

INSPECTION REPORT

OATHALL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Haywards Heath

LEA area: West Sussex

Unique reference number: 126085

Headteacher: Mrs J Wilson

Lead inspector: John Godwood

Dates of inspection: 1st – 4th March 2004

Inspection number: 258720

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

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1398
School address:	Appledore Gardens Haywards Heath West Sussex
Postcode:	RH16 2AQ
Telephone number:	01444 414001
Fax number:	01444 417027
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C McFarlin
Date of previous inspection:	November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Oathall Community College is a beacon school. It has the Artsmark Silver and Investors in People awards. It is a training school, providing initial teaching training in collaboration with Sussex University. The college has its own farm, which is used for vocational courses, to enrich the curriculum and as a focus for school and community links. The socio-economic context is relatively favoured though its catchment area includes some deprived areas. Attainment on entry is above average. Most students have a white British heritage and one in twelve come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including a small number of travellers. A very small number of students speak English as an additional language. Almost one in six students have special educational needs, which is above average. This includes 37 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Of those with more significant needs, most have learning needs or emotional and behavioural difficulties, while a smaller number have communication difficulties or autism. The number of students who join or leave the college at other than normal times is below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18242	John Godwood	Lead inspector	
9756	Ken Parsons	Lay inspector	
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education
2740	Betty Barratt	Team inspector	Special educational needs, history
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
13734	Harold Davies	Team inspector	Geography, business education
15268	John English	Team inspector	Mathematics
18542	Gerald Griffin	Team inspector	Design and technology, information and communication technology
31135	Rachel Hobson	Team inspector	English
1779	David Leonard	Team inspector	Science
31701	Graeme Rudland	Team inspector	Music
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education, citizenship
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	English as an additional language, art and design

The inspection contractor was:

Serco QAA
 Herringston Barn
 Herringston
 Dorchester
 Dorset
 DT2 9PU

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	12
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	17
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	20
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	37

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Oathall Community College is a good school with many very good features. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well. This is due partly to good teaching and partly to students' very good attitudes and the college's very supportive ethos. The college is well led and managed, with strong teamwork and very clear systems, though procedures for reviewing performance do not provide a strong basis for planning improvements. The college provides very good value for money.

The college's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A mutually supportive partnership between teachers, students and parents promotes students' very good achievement and personal development.
- Very good management ensures consistency in the running of departments.
- There is some very skilled teaching as a result of very good professional development and links with other schools. A small proportion of teaching does not engage students sufficiently.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities and students are keen to participate.
- The college farm has a very positive impact on learning and the links with other schools.
- Higher-attaining students are not always challenged sufficiently in lessons.
- A minority of average and lower-attaining boys underachieve due to inattention in some lessons.
- Review procedures do not provide a thorough evaluation of teaching and other provision.

Improvement since the last inspection is good because the college has maintained and improved its previously high standards. Teaching has remained similar. There has been a sound response to the issues in the report, though progress in providing accommodation for all students to take design and technology is limited. The college still does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Many other improvements have helped to raise standards, including opportunities for professional development, collaboration with other schools, curriculum developments and improved accommodation.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	A	A	A	B

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Standards are well above average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Students' very good achievement is the result of good teaching, very positive attitudes, very good support and a strong partnership between school and parents. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is best in English, science, design and technology, geography and religious education. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is very good in these subjects and in mathematics, music, art, business and agriculture. In several subjects, achievement is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 because teaching is stronger. Almost all students achieve very well, including those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some average and lower-attaining boys underachieve.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Their attitudes are very good as the vast majority are keen to make the most of what the college offers. Behaviour is good: most behave very well but a minority of boys are inattentive and disrupt some lessons. Attendance is very good because students enjoy school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching is good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11.

Most teachers know their subjects well and give clear explanations. In many lessons, students are highly engaged through imaginative tasks and good use of ICT and other resources. Most students respond very well and this enhances their learning. In several subjects there is a proportion of less effective teaching. In Years 8 and 9, for example, students' attention is not always well managed and in some lessons, particularly in Year 7, the work does not challenge the highest attainers.

