girl represent the college well at numerous functions. Sixth formers are invited to become senior prefects. They hold specific responsibilities within the sixth form and monitor prefects in Year 11. Students organise many of the college's activities to support charity and help to raise considerable sums for a wide variety of charitable causes. Students develop their social awareness through the work of their own sixth-form council. They choose a representative to the college council that meets members of the senior management team and the governing body.

72. Many students have work commitments outside of college so that participation in regular extra-curricular activities is difficult. However, they benefit from participating in a wide range of activities that broaden their learning and contribute well to their social, cultural and all-round development. Such enrichment occurs, for example, in the cultural trip to New York, in field courses in biology and geography and through many visits to museums, plays and shows as far afield as London. Students, especially those on the performing arts course, take a full part in the college's dramatic productions.

73. Provision for personal development in the sixth form is good. All students participate in a religious education programme and regular assemblies in which they consider spiritual and moral themes, beliefs and values. In a number of subjects, students take part in creative and aesthetic work and are reflective. Spiritual development is good. In many lessons and through assemblies and form periods, students have very good opportunities to develop citizenship skills of listening, discussion, debate, tolerance and understanding of conflicting viewpoints. They consider topical and often difficult ethical issues. For example, in a Year 13 geography lesson, students made some very perceptive contributions to a class discussion on world debt.

74. Work experience in the sixth form is related closely to students' future careers. Links with higher education are very good. The college uses its close proximity to several

universities well. Students have been able to access many interesting university-led activities that have helped to raise their educational aspirations.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

75. The college provides a good quality of care for students of all social and ethnic backgrounds. It has a very friendly and welcoming environment in which students feel safe. The well-established pastoral system works well. Form tutors, subject teachers and heads of year know individual students well. They have a very good awareness of students' particular needs throughout each stage of education and try very hard to meet these needs as well as possible. They give students good personal assistance and monitor their all-round development closely and sensitively. Students who encounter personal and family problems receive particularly good support and guidance. Procedures for child protection are good. Arrangements to ensure that students in the care of the local authority make good progress at college are successful. The good quality of pastoral care has been sustained since the previous inspection. Relationships between staff and students are good and often very good, as a result of mutual trust and respect. Students of all backgrounds feel that they are treated equally and fairly. Often, the time set aside for prayer during tutor periods indicates the caring approach of students and staff and their concern for the well being of one another.

76. Good procedures for induction ensure that students settle quickly into Year 7. Students receive good academic support from many subject teachers in study clubs. These popular and well-attended sessions have helped Year 9 students to improve their test results. Gifted and talented students receive very good support that ensures that they make at least good progress. They are identified by the college and by individual departments. Gifted and talented students have access to a wide range of interesting, enriching activities, which broaden their educational experience and raise their aspirations. All students have access to good guidance delivered within a Catholic ethos in pastoral lessons. The careers co-ordinator provides students with valuable individual guidance and personal support.

77. Suitable procedures for health and safety are in place. The college has recognised that the students' toilets are in urgent need of refurbishment and has arranged for the construction of new toilets. The college intends to improve the dilapidated and dangerous all weather pitch.

78. Students with special educational needs receive good care, support and guidance from teachers and learning support assistants. They are made to feel equally valued as other students and develop confidence and self-esteem. Support is usually sensitive and effective, allowing students access to the same learning opportunities and experiences as others. Learning mentors are very effective in providing students with personal and academic support of high quality. They have succeeded in improving attitudes to college of the few students who needed help to improve their attendance, behaviour and organisational skills. Their support is very much appreciated by students. The work of the learning mentors is restricted by unsuitable accommodation. They are housed in a very small office and have insufficient space to carry out group work or run any type of drop in service.

79. The monitoring of attendance is very good. Careful attention to detail, including rigorous monitoring of registers, has ensured that records of attendance meet statutory requirements. This is an improvement since the previous report. The vigorous following up of absences by form tutors and heads of year has resulted in well above average rates of attendance and very low rates of unauthorised absence. The college appreciates the very good support it receives from the education welfare officer who works hard to serve the college community. Pastoral staff have to spend much time working manually on records of attendance, as the college does not have access to a computerised registration system.

80. The college has very good arrangements for monitoring and promoting high standards of behaviour. Careful monitoring by heads of year, consistent application by all staff of the college's policies for behaviour and the very good relationships between students and teachers result in very good behaviour in lessons and good behaviour around college. A very small number of parents were concerned about the college's procedures for dealing with bullying. Individual cases of bullying that are referred to heads of year or senior staff are investigated thoroughly and followed up with appropriate action. Bullying is discussed and discouraged during pastoral lessons.

81. Since the previous inspection, the college has undertaken a thorough review of its policy for assessment of students' academic work and progress. Overall, procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good, though there are a few inconsistencies in practice.

82. Staff now make greater use of information about students' levels of attainment on entry to the college. Analysis of this information helps to determine tutor groups in Year 7, based on students' performance in primary school. Students have individual target grades in each subject early in Year 7. These targets provide a basis for measuring the effectiveness of provision in each subject and for monitoring the achievements of individual students. Teachers review the targets as students move through the college, especially after the national test results in Year 9.

83. The policy for the day-to-day marking and monitoring of students' work is good and effective. It enables teachers to give students credit both for the quality of the work and the effort made. Most of students' work across subjects indicates very regular and thorough marking that encourages them to do well. There is very good practice in geography, for example, because the frequent and regular marking of students' work contains evaluative and informative comments about the content of the work and suggestions for students about how to improve their standards. However, there is insufficient monitoring by a few heads of subject so that a few inconsistencies occur, even within departments. Within the science department, for instance, much of the marking is of very good quality, but in a few science classes, students' work is not monitored closely and progress is not so good. In design and technology, teachers' comments do not make sufficient use of GCSE grade details to inform students what needs to be done to improve their grades.

84. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are satisfactory. Longer-term assessments of students' progress occur every half term, although the grades are not always referenced to national levels, particularly in Years 7 to 9. A very good computing system records these half-termly grades so that teachers can compare assessments with students' target grades in each subject. Most teachers are now confident about using this system, but the few teachers who have not developed sufficient expertise reduce its effectiveness. When the system works well, the assessment data provide a very good basis for teachers to track the work of individual students across the curriculum to check that they are progressing as well as expected. The college informs parents when students are performing particularly well, or if they are underachieving. Learning mentors appointed by the college provide detailed guidance and additional support for a number of students who need to improve their progress. Subject teachers use the tracking system well to keep a close eye on students' progress in their particular subject. The role of form tutors in monitoring the overall academic progress of students in their tutor group is underdeveloped. They do not ensure, for example, that students enter target grades routinely into their planners. Therefore, students who perform at broadly satisfactory levels do not always receive further support and guidance about their work, or additional personal encouragement to aim even higher.

85. The use of assessment data by heads of department and subject teachers is increasing. It is now linked more effectively to performance management procedures, and to monitoring the quality of work in each class. The use of assessment has an increasingly positive effect on curricular planning. There is good practice in mathematics, for example, in which the assessment of students' work leads to the development of short-term individual targets and special teaching to help students to overcome any misunderstanding.

Sixth form

Assessment

86. Procedures for the assessment of students' attainment and progress in the sixth form are good. They build on the good practice established in Years 7 to 11. Suitably challenging target grades for individual students' performances at AS-level and A-level examinations are established early in Year 12. These provide encouragement for students to strive for high standards and are a baseline for teachers to monitor individuals' progress. The system of assessing the work of all students in every subject each half term continues in the sixth form. In spite of the increasing effectiveness of the mentoring system in helping those students who need closer monitoring and support, most students' knowledge of what they need to do to reach higher grades is limited. Form tutors are more involved in the oversight of students' overall academic progress than in Years 7 to 11. Tutors respond positively to this responsibility.

87. After AS/A-level results are received, the college compares actual grades with the target grades of individual students. This information provides a measure of the performance of each subject, and of individual students. There is also an increasing use of assessment information in the performance management of teachers, linking lesson observations and the quality of teaching with examination results. This leads to increased knowledge about strategies for teaching well, and the spreading of good practice.

88. The use of assessment by sixth-form teachers is particularly effective in promoting achievement in business studies, history, geography and English. There are weaknesses in the use of assessment in chemistry, ICT and physical education, particularly in the diagnosis of individuals' need and in planning curricular provision.

Advice, support and guidance

89. The college provides good care and support and satisfactory advice and guidance. Students value the good quality of personal support throughout Years 12 and 13 and respond well. During Year 11, students receive good information and satisfactory guidance about opportunities for continuing their education. Most students have good guidance about subject courses from teachers but little advice from other providers of post-16 education and training. The college's policy of open entry to the sixth form and an insufficient provision of courses suited to the needs of lower attainers result in a sizeable minority of students ending up on unsuitable courses. These students benefit in terms of their all-round and social development by returning to the sixth form but do not sufficiently enhance their academic development. A number of students drop out of courses early in Year 12 because they find them too difficult or because they want to reduce the number of courses they are studying. The majority of students in the sixth form are studying A/AS-level and AVCE courses that suit their needs and aspirations very well.

90. Procedures for induction to the sixth form generally work well and students settle in quickly. However, the lack of a sixth-form prospectus means that students, particularly the

lower attainers, do not always have a clear enough understanding of the level of difficulty to be expected in A/AS-level work. Students receive a sixth-form handbook, but this is after they have embarked on their studies. The sixth-form information evening held in Year 11 and the high quality of written information supplied by most subjects are helpful and informative. The induction week helps students to acquire study skills and to engage in team-building exercises.

91. Students receive good support when they are filling in their applications for higher education. Subject teachers, tutors, sixth-form pastoral staff and the careers teacher all offer guidance when needed. Support from the local careers service has improved recently and is satisfactory. Support and advice for students entering employment are satisfactory.

92. Students appreciate the good academic support they receive from subject teachers. The learning mentor provides good help for students. For example, Year 12 students are especially appreciative of the way they have been helped to manage their time. Students enhance their personal development through the pastoral lessons and in personal, social and health education. Students often have very good advice about such matters as financial planning and future life as a higher or further education student. Those who have personal problems receive sensitive and good support. Most, but not all, teachers treat sixth-form students as young adults.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

93. The partnership between the college and parents is satisfactory. Parents have positive views of the college, which is popular and oversubscribed. In the questionnaires and letters completed for the inspection and at the parents' meeting held before the inspection, parents report that their children like college. Students' very good attendance supports this view. Parents feel that teaching is good and that their children make good progress. They appreciate the help provided by the college to help their children to become mature and responsible. The large majority of parents say that behaviour at the college is good. A very small number of parents have concerns about how the college deals with bullying. The inspection found that staff investigate any reported instances of bullying thoroughly and deal with these as quickly as possible. However, the college does less preventive work about bullying. Parents think that the college is led and managed well. Inspection findings support strongly parent's positive views of the college. Most parents feel that arrangements for homework are satisfactory but a few parents feel that there is too much homework whilst others feel that there is too little or it is set inconsistently. The inspection found that the quality and amount of homework are good and make a positive contribution to students' achievement.

94. The information the college provides for parents is satisfactory. Parents receive regular newsletters, which celebrate the college's work and students' achievements. The prospectus is satisfactory. It gives parents a suitable amount of information about the day-to-day working of the college. However, there is insufficient information about the sixth form. The prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents contain insufficient information about provision for students with special educational needs. The attendance figures are presented in a way that is difficult for parents to understand.

95. A minority of parents feel that they do not receive enough information about their children's progress. The inspection found that parents receive information of satisfactory amount and quality to keep them suitably informed about academic progress. Reports to parents meet statutory requirements. Regular parental consultation evenings enable parents to meet subject teachers and there is an additional tutor evening in Year 7. Written reports are generally of satisfactory quality. English reports are written well and tell parents clearly

what their children know, understand and can do. College-based grades that measure attainment within a class sometimes cause confusion with national standards. Parents in Years 10 and 11 do not always receive sufficient information about students' expected GCSE grades. Reports in a few subjects do not give enough indication of how students can improve their work. Supplementary reports at the end of Year 9 are of good quality. They supply extra details about students' progress in English, mathematics and science in addition to reporting all the National Curriculum levels.

96. The pastoral system generally works well for parents. Communication is good with parents whose children have issues regarding behaviour or attendance. Less contact occurs with parents of students who are working hard. The college is developing methods to ensure that there is more regular communication with parents about positive matters. There is little monitoring of attendance at parents' evenings to ensure that those who do not attend are contacted. The college does not often seek parents' views. There is a small and dedicated parent and teachers' association that organises fundraising and social events. However, other parents do not always support these events well.

97. Sixth-form students and their parents are supportive of the college and what it seeks to achieve. Students recognise the benefits that they receive from life in the sixth form. Most choose to stay on at college because teachers know and support them well. Students appreciate the accessibility of teachers and the good quality of teaching. They are concerned about not having enough advice including information about progress. They would like to be treated as responsible adults and for their views to be taken into consideration more. Although students are generally satisfied with the choice of courses they would appreciate access to a greater range of activities and enrichment. Inspectors support most of students' positive views about the college, though they judge that the range of courses should be broader and that many students do not develop their independent study skills well enough. Inspectors disagree with the few students who feel that they do not know how well they are doing. Advice and guidance to students about future options are satisfactory and are improving as a result of the recent arrival of an officer from the local careers agency. Most teachers treat sixth-form students as young adults. Inspectors find that the range and provision of extra-curricular activities are satisfactory and similar to that found in many other sixth forms.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

98. Good leadership and management have resulted in good improvements since the previous inspection of 1997. Standards are now higher in national tests and GCSE examinations. The quality of teaching and learning has improved from satisfactory to good. As a result, students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment achieve well by Year 11. The college is popular and oversubscribed and deserves its good reputation locally. The aim of promoting the all-round and academic development of all students is evident in its daily life. A reflection of the good quality of leadership and management is the orderly, friendly and purposeful climate in the college despite the long-running, noisy and potentially disruptive building programme.

99. Under the headteacher's thoughtful and sensitive guidance, the college vigorously seeks to achieve a high quality of performance in all aspects of its work, as indicated in its motto 'towards a better future'. This was evident in the headteacher's expressed disappointment to staff last year that GCSE results overall were 'only well above the average for similar schools', whereas the desire was to reach the levels of performance of the top five per cent of such schools. The head teacher and governing body set a very clear educational vision for the college and have succeeded in communicating this to staff, students and parents. They place great emphasis on the all-round academic and personal development of students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. The majority of staff respond very positively to the good lead set by the headteacher and senior staff.

100. The quality of management has improved considerably and is good. The senior leadership team that comprises the head teacher, one deputy head and five assistant heads has a strong and shared commitment to further improvement. Senior staff know the college's strengths and weaknesses very well. They have clear job descriptions and accountabilities. As a result of their effective and collaborative work, progress has been good overall in respect of the four key issues for action identified in the previous report. Firstly, the qualities of teaching, leadership and students' achievement in business studies and design and technology have improved considerably and are now good. The use of ICT to assist learning has increased greatly across subjects though there is room for further development. Secondly, the provision of more specialists has helped to raise standards in music. However, improvement in French has been satisfactory rather than good because of difficulties caused by staff absences and recruitment. Thirdly, the quality of management at all levels in the college has improved well. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of departments are now rigorous and thorough. They have been a key factor in the college's greatly improved performances in external examinations in recent years. For example, the good improvements in English results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 occurred directly after a senior staff review of the work of the department followed by an action plan for improvement. Senior staff review the work of all departments. They prioritise those departments that are performing less well than others, so that they can receive support quickly. Fourthly, provision for students with special educational needs has improved substantially. It is now good and ensures that students with learning difficulties make at least as good rates of progress as other students.

101. Management has improved as a result of clearly defined and appropriate job descriptions for all staff and good monitoring by senior staff. Heads of department have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and accountabilities. Leadership and management are excellent in geography, very good in mathematics and history and good in English and science. They are good in other subjects apart from ICT, French and physical education in which they are satisfactory. Heads of year manage their students and staff well to ensure that students receive a good quality of care.

102. The fairly new leadership and management of special educational needs are very good. The department now assesses students' needs properly using an appropriate range of tests. It has introduced a more coherent strategy for the allocation of learning support. A successful feature is the forum of representatives from all subject areas who meet regularly to discuss good practice in teaching students with special educational needs. A good increase in the amount of time for learning support assistants has helped students with learning difficulties to achieve at least as well as other students. Documentation on students is up to date. The department carries out annual reviews in accordance with statutory requirements. It involves parents and appropriate outside agencies properly in these reviews.

103. The governing body has a detailed and full awareness of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. It is led well and organised efficiently. Minutes of meetings are

concise and purposeful. Governors carry out their duties effectively and provide good support to many important aspects of the college's work. It carries out its duties responsibly and meets statutory requirements apart from publishing full enough information about special educational needs provision in the annual report to parents. Governors work well and closely with the headteacher and senior staff. Frequent meetings and frank exchanges between the chair of governors and the head teacher help to keep the governors fully informed. Governors play a prominent part in planning for the college's improvement and calling senior staff to account. They have high aspirations for the college's continued improvement. They support the headteacher well in ensuring that targets for raising standards are set at a high level. For example, the college has set a target for performance at GCSE grades A*-C in 2003 that is 10 per cent higher than the 50 per cent attained in 2002. Committees of the governing body work well in partnership with staff. Governors monitor developments closely and take effective action to improve the college. They value highly the work of the headteacher and all staff at the college. They show a good interest in the all-round development, as well as the academic success, of students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment.

104. The headteacher, governors and senior staff make rigorous and effective use of good procedures for checking how well the college is doing and in planning for further improvement. They are successful in taking action to make improvements, as shown by students' achievements in national tests and GCSE examinations. The college's improvement plan contains suitable priorities and targets with an appropriate focus on teaching, learning and staff development. Departmental improvement plans are based on the whole-college plan. The college is intending to apply for status as a specialist college for mathematics and ICT. This is an appropriate target because the mathematics department is of very good quality and the potential for ICT is considerable. However, for the potential in ICT to be realised, the college needs to solve current problems of recruiting sufficient suitably qualified teachers of ICT.

105. Good systems of communication help to keep all staff well informed. The successful implementation of performance management reviews and the college's procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching have led to good improvement in the quality of students' learning. The professional development of teachers is good. It is linked suitably to priorities in the college and departmental improvement plans. A good programme of induction helps new and newly qualified teachers to settle in quickly to the college's routines.

106. The college's financial management is good. The governing body, through its finance committee, monitors spending closely and ensures that funds are used appropriately to support the priorities identified in the college improvement plan. It considers spending decisions carefully to seek best value. Specific funds coming into college, such as those for activities associated with staff development, special educational needs and ICT are used for the designated purposes. The vice-chair of governors is a very experienced and supportive governor, who has made very good use of the college's previous experience as a grant maintained school to ensure that the finance committee conducts its business well.

107. The very large carry over in the budget, around £900,000, is mainly attributable to expenses already occurred on the large building programme and expenses to be incurred on imminent building programmes approved by the governing body. About £250,000 is in the current capital programme for buildings. Money has still to be paid for some of the work completed on the new twelve-classroom block. The governors have earmarked around £100,000 of this carry over for the upgrading of ICT. Approximately £100,000 is intended for improvements to sports facilities including the all-weather pitch and tennis courts. Considerable sums have been allocated for further upgrading of science accommodation, for the current upgrading of students' toilet facilities and the college's

frontage. The carry over also includes a large amount of money that is the college's voluntary fund account. The governors decided to continue with the same arrangements for auditing its finances that operated while it was a grant maintained school until such time as the local authority audit occurred. The annual budget received by the college is allocated suitably to meet the needs of students currently at the college. The latest available completed audit report, for 2001/2002, indicated that the college's financial systems were operating satisfactorily.

108. The college manages its adequate provision of staffing, accommodation and learning resources well to support students' learning. In most subjects, teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to meet the needs of students. Areas of weakness identified in the previous report have mostly been transformed into strengths, for example in business studies and music. The college continues to have difficulty in recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced teachers both to permanent and temporary posts. This currently has adverse effects on students' learning particularly in French and ICT. Medium and long-term absence of teachers disrupts the continuity of learning in a few other subjects. Newly qualified teachers receive good support so that they quickly develop confidence in the classroom. Teachers respond positively to encouragement to take part in further training. This contributes to the improved quality of teaching and learning identified as a target in the college's development plan. The balance between men and women holding senior posts is more even than at the time of the previous inspection. The award of Investor in People status acknowledges the college's good practices in management of staff. The administrative, technical and clerical staff provide good service to support students' learning and to assist the day-to-day running of the college.

109. The accommodation is satisfactory overall to meet the learning needs of students. The current building programme has produced considerable improvements since the time of the previous report and helps to provide a good environment for learning. Most subjects now have good accommodation that encourages good teaching and learning. Teachers make good use of informative displays in many rooms, particularly of students' work, to encourage students to work well. Work now in progress is intended to provide much needed improvement to students' toilet facilities. Future plans include necessary improvement of the accommodation for the learning support department and for physical education. The all-weather pitch currently has several hazardous features requiring urgent attention. The governors are, appropriately, considering the provision of a lift to give access to the three-storey block for students using wheelchairs. Other plans for building improvements include, appropriately, the provision of additional dining facilities and better library and study facilities for the sixth form. The programme of building improvement is being managed very well so that disruption of teaching and learning is kept to the minimum.

110. The quality and range of learning resources are adequate to meet the needs of the curriculum. Only in science, which is otherwise resourced well, does a lack of equipment hinder the teaching of required parts of the syllabus, in this case data logging. The college has an appropriate number of computers to meet most needs and is introducing inter-active whiteboards to support teaching and learning. Music has insufficient access to computers. The modern languages department requires investment to develop course materials to help to raise standards. Both the indoor and outdoor resources used by the physical education department are deteriorating and require attention.

111. Although situated in good and attractive accommodation and professionally staffed, the library is not fully effective as a resource for learning overall. It has fewer than half the books usually found in a school of this size. Particularly, it lacks modern texts relevant to the information and research needs of senior students in several subjects. There is a good range of reference books for art and design. Students in Year 7 recorded good rates of borrowing

for the autumn term. However, rates of borrowing among older students are quite low. The use of the library outside of lessons is less than that observed in many schools. It is used well for teaching students who have special educational needs.

112. Taking into account students' achievement, the current quality of education provided, the social and economic backgrounds of students and the amount of money it receives, the college provides good value for money.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

113. Leadership and management in the sixth form are good. The aims and values of the sixth form reflect those of the whole school, emphasising equality of access and opportunity. Both the headteacher and the head of sixth form lead by example, setting high expectations and ensuring clear educational direction. The head of sixth form, with the strong and effective support of the headteacher and other senior staff, has developed good procedures for improving the quality of education. Standards are rising as a result of the college's successful attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13. The improved, and increasingly effective, use of assessment helps students to improve their work in most subjects. There is a strong and shared commitment among staff to raise attainment further. Students aim for success and personal fulfilment within a caring and supportive community.

114. The governors are well informed about curricular developments in the sixth form. Development planning to support the work of the sixth form is good. The number of students staying on to the sixth form from Year 11 has increased steadily over recent years. Planning places a suitable emphasis on raising students' attainment. The good improvement in A-level and AS-level results in 2002 indicates that the plans are working successfully. Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning through departmental reviews is helping to raise standards. However, this is not entirely successful in sharing good practice quickly across all departments. A few students are beginning to benefit from the support of the recently appointed mentor in the sixth form.

115. The head of sixth form and the good team of tutors know clearly the strengths of the sixth form and areas for improvement. They provide good pastoral support for students. Assessment information is now available to track students' progress and to check the value added in the sixth form. Although the use of assessment to raise standards and to set suitably challenging targets for academic development is improving, its use is inconsistent across subjects. The close monitoring of attendance by pastoral staff assists the continuity of students' learning and helps them to make good progress. The current priorities for improvement are appropriate. Apart from raising standards on advanced courses, they include the provision of more vocational courses for students of all levels of attainment and a wider range of more appropriate courses for students of below average attainment. A large minority of students do not continue their studies into Year 13. The range of students' attainment is wide and is not fully covered by the provision of mostly AS-level courses in Year 12. The college rightly recognises that a number of students who performed well to attain five or more grades A*-C in GCSE examinations have found the transition to studying at A/AS-level very difficult. Students receive a short session on study skills as part of their induction into the sixth form. However, this is not reinforced and developed by teachers in a few subjects. As a result, students do not develop a full range of independent learning skills.

Resources

116. The college makes good and efficient use of its good staffing and adequate resources and accommodation for the teaching of courses in Years 12 and 13. Resources available for learning in the sixth form are of similar quality to those in the rest of the college. Provision and access to ICT are satisfactory and support students' learning in many subjects. The accommodation available to sixth formers is satisfactory, with several parts, as in the new and refurbished buildings, of good quality. However, the resources available for sixth formers in the library are not as good as those found in many other schools. Teachers have good qualifications for the sixth-form courses they teach and use their expertise well to encourage students to achieve well. Governors have a good overview of financial affairs. They plan spending in accordance with realistic budgetary information. They assess priorities suitably before taking decisions about spending. The sixth form is cost-effective in relation to the college's expenditure as a whole.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

117. In order to raise standards and to make further improvements to the quality of education, the college should include the following key issues in its action plan.

- (1) Make further improvements to the overall quality of teaching and learning by:
 - removing the amount of unsatisfactory teaching;
 - encouraging teachers to use a wider range of teaching methods so that students have more opportunities to think for themselves and to develop their skills of independent learning;
 - making the most effective use of time available for teaching;
 - maintaining efforts to recruit and retain sufficient, suitably qualified teachers.(Paragraphs: 13, 26, 34, 38, 39, 100, 104, 108, 182, 188, 197, 230)
- (2) Increase access to ICT and provide sufficient opportunities for students to use their good skills in ICT to enrich their learning in all subjects.
(Paragraphs: 12, 34, 45, 100, 140, 145, 177, 191)
- (3) Improve the provision of resources for learning in the library.
(Paragraphs: 10, 56, 111, 134, 141)
- (4) Ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 receive their full entitlement to physical education, particularly the practical activities.
(Paragraphs: 23, 34, 122, 205)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Deal with the items of health and safety reported to the college during the inspection.
(Paragraphs: 77, 109, 208, 209)
- Ensure the full reporting of provision for special educational needs in the governors' annual report to parents and in the college prospectus.
(Paragraphs: 94, 103)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve results in external examinations in the sixth form in mathematics, chemistry and physical education so that they represent the satisfactory or better achievement observed in current classes in Years 12 and 13.
(Paragraphs: 17, 46, 211, 214, 236)
- (2) Improve the rate of retention of students on courses in the sixth form by:
 - providing a wider range of courses to meet more fully the needs of students of below average attainment;
 - improving the quality of information and guidance for students on entry to Year 12.(Paragraphs: 15, 31, 69, 218, 224, 229, 235, 247)
- (3) Provide more opportunities for students to develop their skills of independent learning so that they are not too reliant on the subject teacher by:
 - using a wider range of teaching methods in Years 12 and 13 to encourage students to participate actively and to think for themselves;
 - making more consistently good use of assessment so that students have challenging and realistic targets for improvement and are aware of how well they are doing;
 - improving provision in the library;
 - increasing access to ICT.(Paragraphs: 20, 30, 50, 51, 86, 88, 115, 116, 212, 217, 219, 222, 226, 231, 233, 237, 240, 241, 253, 256)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	135
	Sixth form	46
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		78

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 – 11

Number	5	37	65	23	5	0	0
Percentage	4	27	48	17	4	0	0

Sixth form

Number	1	12	23	10	0	0	0
Percentage	2	26	50	22	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	941	137
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	134	1

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	22	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	181	0

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	28

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	17

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	99	95	194

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	70	69
	Girls	84	78	75
	Total	145	148	144
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (68)	76 (75)	74 (82)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (31)	49 (43)	36 (45)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65	72	69
	Girls	82	80	70
	Total	147	152	139
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (75)	79 (77)	72 (76)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42 (33)	47 (49)	31 (44)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	93	87	180

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	39	92	93
	Girls	50	87	87
	Total	89	179	180
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	49 (52)	99 (97)	100 (98)
	National	50 (48)	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	42 (42)
	National	40 (39)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	30	25	55
	Average point score per candidate	197	226	210
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	30	25	55	1	1	2
	Average point score per candidate	197	226	210	60	80	70
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

* National comparative data for A/AS-level results in 2002 are not yet available.

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	1032	94	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	17	2	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	57.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	93

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.2
Key Stage 4	22.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3 226 455
Total expenditure	3 194 962
Expenditure per pupil	2 953
Balance brought forward from previous year	862 888
Balance carried forward to next year	894 381

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	27.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1078
Number of questionnaires returned	479

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	56	7	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	45	50	5	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	51	6	2	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	54	13	2	1
The teaching is good.	39	53	5	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	50	14	6	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	42	6	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	35	1	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	24	53	16	5	2
The school is well led and managed.	40	51	5	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	50	4	2	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	49	8	2	3

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Good teaching enables students to achieve well.
- Students make good progress because of their positive attitudes in lessons.
- Good leadership has led to improved teaching since the previous inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Speaking and listening activities, especially in drama, are limited in range.
- Teachers do not always show students models of excellence to guide them.

118. Students enter the college with average levels of attainment in English. Results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 are above the national average. They represent good achievement. By Year 11, students make good further gains in learning. GCSE results and current work indicate good achievement compared with students' levels of attainment when they began Year 10. Students with learning difficulties and those whose first language is not English achieve as well as others.

119. In National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002, results were above the national average. They were well above average compared with results gained by similar schools. These results indicated good achievement for students of all levels of attainment, compared with their performance in the national tests taken at the end of Year 6. The results were better than those achieved in mathematics and similar to those in science. Over the past three years, boys have performed less well than girls, as they do nationally. However, the gap between their performances has been wider than the national difference. Girls' results have been well above the national average for girls. Results for boys have been slightly above the national average for boys. Over this period, results overall in English have improved more rapidly than nationally.

120. GCSE results in 2002 for English were just below the national average. Results for girls were slightly above the national average for girls. Those for boys were slightly below the national average for boys. GCSE results in English literature were very high, both for girls and for boys, compared with their respective national averages. However, only two thirds of all students were entered for English literature. Results in English over recent years have usually been above the national average. In 2002, students' results in English were similar to those that they attained in most other subjects.

121. In work seen in Years 7 to 11, attainment is above average. In Years 7 to 9, students answer questions in class readily and in suitable detail. They express themselves clearly when talking to teachers and listen to others carefully. When discussing topics in groups, they are not so assured. In a lively Year 7 lesson on Ted Hughes's poem, *Sheep*, students gave prompt and sensible answers to the class teacher's questions. When writing answers to a list of questions, they were tentative about consulting with partners. In Years 10 and 11, students express themselves well in a variety of situations. In a good Year 10 lesson, students worked well in small groups discussing Gothic elements in H G Wells's story, *The Red Room*.

122. In all years, students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those with learning difficulties, read a variety of materials with good understanding. When given the opportunity, students read aloud clearly and with good expression. Students in Years 7 to 9 have a good understanding of stories, plays and poetry, as seen in Year 8 students' very good understanding of Robert Swindell's challenging novel, *Abomination* and in their lively work on Ted Hughes's poem, *View of a Pig*. Teachers encourage private reading but many students find the library unappealing and make only occasional visits. Students in Years 10 and 11 show good understanding of plays such as J B Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*. Their writing on texts as diverse as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Mildred Taylor's novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, indicates very good appreciation of character. They read poetry sensitively, as seen in their writing as characters in Robert Browning's narrative poem, *Porphyria's Lover*.

123. The highest-attaining students in Years 7 to 9 organise their writing well. They write fluently, showing a good range of expression. They make good use of ICT to prepare occasional pieces of work. Students of all levels of attainment present their writing very well. They make good use of their drafting books to plan and revise writing. They look after their exercise books carefully and take a pride in their written work. Year 8 students produced good imaginative accounts of time travel in Egypt. Lower-attaining students write more accurately than might be expected, although the spelling of boys, in particular, is weak. In Years 10 and 11, higher-attaining students write with good control of tone, for example, in letters. Lower-attaining students write vivid description and good persuasive letters. Students make less use of word processing to enhance their work than seen in many schools, but students make very good use of drafting to improve their written assignments.

124. Students in Years 7 to 9 behave very well in English lessons. They are co-operative, helpful and relate very well to their teachers. In many lessons, they are enthusiastic about their work and keen to do well. In Years 10 and 11, students are well behaved. Lower-attaining students, in particular, are very positive about their learning and work hard. This helps to explain why all students achieve A*-G grades in GCSE English examinations.

125. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers enjoy their lessons and have very good relationships with students. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject, which helps them to plan lessons that have appropriate levels of difficulty and challenge. They give students of all levels of attainment stimulating lessons that offer good balance between language and literature. Teachers encourage students to make good progress by writing clearly on the whiteboard what they are expected to learn in most lessons. Learning is then good because students know what is expected of them. In a good Year 7 lesson on Don Taylor's play, *The Roses of Eyam*, students realised from the outset that they were to explore character through role-play. Knowing this, they worked productively and focused well on the set tasks. Occasionally, however, the teacher's explanation of the work to be done is too vague to produce the very best learning. Teachers give prominence to literacy in all lessons through good focus on vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. Teachers try to ensure that students enjoy their learning through the selection of appealing texts and activities. However, they give students insufficient opportunities for independent speaking and listening. Too few lessons include discussion in small groups. When such discussion does take place, questions that encourage good feedback to the class are seldom evident. Teachers do not always give students clear indications of what is required to produce the highest quality of work, such as models of excellence or criteria for success. Marking of good quality assists students greatly to improve their writing, although wider use of national levels and grades would make it easier to judge progress against national standards.

126. The good teaching of literacy across subjects helps students to improve their skills in reading and writing. The college's literacy policy has a positive effect on teaching across the curriculum. Students benefit from reading aloud in science and geography. In all subjects, teachers ensure that students learn the meaning and correct spelling of important vocabulary. They provide good support for students' writing in many subjects and show students how to construct their written work and present it well. In mathematics, art and design, geography and design and technology, the careful marking of students' work for spelling and punctuation assists good learning.

127. Good leadership of the department has resulted in good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards are rising, particularly in Years 7 to 9, and the quality of teaching has improved. Teachers work very well together and share responsibilities. They revise continuously the programmes of lessons for students in Years 7 to 9 to give a balanced provision. They provide good coverage of the National Curriculum and national literacy strategies. However, the absence of separate lessons in drama narrows the overall curriculum.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching leads to very good learning.
- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to set high expectations.
- The quantity and quality of students' written record of work are very good.
- Very good leadership and management of the department help students to improve.

Areas for improvement

- Students have few opportunities to use ICT to support work in mathematics.
- Links between students' work and national levels and GCSE targets are not always clear.

128. In 2002, results in national tests at the end of Year 9 matched the national average. They were well above the average for similar schools. Girls performed better than boys. Results were slightly below those in English and science. Students' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the college was good. Results are improving at the same rate as the national improvement.

129. GCSE results at grades A*-C in 2002 were well above the national average and the average for similar schools. An above average proportion of students attained the highest grades A* and A. All students attained a GCSE pass at grades A*-G. Girls and boys attained similar results. GCSE results in mathematics were higher than those in English and science. Students attained higher GCSE grades in mathematics than in most of the other subjects they sat. Comparing students' GCSE results with their performances in national tests at the end of Year 9, achievement was good.

130. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are now well above average. They represent very good achievement in relation to students' attainment on entry. Higher-attaining students have very good numerical skills. They understand, for example, how to use ratio to calculate the corresponding sides of similar triangles. Average-attaining students investigate critically the misrepresentation of information. Lower-attaining students solve simple linear equations by applying previously taught rules of algebra and checking answers by substitution. Use and application of mathematics are very good. Teachers provide much challenging work for students to investigate. For example, Year 7 students determine the function for a sequence of numbers. Opportunities for estimating are infrequent. A few students rely too much on the

use of the calculator. Students with special educational needs and the few for whom English is an additional language make very good progress, similarly to their peers.

131. Standards of work seen in Year 11 are well above average. They represent very good achievement for students of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Higher-attaining students have completed their GCSE course. They make competent use of the sine and cosine formulae when reviewing irregular triangles. Average-attaining students factorise and solve quadratic equations well. Lower-attaining students draw the graphs of simple quadratic functions, labelling all the parts accurately. Overall, the quantity and quality of recorded work by students are very good. Students record key words and statements, as well as clear examples and full exercises, neatly. Their good care for presentation and accuracy support learning and revision well.

132. Students develop their numeracy skills well through mental 'warm-up' sessions at the start of mathematics lessons in Years 7 to 9. Additional support teaching helps the lowest-attaining Year 7 students to make good progress in numeracy. Many other subjects contribute to students' numeracy skills through a good focus on handling data, computation and measuring. In geography, students' read scales, apply measuring techniques and interpret collected data. In design and technology, accurate measuring leads to products of high quality. In ICT, the planned programme develops number skills and overall learning with students making good use of key words and formulae. In science, Year 7 students make very good use of data, interpreting the correlation between variables on a scatter diagram and producing lines of best fit. As a result, students' performance in national tests is improving and the teaching of numeracy skills is good across subjects.

133. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers use their very good knowledge and understanding of the subject to motivate students' achievement. Planning is good and expectations are very high. However, teachers are inconsistent in the use of National Curriculum levels or GCSE targets to show students how their performance measures up to national standards. Teachers control and manage the classes very well as students progress from one task to the next. They make good use of available resources that are of a high quality. Very good use of time keeps the pace of lessons brisk so that students complete a considerable amount of work. Students' very good attitudes and behaviour and their hard work contribute well to their very good achievement. Good directed questions enable students to explain and confirm their thinking. However, opportunities to work in groups and come to the whiteboard are infrequent. Teachers make very good use of the latest technology to support learning. Opportunities for students to use ICT are included in the scheme of work. Teachers set homework regularly, as a continuation of classwork, though there is rarely extension work for the gifted and talented students. Marking is consistent and up to date with appropriate notes to support learning.

134. Very good leadership and management are well informed and provide clear educational direction. As a result, improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The department has raised standards. Issues raised in the previous inspection have been addressed. Departmental documentation is excellent. Procedures for assessment are well established. Analysis of national and college data to guide curricular planning is very good. The quality of information provided in reports to students is good. The frequent and regular monitoring of teaching ensures consistency in record keeping, marking and presentation. The subject staff work very well together and are committed to raising standards further. Displays of students' work in classrooms and adjacent corridors are very good making for a pleasant working environment. The library has insufficient books about mathematics to support research and reading for pleasure, particularly for the lower-attaining students.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 represented very good achievement.
- Good teaching helps students to make at least good progress in most lessons.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students assist learning.
- Students' very positive attitudes and pride in their work contribute well to achievement in science.

Areas for improvement

- The use of computers to support learning has improved, but requires further development.
- A small amount of teaching does not encourage students to be actively involved in lessons.
- Some accommodation has yet to be refurbished.

135. On entry to the college in Year 7, students' standards in science are average. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002, results were above average. Compared with students' attainment on entry, and with the performance of similar schools, these results represent very good achievement for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Girls performed better than boys, although there have been no consistent differences between girls' results and those of boys in the last five years. Results in science were similar to those in English and better than those in mathematics.

136. In 2002, GCSE results at grades A*-C matched the national average. The proportion of students attaining grades A*-G was above average. Boys performed better than girls in the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics. Girls' results were better than those of boys in the dual-award science course. Students' results in the separate science subjects were better than those they gained in most other subjects. Students taking the dual award course did not perform quite as well as they did in many of their other subjects. Compared with their results in the national tests in Year 9, achievement in the GCSE science examinations was good for students of all levels of attainment.

137. In work seen, standards are well above average in Years 7 to 9, and above average in Years 10 and 11. Students acquire a good knowledge and understanding of all the attainment targets of the National Curriculum. Teachers are aware of the levels of work previously attained in primary schools, so students receive work of suitable challenge and difficulty from early in Year 7. Students learn very good working habits from the start, for example, in the presentation of written work. They know the value of well-labelled diagrams to represent scientific principles. In a good Year 7 lesson, a group of higher-attaining students tested a variety of metals to compare their electrical and magnetic properties. They organised the work logically, co-operated well in pairs and recorded their results methodically. Lower-attaining students enjoy practical activities and work well in class and in small groups. They were surprised and interested to discover that the current is the same in all parts of a series circuit. By Year 9, higher-attaining students relate the transfer of energy by conduction and convection to the movement of particles. Lower-attaining students participated well in a lesson about the structure of the lungs and increased their knowledge of the topic. Higher-attaining students in the class explained the difference between breathing and respiration. By Year 11, higher-attaining students explain the meaning of dominant and recessive genes and understand how it is possible for brown-eyed parents to have a blue-eyed child. Most lower-attaining students perform well, as seen when they made good progress in a lesson about the uses of yeast and its optimum working temperature.

138. Students' work improves well as they move through the college. There are a number of reasons for this. The scheme of work, particularly in Years 7 to 9, makes good provision for students' progression. It provides very good support for teachers in the planning of their work. Students' very positive attitudes to their work and very good working relationships with teachers assist their progress. Only a small minority of students fail to make use of the good opportunities to learn. Students with special educational needs make very good progress because teachers know them and their targets for learning very well. Teachers monitor the standards of these students regularly and closely and set work of appropriate difficulty, relevance and interest. Gifted students make very good progress. They receive work that challenges them to think. In the large majority of lessons, extension exercises are available, although a few students are occasionally reluctant to undertake more advanced work than their peers.

139. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 7 to 9. It is good in Years 10 and 11. Much of the teaching observed was very good, in spite of the college's difficulty in finding suitably qualified teachers to replace the two science teachers who were absent during the week of the inspection. The strength of teaching lies in the teachers' professional approach, their willingness to learn, and their desire to improve. The planning of lessons and activities is very thorough. In an excellent lesson in Year 9 about different foods, for example, the teacher's input was kept to a minimum and students benefited from numerous activities to consolidate their understanding. Very good liaison between teachers and the technicians makes an important contribution to the work of the department. Teachers use their very good knowledge and understanding of the subject to provide interesting background information to increase students' interest. They also use a range of stimulating starter activities, often designed to reinforce key points from the previous lesson. They respond knowledgeably to students' queries. One area for improvement in teaching is to encourage students to ask more questions. The management of students is very good in Years 7 to 9, but not quite as confident and relaxed in Years 10 and 11. Most teachers understand clearly the value of praise in encouraging students to participate in lessons. The exercises set in lessons often include more challenging questions for the higher-attaining students. Teachers set homework regularly. Homework does not always take account of the different levels of attainment in the class, and can therefore lack interest.

140. The teachers in science have responded positively to the national strategy for students' learning in Years 7 to 9. Good practice helps to develop students' literacy skills. Teachers make good use of regular displays of key words during the lesson, and consolidate students' understanding of these in the summary at the end of the lesson. They encourage students to pronounce new words and to write their answers in full sentences. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to produce extended writing, for instance, in the excellent programme of activities used towards the end of Year 9 that develops investigational skills and promotes links with local industry. The department makes a good contribution to the development of numeracy. Students draw and interpret line graphs frequently from Year 7 onwards. They often use formulae, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The use of ICT is not as well developed, in spite of the computers sited in one of the laboratories. Improvement since the previous inspection in the use of ICT has therefore been only satisfactory. The shortage of laptop computers and data loggers means that the use of ICT to promote learning remains a departmental priority for development.

141. The leadership and management of the department are good. Because of very good teamwork, and the mutual support of teachers and technicians, the department operated well during the inspection, in spite of the absence of the head of department. The planning of the science curriculum is good. However, the allocation of time in Years 10 and 11 is insufficient to allow enough enrichment and extension activities on the dual-award GCSE course. The

monitoring of the work of the department is good, although there are a few inconsistencies, for instance in the frequency and quality of marking. The departmental plan for improvement has insufficient information about the costs of priorities, the timescale for their implementation, and the name of the person responsible for promoting each of the activities. The general quality of resources, other than for ICT, is good. However, students do not receive textbooks and there are insufficient books in the library. The quality of display of students' work is very impressive in the science rooms and adds to students' interest.

142. Since the previous inspection, the science department has made good progress. Teaching has improved considerably, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Students are now achieving well. Monitoring of the work of the department has improved and includes the accountability of teachers for examination results.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Good teaching leads to good learning and achievement.
- Good displays of students' work in art rooms provide many good examples for students to follow.

Areas for improvement

- Students have too few opportunities to produce large-scale work.

143. Standards by Year 9 are currently average. They represent good achievement from students' below average levels of attainment in art and design on entry to the college. By Year 11, standards are average, indicating good achievement from the end of Year 9 across a wider range of topics than studied previously.

144. Teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 in 2002 showed attainment was below average. GCSE results at grades A*-C in 2002 were above the national average. Students attained higher GCSE grades in art and design than they did in almost all the other subjects that they sat. The results are an improvement on the good results of the previous three years, and represent good achievement.

145. In work seen in Years 7 to 9, students' drawings and paintings are of an average standard. They show observed images with reasonable accuracy of detail and tone. Students work in a good range of media in two and three dimensions, including papier-mâché modelling and ceramics, to produce attractive, brightly coloured objects such as Indian masks and exotic birds. Students adapt and refine their work well to reflect their own view of its purpose and meaning. Knowledge of representative artists such as Blossfeldt and Hundertwasser is satisfactory. Students make little use of ICT to scan digital images and manipulate them.

146. In Years 10 and 11, units of work for GCSE show that students have made satisfactory gains in knowledge and understanding of drawing and painting. They have a good awareness of the properties of a wider variety of media in two and three dimensions. Work is mostly on a small scale. Students have insufficient opportunities to produce large-scale projects. Students use ICT well for research, scanning images and, at times, for word processing. They present contextual studies of subjects such as Art Nouveau and Cubism well. Visits to the Lowry Gallery have been influential and productive in students' learning.

147. The quality of teaching is good throughout Years 7 to 11. Teachers use their very good knowledge and skills in art and design to support students' learning. For example, they show how pieces of clay can be joined together well by scoring the surfaces, coating them with slip, (a sort of clay glue), then putting them together. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their skills in literacy. They often present students with a variety of ingenious word games at the start of lessons that focus on the key vocabulary of the subject. Teachers encourage students to use their mathematical skills in making careful measurements and estimates of sizes and quantities. Students make good progress in most lessons because planning is good, reinforcement of ideas is thorough, and sufficient time is allowed for ideas and skills to be developed. Teachers use a good variety of methods to help students to maintain concentration and interest. They manage classes, which are often quite large, well.

148. The quality of learning is good in Years 7 to 11. Students of all levels of attainment and different ethnic backgrounds acquire good skills, knowledge and understanding in art and design and make good creative efforts. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, students worked productively to decorate their card and papier-mâché Gaudi buildings and made excellent progress. The buildings acquired colour and texture and looked really attractive. In this group, the high proportion of students with special educational needs receive good support and are achieving well over time. In other classes, students with learning difficulties make similar progress to that of other students. Talented students make good progress in all years. They carry out extension tasks when their capabilities enable them to complete work more quickly than their peers. Students' good behaviour and positive attitudes contribute well to their good achievement. In Years 10 and 11, there is a good take up for the GCSE course in art and design.

149. The inspection took place in the context of a temporarily absent head of department. The assistant in the department has taken over leadership and management of the department meanwhile. A newly qualified teacher has been appointed as assistant. These arrangements have worked well and ensured that continuity of students' learning has been maintained very well. The department's good and clear documentation enables all aspects of the curriculum to be taught well.

150. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards have risen and are average. The two key areas of teaching and achievement have improved from satisfactory to good.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Good planning and implementation have established the subject well.
- Good teaching promotes students' good achievement in citizenship skills and understanding.
- Citizenship makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Schemes of work lack sufficient information about assessment and levels of attainment.

151. Standards of attainment are average by Year 9 and by Year 11. As they have not studied citizenship in their previous schools, students' current attainment represents good achievement overall.

152. Students in Years 7 to 11 study citizenship within a wide range of subjects and in the personal social education and pastoral programmes. Students learn much about citizenship through good work in lessons in history, geography, religious education, design and technology, science and music and expressive arts. The good programme of extra-curricular activities and links with the community and outside agencies help students to develop various aspects of citizenship in a practical way. Participation in year councils and the student council provide useful experience for students to operate and participate in representation and election. Students' work in these activities has a positive effect on the life of the college.

153. As the programme for citizenship started only eighteen months ago, students' accumulated experience is limited. However, good teaching and students' enthusiastic attitudes, lead to good learning. Students consider difficult and challenging moral and ethical issues. They learn about and discuss topics such as gender, fear, war, energy reserves, the environment, personal freedom and responsibility, political systems and their outcomes. They develop skills of making judgements from categorising and prioritising evidence. Students discuss, negotiate and debate. They learn to appreciate opinions, traditions and cultures that differ from their own. In history, students in Year 7 learnt about the importance of national identity and how occupation and loss of territory threaten it. Through lively discussion, students in Year 9 identified the values and qualities likely to ensure enduring relationships. In a Year 10 lesson, they worked productively with the challenging and topical problem of the difference between, and the effects of, liberation and repression. Through the skilful guidance of the teacher, they came to realise that rules can be both protective of the people and a threat to their freedom.

154. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout Years 7 to 11. The good planning of lessons about citizenship through other subjects helps students to improve their work in both subjects at the same time. Students are very interested in the different and contrasting tasks, with tight deadlines for completion. Teachers help students' to gain a good understanding of topics through competent use of probing questioning and requiring students to give suitably detailed reasons for their views. In group activities, students with special educational needs have good support from staff and from other students that enables them to make similar progress to that of other students. Suitably difficult and challenging tasks and activities provide good extension opportunities for gifted and talented students that assist their good progress in the subject.

155. Citizenship makes a valuable contribution to students' personal development, particularly in developing their social skills and in making them aware of cultural diversity within and outside this country. Students improve their speaking and presentational skills through the requirement for students to present reasoned judgements and to evaluate the decisions of others.

156. Students keep records of citizenship issues that they have studied. They transfer these to their citizenship log in tutor periods. At present, the college has not defined levels of attainment or the criteria and systems to assess them. Accordingly, students do not have a clear understanding of how well they are doing.

157. The leadership and management of citizenship are good. In a short time the subject has been introduced well and meets statutory requirements. The good policy for citizenship links well with the overall aims of the college and the local community. The co-ordinator and teaching staff have had appropriate training. Citizenship was not taught at the time of the previous inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Good teaching is now enabling students to learn well.
- Good leadership and management provide clear educational direction for the subject.
- Students' positive attitudes, behaviour and very good attendance assist good progress in lessons.

Area for improvement

- A few boys are underachieving in graphics in Years 10 and 11.
- ICT facilities are currently insufficient for students to enrich their learning in Years 7 to 9.

158. Students enter the college with standards slightly below average in this subject. By the end of Year 9, standards have improved and are above average. They indicate good achievement for students of all levels of attainment. In all areas of design and technology, students develop their graphical skills and their knowledge and understanding of materials. They use both hand and electrical tools and equipment competently and confidently. Students of all ethnic backgrounds are beginning to develop a good range of theoretical and practical skills. Higher, middle and lower attainers are making good progress. Students with special educational needs achieve well and benefit from the good help that they receive from the learning support assistants. Teachers' assessments of students' National Curriculum levels in 2001 were too high and not a true reflection of the students' capabilities. In 2002, they were more realistic. Girls attain higher standards than boys.

159. By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is average and indicates satisfactory achievement. Recent GCSE results have matched the national average in electronics, food technology and graphics and were below average in resistant materials. Results in 2002 were an improvement on those in 2001. Girls gained more A*-C grades than the boys. The proportion of GCSE A*-C grades was slightly above average. In 2002, students attained very slightly lower GCSE grades in design and technology than they did in most other subjects that they sat.

160. The new schemes of work, introduced in September 2002, are enabling students to develop a wide range of skills. These skills now show good progression over Years 7 to 9. In Year 7, students improve their skills in cutting and shaping materials, in work in electronics and resistant materials. They are developing their chosen ideas for a flashing cartoon character and picture frames with accuracy and flair. Students in Year 8 increase their knowledge of fabric finishes through making Batik clocks. A few, mainly boys, have difficulty in developing a range of ideas. Year 9 students use a wide range of design and technology skills to design and plan kitchens well. They develop plastic desk tidies and make electronic moisture testers for plants. Students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment produce work of good quality as a result of the expert guidance and help they receive from teachers. Students with special educational needs acquire good practical skills, but their folder work often lacks detail and depth. Not all of their design ideas are successful, but appropriate modifications help them to achieve successful outcomes.

161. The progress of students in Years 10 and 11, when they were in Years 7 to 9, was affected adversely by difficulties in staff recruitment. However, the new team of teachers are working hard to help these students to raise their achievement. Currently, standards in lessons are average overall. In many practical activities, standards are above average. In a Year 10 food technology lesson, students had a good understanding of the requirements of food packaging. They were well aware of environmental factors that affect designs. However, their oral answers indicated a lack of depth in their knowledge. A graphics group designing promotional material explored successfully a range of ideas suitable for children's books,

cafes and board games. However, students do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to extend and enrich their work in graphics. Students in Years 10 and 11 receive very good teaching of a wide range of practical skills in resistant materials. In Year 10, they use wooden moulds to shape acrylic mobile phones. For their coursework in Year 11, students produce storage units of good quality in wood, plastic and metal. The quality of their folder work is weaker than their practical work. The current teacher has only taught students in Year 11 since September 2002. Students are making very good progress with their practical skills. The achievement of the group taking electronics is good. All students have virtually completed their circuits. Their folder work is of a good standard. Predicted grades for electronics are realistic and are above the national average. Within projects, students use ICT well, either at home or in college, when the college's facilities are available. Higher-attaining students in food technology and graphics in Year 11 make good progress, especially with their folder work. However, several boys taking graphics are underachieving. Their teacher, who has been in post since January 2003, is helping these students to make faster progress by monitoring their work closely to identify shortcomings and showing them how to improve their work.

162. Teaching and learning are good throughout Years 7 to 11. The new teachers have had a positive effect on learning. Thorough planning of a range of interesting activities helps students to make good progress and supports good continuity of learning. Teachers' very good skills in the subject enable them to teach well in more than one material area. All have high expectations, demand high standards and give freely of their time to help students to complete tasks. The teachers work well as a team, share ideas, successes and failures and moderate their work continually to help students to achieve well. They have the confidence to allow students to develop a range of ideas. Though marking and assessment are thorough, target setting to improve work is not consistent across the department. In all years, teachers place a great emphasis on the development of good literacy skills and the development of specific technical vocabulary. The teaching of numeracy is good. Successful practical activities are often due to the very careful measuring expected by the teachers. Very occasionally, planning doesn't always maximise the time available and teachers give too much guidance, so that students do not engage in independent learning. From Year 7, students learn well how to use a range of equipment safely. They develop good research skills because teachers focus students' research on relevant areas. Analysis and evaluation of their ideas help students to develop one good area well. In electronics, they are competent in carrying out very intricate work. They develop very good manipulative skills and have good powers of concentration. Students' varied range of experiences of the subject in the primary schools often means that graphical skills are not well developed. Presentation of work, especially that of boys is not always as good as it should be.

163. The good behaviour and very good attitudes to work of the students make a very good contribution to their progress in lessons. Students are keen, interested, enjoy being challenged and are well motivated. The older students are keen to work after the end of the college day to complete their projects. Very good attendance assists the continuity of learning and coursework. Very occasionally there is off-task chatter and immature behaviour in a lesson, but the teachers are quick to deal with these well.

164. Leadership and management of the department are good. In the short time that the teachers have been in post, they have developed good, progressive schemes of work and established a workable assessment scheme for Years 7 to 9. Standards are improving. Staff use the available resources well to support students' learning. Suitable priorities for improvement have been identified in the departmental action plan. Good displays of students' work of high quality motivate students to do well.

165. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. GCSE results now match the national average. There is a full complement of suitably qualified teachers. Teaching is now good. Time for teaching the subject has increased and is appropriate. There is still the need to update and repair existing ICT hardware and other resources. Assessment in Year 10 and 11 does not target students' work clearly enough.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average by Year 9 and at GCSE and indicate very good achievement.
- Very good teaching motivates students and encourages them to think for themselves.
- Excellent leadership and management of the department ensure that students achieve very well.
- Fieldwork of high quality enables students to produce very good GCSE coursework.

Area for improvement

- There is no major area for development.

166. Standards, as indicated by teachers' assessments are well above average by the end of Year 9. In 2002, for the third successive year, teachers' assessments indicated well above average standards both for boys and for girls. They represent very good achievement. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average and indicated very good achievement for students of all levels of attainment. Students, especially boys, achieved higher grades in geography than in most of the other subjects they took.

167. In work seen in Years 7 to 9, students' attainment is well above average. The achievement of students of different ethnic backgrounds and all levels of attainment, including those with learning difficulties, is very good. Students in Year 7 have very good skills in reading maps. They use scales and measure distances accurately. Students use specialist vocabulary well and, for example, distinguish clearly between weather and climate. Lower-attaining students in Year 9, including those with special educational needs, have a good understanding of the social and cultural differences of countries that are more and less economically developed. They explain the principles of healthy eating and know the contributory causes of malnutrition and obesity. In a Year 9 lesson, students worked very well in groups to share resources. They delegated tasks and took decisions that gave them a deeper understanding of the principles of fair trade.

168. In work seen in Years 10 and 11, students' attainment is well above average. Students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment achieve very well. In Year 10, students identify confidently and label accurately the physical features of rivers on maps and photographs. They consider the advantages and disadvantages of different schemes of river management and reach logical conclusions. Lower-attaining students are less confident about explaining their decisions in detail. Fieldwork of high quality stimulates students' interest in the subject. They make skilful use of the extensive information they collect to produce very good coursework. In Year 11, students select relevant information from a variety of sources very well. They tabulate this concisely and accurately.

169. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject, a variety of attractive resources and a wide range of teaching methods to interest the students. They set challenging and difficult tasks, which require students to think for themselves. They ask

probing questions to which students respond very well. Teachers use their very good understanding of the requirements of the examination syllabus to help students to succeed. The teaching of skills in literacy and numeracy is very good. As a result, students' basic skills improve rapidly. Teachers mark work rigorously. They give very good support and guidance that help students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment to achieve very well. Students have trust and confidence in their teachers, work hard and behave well. Accordingly, they learn readily. Students' very positive attitudes and very good behaviour and attendance make an important contribution to their very good achievement. The department is currently developing ways of increasing students' knowledge of what they need to do to reach even higher levels of attainment in Years 7 to 9.

170. Excellent leadership and management of the department have resulted in a very good improvement in GCSE results. There is a clear overview of the work to be done. Appropriate priorities for development are set that match those of the whole college. Teachers receive good training to keep them up-to-date with developments in the teaching of geography. Close monitoring of teaching and learning ensures the spread of very good practice. Rigorous evaluation of the departments' performance helps to ensure that students continue to achieve very well.

171. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Students and teachers make increased use of ICT to support learning. Teachers take care to match tasks to the needs of individual students. Teachers now use a wider range of teaching methods to engage students' interest. Staff in the geography department have a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to raise standards further.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Some outstanding teaching promotes very high standards and serves as a model for others.
- Students' achievement is good in all years.
- Good leadership and management have improved the quality of teaching and learning,

Areas for improvement

- Few students attain the highest GCSE grades.
- Procedures for assessment at the end of Year 9 lack consistency.

172. Currently, attainment in history by the end of Year 9 is above average. This represents good achievement for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including the few for whom English is an additional language. In 2002, teachers' assessments of students' work at the end of Year 9 indicated broadly average standards, though these assessments slightly underestimated students' attainment. Since the recently appointed subject leader took over during last year, methods of assessment have, appropriately, been made a priority for development.

173. All students make good improvements in their knowledge, understanding and skills after they join the college. The achievement is particularly good in historical skills, as these are weak in Year 7 and some consolidation is needed. In Year 9, most students have a good understanding of the nature of evidence and how historians work. Another good feature is the improvement in students' writing skills across these years. This enables them to communicate their historical ideas well. Higher-attaining students write well reasoned, extended explanations, for example, of the causes of the First World War and how

segregation occurred in the USA. Students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented progress as well as the others. However, there is a gap between the overall attainment of boys and girls. Girls do better than boys, but teachers' efforts to redress this are narrowing the gap.

174. Numbers of students taking GCSE in history have been too low to make meaningful comparisons with national averages. The proportion of students gaining A*-C grades doubled last year. However, students did less well in history than in the other subjects that they sat. Overall, boys' results were better than those of girls. Currently, attainment for students in Years 10 and 11 is average. Most students explain with some cogency and appropriate detail whether the First World War was responsible for the downfall of Nicholas II in Russia, and how the Weimar Republic recovered from hyperinflation. Achievement is good as a result of recent very good improvements in teaching and learning. Numbers have increased in Year 10. They are still low in Year 11 and there are few higher attainers.

175. The quality of teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. It is stronger in Years 10 and 11 where the expertise of the teaching and the suitable challenge lead to a fast pace of learning, and some outstanding teaching was seen. When teaching was of very high quality, it generated enthusiasm among the students. The department's style of teaching is one that encourages students to be actively involved and to think out problems for themselves. Tasks are structured carefully to ensure that students of all levels of attainment achieve some personal success. Behaviour was good in lessons observed in all years. Most students showed real interest in the work. In a Year 10 lesson, the use of pictures and maps gave a strong visual context for understanding the Bolshevik revolution. Students used maps of Petrograd to identify the strategic points and to plan how an effective coup might be achieved, before being faced with what happened. The methods made them perceptive and questioning, heightened their understanding and engendered high levels of enjoyment.

176. In an excellent lesson for a higher-attaining class in Year 9, students learned about the key events of the Cold War. The lesson challenged students to think and they responded with zest. Groups worked on different events such as the Berlin Airlift and Hungarian Uprising, identifying the 'how', 'why', 'what happened' and 'what were the consequences'. Then 'spokespersons' reported to the class. Orally these students were confident and fluent. The teacher then drew all the events together well to give a clear chronological overview. The provision for students' personal development is good, particularly for their social development, as a result of the many opportunities for independent and collaborative work.

177. Generally the starter activities worked very well, but the final reviews of learning were more inconsistent and did not always allow time for suitable reflection to draw out what had been learnt. The teaching of basic skills is good, particularly literacy which receives careful attention. The teaching of ICT skills is good for those classes that have ready access to the specialist rooms. For other classes, the development of ICT skills is slower because of little access to suitable facilities. Marking is encouraging and gives students manageable points for improvement. In a small number of lessons the activities did not work as well as in the best lessons because the explanations were not so clear. This meant that a few students were confused, for example, on understanding the differences between capitalism and communism.

178. Good leadership and management have enabled the history team to reinvigorate the subject in recent months. A high priority is now placed on raising standards. This is beginning to prove successful, particularly for boys. The vision is very clear. Rigorous monitoring is leading to a more consistently good or better quality of teaching and learning. The improvement since the previous inspection has been good, especially in view of some

turbulence in staffing since then. Local history is developing. Fieldwork is planned, including a visit to the First World War battlefields.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Resources for ICT have improved considerably since the previous inspection.
- Improvements in teaching and learning have raised students' achievement in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- Staffing difficulties have meant a lack of continuity in the teaching and management of ICT.
- Resources for ICT remain insufficient to ensure that all subjects have easy access to facilities.

179. Students enter the college with a wide range of levels of skill in using ICT. Overall, their attainment at the beginning of Year 7 is average. Teachers' assessments of students at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated that attainment in ICT was average and represented satisfactory achievement. GCSE results in information technology in 2002 were average and indicated satisfactory achievement. Girls' results were higher than those of boys. Students' GCSE grades in ICT were similar to those obtained in the other subjects that they took.

180. In work seen in Years 7 to 9, standards in ICT are average. By Year 9, students know how to access their own files and to save and print their work. They use software packages competently for word processing and desktop publishing. They make good use of databases and spreadsheets to process information. They are competent and confident users of the Internet to research topics. Higher-attaining students have a clear understanding of how to set up databases and make complex searches. Lower-attaining students display good technical skills but do not always complete their work thoroughly. In Year 9, many students have weaknesses in understanding the principles of computer-aided control, of moving robots and of data logging. In most lessons, students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress as they learn new skills and reinforce existing ones.

181. Currently, students in Year 11 have standards in ICT that are above average. These indicate good achievement for most boys and girls of all ethnic backgrounds. In Years 10 and 11, all students study GNVQ either at intermediate or foundation level. Standards of work on these courses are above average overall. By Year 11, students show enhanced skills in accessing and processing information using databases and spreadsheets. They produce animated presentations and web sites to high specifications. They learn about the moral and social implications of using ICT. Higher-attaining students have well-organised files and show a good understanding of the subject. Lower-attaining students produce printouts that require good technical skills. However, their work is sometimes incomplete and lacks clear explanations as to how they have obtained results.

182. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use their good knowledge and understanding of the subject to give students good advice about how to improve. In the lessons observed in which teaching was good or very good, teachers planned the lessons well to contain a wide variety of learning activities. They provided good support to assist students' development of literacy and numeracy skills. Students responded with enthusiasm

and produced good work. In these lessons, relationships between the teacher and the class were very good and students collaborated well with one another. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, in which students were producing a database about different countries, they researched the countries on the Internet, downloaded information and worked in groups to share their findings. They set up their databases and used them to display different aspects of the countries. In lessons in which teaching and learning were satisfactory, there were a few shortcomings. The teacher tended to dominate the work too much and planning did not take full account of students' interests so that the work failed to motivate all students. The small number of unsatisfactory lessons were a result of inadequate supply teaching. In these lessons, the lack of variety and pace meant that a few students became restless, lost concentration and their progress was slow.

183. Students are keen to learn and apply themselves diligently. They are interested and enthusiastic about the subject. They stay focused on tasks set, work independently when given the opportunity and co-operate well when working in pairs. In question and answer sessions, students are responsive. Students behave very well in lessons and respond well to teachers. Students develop their literacy and numeracy skills well in ICT lessons. They know the correct meaning of technical words and learn to spell and use them accurately. They develop their computational and graphical skills in carrying out various projects.

184. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staffing difficulties involving recruitment and retention have resulted in a lack of continuity in teaching and in management. However, the current temporary management has ensured a shared commitment within the department to improve standards and the quality of teaching and learning. A good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department has resulted in clear plans of how to raise standards. The use of assessment in Years 10 and 11 is increasingly effective in helping students to set targets to improve their work. A formal system of target setting has been introduced in Years 10 and 11 so that students are aware of the level at which they are working and the level that they should achieve. In Years 7 to 9 this system is not in place and information is not shared with students.

185. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. There has been a considerable increase in ICT resources. An increase in the amount of teaching time given to the subject, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and the improved monitoring of teaching have led to higher standards and achievement. Progress has been made to increase the use of computers to support learning across all departments, but the number of computers available does not match the demand. The developing, planned programme for using ICT within other subjects has improved since the previous inspection. Good use of computers within history and geography helps to extend and enrich students' learning. In many subjects, students now use computers for research on the Internet and for word processing and desktop publishing to present work. Teachers in mathematics and English make good use of electronic whiteboards to support students' learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Attainment is above average by the end of Year 9.
- Good relationships between teachers and students foster a good atmosphere for learning.
- Attractive accommodation and good use of display support learning well.

Areas for improvement

- Marking does not always show students what levels they are working at and how to improve.
- Teachers are inconsistent in relating work to levels of the National Curriculum.

186. Teachers' assessments of students' work in French at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were above average. Standards of work seen in Year 9 currently are above average. They represent good achievement for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Students understand long texts and dialogues. They refer to past, present and future events. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students in relation to their prior attainment.

187. In 2002, GCSE results were below the national average in French. Girls performed better than boys. These results were attained with an entry that was nearly twice the national average size. All students entered attained a GCSE grade in the range A*-G. Standards of work seen, however, were above average. This is because numbers of students studying French in Years 10 and 11 have drastically reduced, largely as a result of acute staffing problems experienced by the department in recent times. This means that the groups in Years 10 and 11 are largely made up of students whose prior attainment is relatively high. The group in Year 11, for example, exceeded the target set for them in the recent mock GCSE examinations. This represents satisfactory achievement. Students speak and write with reasonable accuracy. They use more complex sentence constructions and refer to past, present and future events. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students in relation to their prior attainment.

188. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the good and very good lessons, teachers have clear learning objectives that they share with students. They present language energetically, using a variety of methods to help students to understand the work. The teaching of literacy is good. Teachers use the grammatical structures of English and French to increase students' confidence and competence in developing their language skills in both subjects. Teachers use French almost exclusively for classroom routines as well as practice. They provide good opportunities for students to interact with each other as well as the teacher. These lessons proceed at pace and have a wide variety of activities that keeps students engaged and motivated. Teachers use correction sensitively to help students to make progress. They review learning thoroughly and consolidate it at the end of the lesson. As a result, students work hard, make intellectual effort and their learning progresses at a good rate. In the lessons that were satisfactory, a few shortcomings were present. In these lessons, the work did not always match the capabilities of all students in the class and resulted in slow pace. In a few lessons, the teacher tended to do too much of the work and did not involve the students fully in working things out for themselves. Occasionally, the use of time was unsatisfactory so that the learning reviews were too rushed to be effective. Students' positive attitudes and good behaviour assist their learning.

189. Marking of students' work is frequent, regular and supportive. However, it does not link to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9, nor to GCSE grades in Years 10 and 11. This makes it more difficult for students to know exactly at what level they are working and how to improve.

190. The curriculum meets current statutory requirements across the college, although the time allocation in Years 7 to 9 is slightly less than that found in many schools. Through good use of display and exchange visits abroad, the department makes a good contribution to students' cultural development.

191. The acting leadership and management are satisfactory. Efforts to develop provision in the subject are affected adversely by instability and uncertainty in staffing as a result of resignations and long-term absence. These difficulties have resulted in problems presented by non-specialist and unqualified staff covering classes. Nonetheless, by concentrating on the classroom and the requirements of the National Curriculum and GCSE, the department has helped students to attain above average standards. The department has adequate resources except for the main textbook, which is outdated and does not reflect current developments such as the National Framework for modern languages. Restricted access to ICT equipment hinders students' learning.

192. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have risen in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are making greater efforts to match tasks to the capabilities of students.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and students' enthusiasm promote good achievement.
- GCSE results are well above average on the popular expressive arts course in Years 10 and 11.
- Music and expressive arts make a good contribution to students' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning lacks consistency in Years 7 to 9.
- Students make little use of ICT resources to extend and enrich learning.

193. Overall, standards of attainment for students on entry are approaching the national average. Teachers' assessments of students work at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above average. However, standards of work seen by Year 9 are above rather than well above the national average overall. A small proportion of gifted and talented students attain at a very high level. Achievement by Year 9 is good overall.

194. Students are offered expressive arts rather than music in Years 10 and 11. In work seen, attainment is above average and indicates good achievement. Over the past three years, GCSE results have been well above the national average. In 2002, almost half the GCSE passes were at A* and A grades. These results indicated very good achievement.

195. Students develop good performing and composing skills in music. By Year 9, most students of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment sing accurately with supportive technique. They are competent at the keyboard using both hands. During Years 7 to 9, they develop fluency in whole-class and group rhythmic co-ordination. Most students in Year 8 improvise well. In Year 9, students' understanding of chromaticism and the techniques of

structural inversion and reflection means they can compose serial music. Students gain good knowledge about the signs and symbols, basic elements and notation of music. They understand simple differences in musical style and structure.

196. The quality of learning is good. Students' good progress is the result of teaching that challenges them with progressively more difficult tasks and builds on previous skills and experience. From Year 7 on, students learn to be attentive and analytical listeners. They benefit from many good opportunities to develop appraising and evaluating skills, including self-assessment. The department provides very good, originally produced workbooks for each unit of study. These contain musical material that targets the specific development that teachers want students to make and assesses it well. The material is adaptable and, together with the good help that students have from their teachers and learning support assistants, it enables students with special educational needs to make good progress. The talented students develop their musical skills quickly, carry out suitably challenging extension activities and are often help other students in group activities. Students increase their confidence in music as a result of good feedback from teachers that encourages students to improve and refine their work.

197. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 7 to 11. However, there are inconsistencies in different teachers' approaches to students, particularly in the management of lesson time and activities and the expectation of students' behaviour. The teaching of literacy is good. Teachers encourage students to produce creative writing. They place a good emphasis on learning the meaning and correct spelling of key vocabulary. In good and very good lessons, students work to short deadlines, which focus their concentration on the task. Teachers intervene to provide support and guidance before students lose interest. Students know, accept and follow the code of practice established in the subject. This demands attention to instructions and silence when music is performed. A few of these aspects are less successful in a small number of lessons. The small amount of non-specialist teaching is unsatisfactory, because inadequate subject knowledge and practical skills restrict the help available to students when they encounter difficulties.

198. Music is not offered for GCSE, even though there are students of suitable aptitude and with real interest, Expressive arts is proving a popular subject choice for these students. Numbers on this course have increased rapidly over the past four years. Sometimes teachers are challenged in one-hour lessons to cover all the aspects of the course and to ensure full participation and continuous assessment for every student. Most students commence the drama, dance and stagecraft aspects of the course in Year 10. They have very little formal opportunity to prepare for these skills before this. Thus, the concepts, ideas, skills and confidence of students in Year 10 are very varied. All these aspects are better in Year 11, because, as a result of accumulated good learning, students realise their ideas more quickly and with greater assurance.

199. Good team teaching within expressive arts stimulates, supports and guides students well and leads to good learning for students of all levels of attainment. As activities are varied and directly focussed on outcomes, most students meet the criteria for a particular task. Group activities and the core skills developed by them are central to students' experience. Students in Year 11 understand how they can draw resources from their group to promote their creative ideas. Teachers help students to develop their literacy skills well by planning exercises and creative writing. Practical assignments help to improve students' oral and evaluative skills. However, limitations of resources restrict students' opportunities to use ICT to extend and enrich their work.

200. In music and expressive arts, the positive attitudes, enthusiasm and commitment to improve shown by students are important factors in their good achievement. The good nature of many students and their mutually supportive relationships are developed well by group activities. Through this and good extra-curricular provision, both subjects make an important contribution to students' personal spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to liturgy in the college.

201. Leadership and management are good. At the previous inspection, standards of attainment, achievement, teaching and learning, differentiation, the curriculum, assessment and resources were all areas for improvement. The establishment of specialist teaching was part of a key issue for action to improve standards and progress in the college. In a relatively short time most of these aspects have improved sufficiently well to have a positive effect on standards. Specialist teaching staff are now in place, but there is still a small amount of unsatisfactory non-specialist teaching. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection is good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- In Years 7 to 9, the good quality of teaching and students' positive attitudes enable students to achieve well.
- A wide range of activities helps students to develop skills in addition to those learned in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of older students not taking part in lessons is unusually high.
- The poor condition of the all-weather pitch needs urgent attention.

202. Teachers' assessments of standards reached by students at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were average. They indicated good achievement and rising standards among younger students. GCSE results were below average in 2002. They were higher than in the previous year for the proportion gaining grades A*-C. A higher proportion than is usual takes the subject to examination level. The proportion obtaining grades A*-G is above average. Students attain less well in physical education than they do in the majority of other subjects in which they are examined. Too few girls took the subject in 2002 for meaningful comparisons to be made. High standards of performance of many students are reflected in the successes of teams and individuals at area, county and, occasionally, national levels.

203. Attainment of students by Year 9 is average and includes a few considerable strengths. Students in Year 7 have good skills in dance and gymnastics. They devise, rehearse and perform sequences of actions, including required elements, which demonstrate good levels of skill and understanding. They have a willingness to experiment and be imaginative. Students respond well to opportunities to take responsibility for leading warm-up sessions for classmates and devising skill development drills, for instance for football, as shown very well in a Year 8 lesson. Opportunities to assess students' abilities to explain why some actions are more successful than others were limited during outdoor sessions by unpleasant weather. Even so, it is clear that teachers aim to develop these skills more than at the time of the previous report.

204. By the end of Year 9, students make good progress because they are enthusiastic and enjoy their work. They behave well and sustain good levels of concentration. Although often highly competitive, they have good awareness of considerations for safety and fair play.

They enjoy their own successes and applaud the successes of others. Most have good memory of earlier learning and build upon it to good effect. Dance is not taught after Year 7 so that, although standards are above average at the end of Year 7, they are not developed further. Students with difficulties that restrict their performance make good progress because teachers understand their problems and provide helpful support and encouragement, as was clearly evident in a Year 8 hockey lesson. The highest attainers benefit in the same ways and make good progress.

205. Attainment of students in Years 10 and 11 is average and indicates satisfactory achievement overall. Many continue to improve levels of skill and understanding developed in earlier years. Most continue to have positive attitudes towards their work that contribute to their good progress. However, a large number, occasionally half a class, for a variety of given reasons do not participate in the main activities of lessons. Of these students, many do not understand the relevance of lessons in raising levels of fitness for successful performance in games. Their non-participation reduces their own learning and that of those who are participating, since it distracts the attention of teachers who continue to be responsible for them. The quality of teaching and learning was reduced by the challenging behaviour of a small group of boys in one of the classes preparing for GCSE examinations.

206. In Years 10 and 11, most students have satisfactory performance skills and work hard to develop them. They organise their material with sufficient clarity and accuracy in their written work. Lower-attaining students depend heavily on the guidance of teachers. Above average levels of attainment were observed in a Year 11 class identifying the factors that affect athletic performance and in a Year 10 group learning to identify the main body types and reasons for their appropriateness to particular forms of athletic activity. In both of these lessons, students' levels of interest were high. Students responded positively to opportunities to take some responsibility for their learning. In less successful lessons, students received similar opportunities but a few chose to reject them and showed poor motivation. Their poor attitudes reduced the effectiveness of their own learning and that of other students because they took up too much of the teacher's time.

207. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Teachers plan lessons carefully so that there are specific opportunities to develop particular skills. They link lessons to previous and future work so that students understand their relevance. Explanations are quick and clear so that students begin their work confidently. Tasks set are appropriate to students' experience and levels of skill. Teachers are quick to offer appropriate help and encouragement to students of all levels of attainment. They make good use of questions to check students' understanding and, though less frequently, use supplementary questions to encourage deeper thinking. Teachers have high expectations of students' effort, behaviour and achievement, which almost all students seek to meet. They are skilful and firm in dealing with minor misdemeanours and any challenging behaviour. The quality of marking of written work is inconsistent. In the best examples, marking identifies the strengths of the work and provides advice on how further improvement should be made. In others, comments are too brief to be properly helpful. Departmental documents show that the department makes a suitable contribution to the development of students' skills of literacy, numeracy and citizenship, though there is little planned use of ICT.

208. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. All members of the department work well together. The sharing of responsibilities is appropriate, including contributions to the good range of opportunities provided outside normal lesson time. Good progress has been made towards the achievement of most of the targets identified in the development plan except that standards of attainment are not rising consistently or significantly. Teachers do not make the best use of the time provided for the identification and sharing of the most successful teaching and learning. The best practice in marking and

assessment is not used consistently. Too many older students frequently fail to take part in lessons. The all-weather pitch has deteriorated further since problems were noted in the previous report. It now represents a hazard with sharp flints from the hard-core base and grass having penetrated the surface. There are several holes that require immediate attention.

209. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Teaching has improved and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. The heavy emphasis on the development of performance skills and the lack of sufficient opportunities to develop skills of planning and evaluation have been revised so that students now have a broader range of skills. Problems and limitations of both indoor and outdoor accommodation noted in the previous report have not been remedied and continue to have adverse effects upon learning.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	22	73	*	10	*	1.8	*
Chemistry	5	100	*	13	*	2.4	*
Biology	9	56	*	13	*	1.6	*
Physics	12	83	*	14	*	2.4	*
Technology	4	100	*	25	*	2.3	*
Business studies	7	100	*	39	*	3.7	*
Computing	7	100	*	33	*	2.6	*
Information technology	8	88	*	0	*	1.8	*
Physical education	9	100	*	14	*	2.1	*
Art and design	3	100	*	0	*	3.0	*
Performing arts	5	100	*	100	*	5.0	*
Geography	22	100	*	47	*	3.9	*
History	2	100	*	100	*	4.5	*
Religious studies	16	100	*	55	*	3.6	*
English literature	19	100	*	37	*	2.5	*
French	1	100	*	0	*	3.0	*
General studies	30	97	*	18	*	2.5	*

* National comparative data for A/AS-level results in 2002 are not yet available.

CE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	17	88	*	6	*	3.4	*
Chemistry	7	100	*	0	*	4.0	*
Biology	11	100	*	27	*	6.2	*
Physics	10	100	*	30	*	5.2	*
Technology	9	67	*	0	*	2.2	*
Business studies	5	100	*	20	*	5.2	*
Computing	9	89	*	22	*	4.2	*
Physical education	9	78	*	0	*	3.1	*
Art and design	2	100	*	100	*	9.0	*
Performing arts	3	100	*	100	*	9.3	*
Geography	24	100	*	33	*	6.1	*
History	3	100	*	0	*	3.3	*
Religious studies	8	88	*	13	*	3.8	*
English literature	19	89	*	21	*	5.3	*
French	1	100	*	0	*	6.0	*
German	1	100	*	100	*	8.0	*
General studies	19	100	*	32	*	5.8	*

* National comparative data for A/AS-level results in 2002 are not yet available.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics and chemistry. Work was sampled in biology and physics. In biology, A-level results in 2002 were above the previous year’s national average. They represented satisfactory achievement compared with students’ GCSE results. In the two lessons observed in biology, teaching was good overall. In one of the lessons, very good teaching included clear explanation, a well-structured sequence of activities and frequent review and assessment. This led to students gaining a good understanding of the factors that affect transpiration. Students applied their knowledge successfully to new situations, for example, to explain how plants growing in hot dry desert regions had become adapted to reduce their rates of transpiration. In physics, A-level results in 2002 were just below the previous year’s national average and indicated unsatisfactory achievement. Two lessons were observed. In a Year 12 lesson, good teaching enabled students to make good progress. Students performed calculations well based on electrical circuits and were encouraged to work out their own solutions. The pace of the lesson was quick and the teacher provided good support for the few students who lacked confidence. However, no additional questions were provided for higher-attaining students. In Year 13, a lively debate occurred in a very good lesson about Einstein’s theory of relativity. Students, therefore, developed a very good

understanding of the concept of time dilation, which they consolidated by undertaking calculations.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Good teaching motivates students to work hard.
- Good working relationships with the teachers help students to achieve well.
- Teachers make very good use of new technology to support learning.

Areas for improvement

- In a few lessons, students have insufficient opportunities to explain their work.
- Teachers do not make enough use of assessment to identify underachievement and monitor students' progress.

210. The department provides AS/A-level courses in Years 12 and 13 that attract a reasonable number of students. Most students who begin the AS-level course complete it. A few do not move on to the A2 courses in Year 13. Nearly all of those who do, complete the course.

211. A-level and AS-level results in 2002 were below the previous year's national average. They represent unsatisfactory achievement based on students' prior attainment. Students did less well in mathematics than in the other subjects they took. Current standards, however, are average and achievement is at least satisfactory, both for Year 12 and Year 13 students, in relation to their GCSE results. Standards are higher than those indicated by recent A/AS-level results. This is because recent timetable improvements, including the introduction of five instead of four taught sessions every week, have enabled students to complete their courses in greater depth. Students of all levels of attainment, including those of ethnic minority backgrounds, organise their workbooks very well to provide a good record for revision. Year 12 students make good use of past GCSE work to move into new areas. For example, when completing questions on arcs and sectors of a circle involving radians, students applied their knowledge of ratio and rules of algebra confidently and competently to this area of study. In Year 13, students recall knowledge and apply it confidently in class and in their written work. In one lesson, for example, students were familiar with the graphical properties of quadratic and cubic functions and, from analysis, moved onto more complex forms of curve sketching.

212. Students of all levels of attainment learn well on the AS-level and A-level courses because the teaching is consistently good. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to explain the work well and to respond quickly and accurately to students' questions. They plan lessons well and communicate the learning objectives clearly. Teachers maintain a brisk pace and set students challenges that are intellectually demanding and deepen understanding. They make good and efficient use of new technology to support learning. As a consequence, students are well motivated and prepared to work hard. Often, students contribute as much to lessons as the teacher and make considerable collective effort to understand the work. In a few lessons, however, students do not have enough opportunities to confirm their thinking or receive encouragement to listen to one another.

213. Good leadership and management have taken effective action to raise standards. Accurate and critical analysis of the department's examination performance has resulted in realistic and achievable targets for improvement. There is a shared commitment between students and teachers in and out of lessons, to build on what has already been achieved.

Students' record of work is detailed and thorough. Procedures for assessment are well established but teachers do not use them frequently enough to identify and correct underachievement at an early stage. The marking of homework is regular and contains annotations for improvement. However, marking does not usually refer to students' individual targets and examination requirements. Teachers are approachable and give up much of their non-contact time to support students. As a consequence, numbers have been maintained since the start of the current courses. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have fluctuated from well above average to below average, reflecting the different capabilities of successive year groups. The quality of teaching has improved and is good.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Students' good relationships with teachers help them to make satisfactory progress.
- Students are well motivated. Their positive attitudes assist their learning.
- The number of students taking chemistry is increasing.

Areas for improvement

- A-level results are below average.
- A narrow range of teaching methods and insufficient use of ICT restrict learning.
- Insufficient monitoring of students' work and lack of attention to improving skills in note taking limit progress.

214. In 2001, A-level results for the three students entered for the examinations were well below average. Results in 2002 at A-level and AS-level were both below the previous year's national averages. Standards are higher than they were at the previous inspection. The numbers taking A-level chemistry have been low in recent years but are improving steadily. Rates of retention for students who start the AS-level and A-level courses are good. AS-level results in 2001 were above average for A-E grades, but were well below average for the higher grades, A and B. Results in 2002 show a very slight improvement. Achievement at A-level in 2001 was unsatisfactory because students did not do as well as expected from their GCSE results. Achievement in 2002 was satisfactory.

215. Standards of work in Year 13 are below average currently. Achievement in relation to students' previous GCSE results is satisfactory. The course being followed is a highly academic one and is proving to be exceedingly challenging for a few participants. In one of the two lessons seen, students were doing well as a result of good teaching that demanded much of them. Higher-attaining students showed a good understanding of transition metal chemistry and explained given reactions.

216. Students in Year 12 are achieving much as expected. In one lesson, students made good progress understanding the factors affecting the rate of a reaction. Most understood that reactions could only occur when collisions take place between particles having sufficient energy. Higher-attaining students drew on their understanding of the Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution of molecular energies in gases to draw and interpret distribution curves for different temperatures. Higher-attaining students recall knowledge reasonably well but are less able to apply it. Students' written work does not always show the same confidence as their oral work in class.

217. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, overall. Teachers plan their programmes well to provide a suitable introduction to the subject and to cover the syllabus.

The best features of teaching are that teachers are well qualified and enjoy good relationships with students. In the good lessons, teachers challenge students to think for themselves and to use their initiative. However, much of the teaching of theory is narrow and lacks stimulus, excitement and relevance. The lack of variety of teaching methods hinders the learning of most middle and lower attainers, who struggle to understand the work. Much of the teaching is instructional, directed at the whole class, without adaptation to the different levels of attainment. Analysis of work indicates that teachers do not check sufficiently students' understanding or the quality of note taking. Teachers mark work in encouraging ways but do not provide enough clear indications of how well students are progressing. They provide insufficient comments to help students to improve. They provide too few opportunities for students to use ICT for research or to gather, handle and display scientific data. Staff absence through illness has had an adverse effect on standards of the current Year 12 and Year 13 students.

218. Teachers create a positive environment for learning. Most students appreciate the freedom that they are given to do independent study, but they need more careful guidance and a clearer structure to succeed in this. Students have a positive attitude to their work and are keen to do well. They are co-operative and willing to help each other. They work well when taking part in collaborative activities. Relationships are good and students listen carefully to the teacher and to the views of others. Most join in discussions well through the good encouragement of the teacher. Lower-attaining students are much more passive learners and struggle to make satisfactory progress. Entry requirements to this particular chemistry course are not stringent enough to ensure that all students can cope with its demands.

219. Satisfactory leadership and management of chemistry have resulted in satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. There is a commitment to improving standards. The planning of the chemistry course and the monitoring of the work of individual teachers are adequate. Schemes of work are appropriate but need some refinement, particularly with reference to key skills, ICT and data logging, and provision for higher and lower attainers. The assessment, monitoring and evaluation of students' work lack consistency and sufficient rigour to help students make faster progress. Teachers make little use of assessment to modify the curriculum and the way that it is taught.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Good teaching enables students to develop good technical and theoretical skills.
- Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject to stimulate students' interest.
- Achievement is good overall and is particularly good in Year 13.

Areas for improvement

- Students have too few opportunities to access ICT to improve their work.
- Teachers make little use of short-term targets to monitor students' progress.

220. A very small number of students study the A2 course in product design in Year 13. Nine students are taking the AS-level course in product design in Year 12. Of the five who took AS level in 2002, three did not move on to the A2 course, partly because of staffing

difficulties. Rates of retention on the AS-level course are good. A/AS-level results in the past two years have been below the national average for 2001, although achievement based on prior attainment has been satisfactory. Standards of work currently are higher, particularly in Year 13 and indicate good achievement.

221. There has been a complete change of teaching staff in the department since 2002. The team of teachers in both years is having a positive effect on standards. The standard of work in Year 13 is above average and represents particularly good achievement. Students' projects are good as a result of thorough research and visits to industry to find out how specialist, cleaning devices are developed. A project for a sewer cleaner development has gone through several trials and is currently nearing completion. It indicates the use of good skills in welding in the construction of a prototype. Very precise measuring and use of a range of techniques helped to produce a good prototype of an automatic vacuum cleaner. Students use 'Prodesk top' to create a model of the finished cleaner. Year 12 students work on the improvements of an existing item. They modify and adapt a range of items from tennis racquet handles to new bar pumps and steering wheels. Students are looking at the positive and negative effects on the environment and considering moral issues that may be influenced by their modifications. Most students give reasoned arguments as to the result of their modifications but lower attainers rely on support from the teacher. Overall, the achievement of students of all ethnic backgrounds in Year 12 is good. A few lower attainers are finding the change from GCSE to AS-level much harder than they anticipated.

222. Teaching and learning are good. Students receive very good individual attention and support from teachers that encourage them to do well. The four teachers for Years 12 and 13 have a wide range of skills in design and technology, liaise with each other constantly and plan lessons well so that students benefit greatly from their expertise. Teachers develop students' understanding through challenging, probing and skilful questioning. They provide good learning resources that succeed in stimulating ideas and encourage students to learn independently. Students respond well to the challenging work. Most have a mature approach to the subject, attend regularly and are punctual. Year 13 students often work out of lesson time and college time in an effort to complete their work to the highest standard possible. Students are attentive in lessons. In Year 12, they are beginning to probe for further knowledge and clarification of their understanding. Good working relationships and mutual respect between teachers and students contribute to students' good progress in lessons. Students, particularly in Year 13, receive good guidance on how to research well and are encouraged to make industrial visits to gather information. Although teachers check students' work regularly, there is insufficient provision of targets to monitor individual students' learning and understanding to ensure that progress is as fast as possible.

223. Good leadership and management have a clear vision for the development of the subject in the sixth form and have resulted in an improved and good quality of teaching and learning. The department is working hard to incorporate a range of material areas and to offer the subject to more students. The whole team has a strong commitment to improve standards by raising the achievement of all students. A system of monitoring students' progress is being developed. Plans for further availability and use of ICT are in place. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The quality of teaching has improved. The new teachers have made good progress towards raising standards. Numbers taking product design in Years 12 and 13 are increasing.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on the advanced vocational certificate in business (AVCE) course in business studies. Work was sampled on the A-level and AS-level courses in business studies. In 2002, A-level results in business studies were similar to the national

average for the previous year. They represented good achievement compared with students' prior attainment at GCSE examinations. Results in AS-level examinations taken at the end of Year 12 in 2002 were above the previous year's national average and indicated good achievement. In lessons observed, good teaching enabled students of all levels of attainment within the class to make good progress, for example, in developing their understanding of operations management.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Very good use of assessment gives students a clear understanding of how well they are achieving.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan their programmes well.
- Students make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of business.

Areas for improvement

- Rates of retention are unsatisfactory because courses available do not meet fully the needs of lower attainers.

224. Only two students completed the course in 2002, both achieving a pass grade. Students entering the AVCE course usually have levels of attainment at GCSE examinations that are well below average for students following advanced level courses. As a result, rates of retention on the course are unsatisfactory. In Year 12, standards of work seen in lessons and work presented in folders are below the average standard expected for this course. There are currently no Year 13 students taking the course.

225. Students in a Year 12 class recalled aspects of marketing from the previous lesson. They were aware of the Boston Matrix but most did not describe it accurately as a system of product portfolio analysis. In discussion with students, the overall level of recall of knowledge was below average. Most find it difficult to identify business theory and to apply it, using current examples as illustrations. In one lesson, students' limited powers of analysis and the low level of basic knowledge restricted the effectiveness of the activity. The teacher recognised this and provided suitable additional guidance in order to ensure good progress. Given the low levels of attainment on entry, students make good gains in their business knowledge and achieve well. For a number of students the advanced course is proving extremely challenging, particularly those who have previously gained only one or two GCSE grade C passes.

226. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The programmes are planned well using resources that match well the needs of the students and the requirements of the course. Teachers have a good knowledge of their students and enjoy good working relationships. They provide good support for students, who also support one another well. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject that sets high expectations for students. However, the limited range of teaching methods restricts the progress of the low attainers when they have difficulty in understanding some concepts. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject does not always influence students' attitudes to learning which is only satisfactory. The level of motivation is sound but students do not spend adequate time reading around the subject to improve understanding.

227. Assessment procedures are very good and support the good achievement seen. Students receive good diagnostic comments showing how well they are doing and what is necessary in order to improve.

228. Leadership and management of the subject are good. There is clear vision and a commitment to the values of the college. Professional development is good and keeps teachers updated with developments in teaching and learning of business studies courses. At the time of the previous inspection, standards were below average. Whilst this still applies to the AVCE course, there has been much improvement in the other awards. Teaching is now good and staffing issues have been resolved. Overall, therefore, improvement since the previous inspection has been good

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on the A/AS-level courses in computing. Work was sampled in the AS-level ICT course. In 2002, results in the AS-level examinations in ICT were below the previous year's national average and indicated satisfactory achievement. In the one lesson observed, standards were below average and teaching was satisfactory. Students gained a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of vector and bitmap graphics. They demonstrated positive attitudes and good behaviour.

Computing

Overall, the quality of provision in advanced level computing is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject helps students to achieve satisfactorily.
- Students' enthusiasm and concentration assist their progress.
- The good quality of equipment and accommodation promote learning.

Areas for improvement

- Difficulties in recruiting staffing hinder consistency and continuity of learning.
- Lack of variety of teaching methods hinders learning for low attainers.

229. Attainment on entry to the computing course is average. A-level results in 2001 were average and results for 2002 were similar. Eight of the nine students who took the examination gained a pass grade. There was little difference between the performance of boys and girls. Achievement was broadly satisfactory with a few students performing better than expected when taking account of their results at GCSE. AS-level results in 2002 were above the previous year's national average and indicated good achievement. Rates of retention are good on the A-level course completed in Year 13. However, retention on the ICT courses that commence in Year 12 is unsatisfactory because several students of low attainment drop out from the courses because they find them too difficult.

230. Work seen in lessons and folders for Year 12 and 13 students is average and indicates satisfactory achievement. Students have a good grounding in the subject and comment knowledgeably on various aspects of their work, for example, the use of different program languages. Students speak confidently of the requirements of the course and have a good awareness of their own performance. In a Year 13 lesson, students had a good knowledge of networking. Most of the class made an active contribution to work on the range of communication methods used in wide area networks. Year 12 students, all boys, demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of output devices, identifying the different characteristics and applications. Students' knowledge and understanding in both year groups matched the level required in the examination specification. Difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified teachers have hindered the continuity of learning on the computing and ICT courses recently. Students benefit, however, from the provision of accommodation and ICT resources of good quality to assist their learning.

231. Teaching on the course is satisfactory. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they use well to provide students with the required knowledge. They share objectives with students at the start of lessons and provide work that is generally matched well to students' needs. In the less effective lessons, teachers do not use a variety of methods to ensure good pace. They do not always target questions to individual students in order to test their learning. The main teaching style used often excludes the lower attainers from active participation because it allows the most competent students to dominate discussion. Learning is satisfactory. Students respond to demands rather than take the initiative and ask questions. A few students gain from the mainly whole-class approach but the style does not suit a few other students who simply take notes and make little oral contribution.

232. Students contribute well to their own learning though their enthusiasm for the subject and willingness to concentrate. They approach the subject in a purposeful way, generally demonstrating good attitudes. Motivation is good even with the limited range of teaching methods. Relationships among students are generally good, though the more competent students occasionally express frustration at the slowness of the work of other students.

233. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staffing difficulties and recruitment problems have meant that one of the senior managers has recently taken temporary charge of the department. This arrangement is maintaining the department and ensuring satisfactory day-to-day operation. Good technical support ensures that the increasing network is operating efficiently. Procedures for assessment are satisfactory and support individual students. However, they are not sufficiently standardised to be fully effective in monitoring the attainment and progress of students.

234. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Teaching has improved, though it has been affected adversely by recent difficulties of staff recruitment. External examination results are broadly similar. Facilities and equipment have improved.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on the AS-level and A-level courses in physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Students work hard and achieve satisfactorily in A/AS-level examinations.
- Good relationships between teachers and students assist learning.

Areas for improvement

- Too few students gain the higher grades A and B in A/AS-level examinations.
- Too many students fail to complete Year 12.
- Students lack sufficient individual academic guidance.

235. An unusually high proportion of students choose to study the AS-level course when they enter the sixth form. Rates of retention are poor. In the present Year 12, only 11 of the 23 students who began in September are continuing with the course.

236. In 2002, results at A-level were below the national average for the previous year and indicated unsatisfactory achievement. Over the past three years, the proportion gaining pass

grades has matched national figures but no student has passed with the highest grades A or B. At AS-level in 2002, most results were better than expected compared with earlier attainment and better than in the previous year.

237. Standards in Year 13 are average. Students' knowledge and understanding indicate that they are reaching the targets set for them and making good progress and satisfactory achievement over time. They undertake research successfully into the historical development of major games using both printed and electronic sources. When presenting their findings to the class, they lack confidence and are insufficiently experienced in the skills of presentation. In discussion, they are mostly reluctant to draw upon general knowledge or personal experience to illustrate aspects of modern games. When considering the psychological factors which affect performance, many but not all are confident in drawing upon their actual or imagined experience to illustrate how athletes respond to stress and anxiety and how target setting might be helpful. They make sensible and considered responses to questions asked of them. The quality of written work is average. Students communicate their ideas clearly and, for the most part, accurately. Most recognise what questions require of them and answer relevantly, but do not always provide appropriate amounts of detail.

238. Students in Year 12 are mostly reaching the targets set for them. At the current good rates of progress many are likely to exceed the long-term targets. This represents good achievement. Students demonstrate above average attainment in lessons. They have good recall of earlier learning and build upon it. This skill was evident in a very good lesson on the circulatory system when it was clear that students had vivid memories of having dissected a heart and of the learning associated with that experience. Students showed the same ability to build upon earlier work and to grasp new concepts in a good lesson on factors affecting reaction time, particularly in sport. They have developed good skills of note making. They represent data clearly in the form of graphs. Most are developing confidence in the use of appropriate technical terms. Standards of written work have improved considerably since beginning the course, particularly in recent times and especially in the selection and expression of relevant material. Writing is generally clear and accurate but weaknesses of spelling reduce the effectiveness of the work of a few.

239. Achievement, from sometimes low levels of earlier attainment, is good because students have positive attitudes to their studies and work purposefully. They have good relationships with teachers and each other that help them to gain needed confidence.

240. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the topics they teach and a clear view of what they intend should be learned. They link lessons clearly to previous and future learning. They make good use of questions to check the quality of students' understanding and also to encourage them to think for themselves. Students have good opportunities to contribute to their learning in question and answer sessions involving the whole class and in presenting their research findings. The few opportunities for students to work together in small groups contribute to good learning. The quality of marking and assessment is inconsistent. In the best examples, marking is frequent and regular, notes are written in the text and summary comments identify strengths and offer advice on the means of further improvement. In other cases, the comments are often too brief to be helpful. Teachers' good understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses is evident in the way they construct lessons and take care to check levels of understanding. The value of providing guidance on a one-to-one basis is recognised in the plans for some lessons but no evidence of this being practised was observed either within or outside lessons.

241. Leadership and management of the course are satisfactory. There is a sensible sharing of responsibilities. All full-time members of the department contribute according to their special areas of interest. There is insufficient analysis of reasons for the below average results in examinations or provision of strategies for their improvement. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

This area was not a focus of the inspection. However, work was sampled in art and design and in performing arts. In art and design, results in A-level and AS-level examinations in 2002 were above the previous year's national average for the small number of candidates. They represented good achievement based on students' previous attainment in GCSE examinations. Currently, standards on these courses are average and indicate satisfactory achievement. In the one lesson observed, students in Years 12 and 13 made good progress in work on pastel and pencil drawings. They responded positively to good teaching and the teacher's encouragement.

In performing arts, A-level and AS-level results in 2002 were well above the national average for the previous year. These results indicated very good achievement. The five candidates in the AS-level examination, all girls, gained A grades. In two lessons observed, teaching was good and students were making good progress. Students in Year 13 are attaining above average standards. Their practical skills and understanding of performing styles are better than their analytical perception and extended writing. The students on these courses are the mainstay of college productions and also gain performing experience in the local community. Some have aspirations to work in performing arts and students in Year 13 have gained places for higher-level training.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography and history.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching helps students to attain above average A/AS-level results.
- Very good relationships with teachers and mature attitudes to learning help students to make very good progress.
- Excellent leadership provides a clear overview and ensures students achieve very well.
- Fieldwork of high quality enables students to produce very good coursework.

Area for improvement

- Teachers are seeking ways to enable more students to achieve the highest grades.

242. Geography is a popular subject that attracts large numbers of students. Rates of retention on the advanced courses are good. In 2002, all students who completed the AS-level course continued to study the A2 course in geography in Year 13. A-level and AS-level results in 2002 were above the national average for the previous year. These results represent very good achievement for students of all levels of attainment. Students' results in geography were above those of most other subjects they took. A-level results have improved consistently over the past three years.

243. In work seen, students' attainment is above average and represents very good achievement for students of all ethnic backgrounds. Students in Year 12 have a very good understanding of river management. They extract information from a variety of sources in order to present well-reasoned conclusions, for example, about the advantages and disadvantages of the Three Gorges Dam. Fieldwork of high quality, completed in Whitby, stimulates students' interest in river and coastal processes. Year 13 students make very perceptive contributions to discussions on fair trade and world debt that illustrate their clear understanding of complex geographical issues. They use specialist vocabulary with confidence in extended essays and examination answers. The mature attitudes of students and their very good relationships with teachers have a very positive effect on learning.

244. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 12 and 13. Teachers use their very good understanding of the requirements of the examination syllabus to help students to succeed. Teachers respect students' opinions and encourage them to think for themselves. Strategies for allowing higher-attaining students to develop their ideas in greater depth in order to achieve the highest grades are still developing. Teachers plan their lessons very thoroughly and use a range of attractive resources to engage students' interest. These resources include videos, topical magazine and newspaper articles, information from the Internet, posters and textbooks. Teachers have high expectations of all students. They use their very good knowledge of the subject well to set challenging tasks. Teachers assess students' work frequently and carefully. They mark work rigorously so students are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students receive very good support and guidance that help them to make good progress.

245. Excellent leadership and management of the department provide a clear overview of the work to be done and set appropriate priorities for development that match those of the whole college. Relevant staff training, close and effective monitoring of teaching and learning and sharp analysis of the department's performance ensure that students achieve very well.

246. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Attainment is above average. Teachers now use a wider range of teaching and learning strategies, including increased and successful use of ICT. Teachers encourage students to become independent learners. Staff have a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to raise standards further.

History

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

Strengths

- Standards are rising and very good teaching helps students to achieve well.
- Students receive good encouragement to think at higher levels and to work independently.
- Numbers of students are increasing.

Areas for improvement

- Resources in the library are inadequate for AS/A level study in history.
- Students do not receive enough formal academic guidance.

247. The department provides AS-level and A-level courses, both in 16th century history. This is a recent change to avoid undue repetition of modern world history from the main school. Numbers are very low in Year 13. They have increased in Year 12 as a result of the greater popularity of history in the main school and the sixth form. Since the arrival of the new head of department last year, no student has left a course. Students in both years enjoy history and find the lessons stimulating and interesting. Most Year 12 students intend to

continue to A2 history in Year 13. The school's policy of open access to AS-level courses means that a few students choose history inappropriately, although the department does offer good advice to Year 11 students.

248. Numbers taking AS/A-level examinations in recent years are too low for meaningful comparison with national averages. However, all candidates gained A-level grades in 2002 and 2001, though these were not as high as expected from their previous attainment at GCSE examinations. In 2000, when numbers were a little higher, six out of seven students passed, and their overall achievement was good in relation to their predicted grades. The two students entered for the AS level examination in 2002 passed with high grades and achieved well.

249. Standards in current classes are average in Year 12 and above average in Year 13. Students' achievement is good in both years. This is because students are pushed hard to think analytically so that they gain a good training in the historical skills needed for these courses quickly. In a Year 12 lesson, students handled different historical interpretations of the significance of Cardinal Wolsey with competence. They backed their arguments with good levels of knowledge and understanding. Students found this work difficult and the teacher was showing them how to prioritise arguments. In Year 13, the work seen indicated successful acquisition of the techniques of synthesis needed for the highest A-level grades. It entailed reviewing all previous learning and selecting aspects of political, social, economic and religious history relevant for an 'overview' question on all the challenges facing Queen Elizabeth I. The teacher directed this work well to ensure the class had a good grasp of synthesis by the end of the lesson.

250. Students in both years co-operate well with the teachers to ensure that no time is wasted. They are keen to participate and to work with a will on the tasks set for them. Their files show that motivation is good and that they are willing to persevere.

251. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Some outstanding and inspiring teaching was observed, for example, in a Year 12 class that was preparing for a coursework essay on Cardinal Wolsey. The teacher's very high expectations and very good planning helped students to make very good gains in understanding. The style of teaching encourages students' active involvement so that they are required to think critically, to engage in dialogue and to discuss their work. A few find this demanding but have come to realise that working in partnership with their teachers improves their learning considerably. A prominent feature of all lessons observed was the teachers' effective use of very good expertise in the subject to ensure that learning was full of pace, challenge and variety. The teaching of higher-level skills of source analysis is good. Teachers provide many opportunities for collaborative work so that students learn well from each other as well as from the teacher.

252. Teachers structure tasks with care to enable students of all levels of attainment to enjoy learning and to acquire appropriate self-knowledge and insight. Marking gives ample information on how to improve, but teachers do not always link it closely enough to the assessments and standardised levels of attainment used by the examining boards. Academic guidance is very good on an informal basis, especially as numbers are low, and students benefit from a great deal of individual attention. However, they do not receive enough formal academic guidance about their work and progress.

253. The new and good leadership and management of history have achieved a great deal in a short time, especially with regard to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The clear focus on raising standards and recruiting higher numbers is showing signs of success. The curriculum needs some additional stimulus, which the department intends to provide through a planned visit to Florence linking with study of the Renaissance. The resources for the subject are satisfactory within the department, but the library is inadequate for students' needs and puts a constraint on their learning.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English literature. Work was also sampled in French. In 2002, results for the very small number of students entered were slightly above the previous year's national average at A-level and below at AS-level. In the lesson observed in Year 13, standards were average and the quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Year 13 students show good gains in attainment from when they start Year 12.
- Good teaching helps students to achieve well.
- Students have positive attitudes and work hard.

Areas for improvement

- Students have insufficient opportunities to interact in lessons.
- Lessons do not always provide enough challenge for all students in a group.

254. The A/AS-level courses in English literature are the most popular in the sixth form. Rates of retention are good and very few drop out. Most students who complete the AS-level course stay on to finish the A-level course in Year 13.

255. The attainment of students entering the sixth form is below average. By Year 13, their work is at average levels. This indicates good achievement for students of all ethnic backgrounds. A-level results for 2002 were close to the previous year's national average. They represent good achievement compared with students' previous attainment in GCSE examinations. AS-level results in 2002 taken in Year 12 were above national averages for the previous year and represent good achievement for students of all backgrounds and levels of attainment. Results in recent years have been inconsistent but generally below national averages. They have reflected the different levels of prior attainment of successive year groups. Female and male students achieve equally well.

256. Work seen in Years 12 and 13 is average. Students do not usually talk confidently about texts even though their knowledge is good. In most lessons, talk tends to be directed through the teacher. Opportunities for developing discussion skills are limited when, as is often the case, students all sit facing one way. Students organise written work in their folders well. Essays on texts such as Shakespeare's *Othello* show that lower-attaining students gain confidence and competence in Year 12. Later work is more closely argued and reveals good detailed knowledge of the play. Course work on *Hamlet* is never less than good. The highest-attaining students show assurance in their skilful handling of material. Students' reading of texts generally shows good understanding, as seen in the perceptive analysis of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Students' presentations on English literary history show good grasp of the

qualities characterising different literary periods. Standards of literacy are average, but a few students frequently spell common English words incorrectly.

257. Teaching and learning overall are good. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to provide good explanations, to ask searching questions and to supply informative answers to students. They prepare students very thoroughly for examinations. Teachers and students have cordial relationships that ensure a good climate for learning. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that students are involved fully. In a good Year 12 lesson on Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, students made very good progress. They were responsible in small groups for exploring aspects of the final section of the book. The teacher ensured that all students were challenged fully and, as a result, they learnt well. In other lessons, work in groups is sometimes less focused and demanding. Consequently, students' progress is not so fast and outcomes are more modest. Teachers mark work very conscientiously and provide detailed comments suggesting how students should improve. Students know their levels of attainment and what they must do to achieve higher standards.

258. Students work hard and are invariably positive about their learning. They like most aspects of the course. They appreciate teachers' thoroughness in preparing lessons. They value the good support and guidance they receive from teachers about their work and personal development.

259. Leadership and management of English are good. Careful planning ensures that students are prepared fully for the examinations. Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning help to spread good practice within the department. Satisfactory improvement has taken place since the previous inspection because standards remain average and teaching is good.