The curriculum is good, with a very good range of extra-curricular activities. The farm is used very well to enhance learning in many subjects. There is a limited range of vocational courses, which the college is planning to extend. Gifted and talented students have some enrichment, but this is not planned systematically in all subjects. Students have very good support and guidance and there is a very good partnership with parents. Very good links with other schools support the exchange of good practice and a smooth transfer from primary school into Year 7.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides good leadership in promoting the college's values, providing a sense of direction and supporting staff and students. Innovation is encouraged and there are very good opportunities for teachers' professional development. The college regularly reviews its performance but evaluation is not rigorous enough and, as a result, strategic planning does not give a clear picture of what the college wishes to achieve. The college is very well managed, with very clear guidance to teachers and managers that promotes consistency. Governors give good support and challenge in planning and monitoring and offer particularly good expertise in finance and improving the premises. Two statutory requirements are not met. Collective worship is not held every day for all students because of a lack of space, though through other means their spiritual development is supported well. The college also lacks suitable accommodation for all students to study design and technology in Years 10 and 11; this ceases to be a requirement in September 2004.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are in most respects very pleased, particularly with their children's progress and maturity. They appreciate the opportunities and the care. Some are concerned about a lack of challenge in Year 7 and insufficient information about progress in Year 7. Some believe that behaviour has declined in recent years. Almost all students are happy and very loyal. They feel well taught in most lessons and well supported. They like the activities and the opportunities to take responsibility. They are aware of some disruptive behaviour but find bullying to be dealt with very well.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the college should do to improve are:

- evaluate the quality of teaching and other provision rigorously and systematically as a basis for planning improvements;
- ensure that all students are challenged in Year 7 and that all subjects plan appropriately for gifted and talented students;
- raise the achievement of average and lower-attaining boys;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Standards are consistently well above average. The difference between girls' and boys' performance is similar to that found nationally but a minority of average and lower-attaining boys underachieve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have risen steadily in Year 9 and in the proportion of students who gain five or more GCSE grades A*-C.
- Students' achievement is enhanced by a mutually supportive partnership between teachers, students and parents.
- Achievement accelerates in Years 10 and 11 because of very good teaching.
- Some average and lower-attaining boys are inattentive in some lessons and hence do less well.
- Gifted and talented students have some enrichment but are not consistently challenged in all subjects.

Commentary

1. Year 9 results are consistently well above average in English, mathematics and science. They have improved steadily, in line with the national trend, and in 2003 were the best yet for English, science and for students' total points score. The results were well above those in similar schools overall, though mathematics results were in line with similar schools. Students' progress in relation to their attainment on entry was well above average. Girls' standards are higher than boys' by the same amount as that found nationally, though boys and girls both make very good progress. Average and lower-attaining boys make rather less progress than other students.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.2 (36.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.7 (37.8)	35.4 (34.7)
science	37.5 (36.7)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 313 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results are consistently well above average. Students' average total points score has remained fairly constant over the last five years, but the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades has improved and was at its highest in 2003. Girls do better than boys by a similar amount as that found nationally. The 2003 results were above those of similar schools. Students' progress in relation to their Year 9 results was well above average overall. However, a minority of boys who achieved average or below average results in Year 9 did less well than similar students nationally.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	75 (71)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (95)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	42.4 (42.1)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 269 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. For current students, standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average. In relation to their attainment on entry, students achieve very well. This is partly due to good teaching, but is also a result of students' own aspirations and confidence and the college's very supportive ethos. There is some variation in achievement across subjects. It is very good in English, science, design and technology, geography and religious education; and good in all other subjects. This variation is closely related to variations in the quality of teaching. Students achieve better in Years 8 and 9 than in Year 7. This is because a minority of lessons in some subjects do not provide all students with enough challenge and this has a greater effect in Year 7, where classes are mixed ability.
4. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average and students achieve very well. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good and, as a result, students' achievement is better than in Years 7 to 9. It is very good in most subjects, though it is good in modern languages, ICT, history, physical education and citizenship. These differences are due to variations in the quality of teaching. As in Years 7 to 9, students' achievement is enhanced by their very good attitudes, very good support and guidance and the college's partnership with parents.
5. Students with special educational needs make very good progress in reaching their individual targets, and in improving their reading and spelling. Their progress is carefully monitored and they achieve very well in all subjects, especially art, horticulture and agriculture. Many do well in GCSE. Gifted and talented students achieve well and in many subjects they achieve very well, particularly in Years 10 and 11. They have some additional enrichment but this is not sufficiently well co-ordinated or monitored. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including the very small number for whom English is an additional language, achieve as well as other students. In most respects, boys and girls achieve equally well, though a minority of average and lower-attaining boys underachieve in some lessons because of low level disruption which is not sufficiently well managed.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes are very good and their behaviour is good overall. Attendance is well above average. Students' personal development is very good: moral and social development is very good; spiritual and cultural development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students have very positive attitudes and are keen to take part in activities.
- Behaviour is good in most lessons and contributes to good learning. In a minority of lessons, however, learning is slowed or disrupted by the immature behaviour of a few students.
- Relationships are very positive and students are proud of their school.
- The college has a clear set of values which contribute well to students' personal development.
- Students' learning is aided by very good attendance.

Commentary

6. The majority of students are engaging and confident young people. They are proud to belong to the Oathall community and are keen to participate in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Their very positive attitudes are a significant factor in their achievement. Students appreciate the college's very strong ethos in which teachers, parents and students support each other in learning and personal development. The college is largely successful in helping its young people develop into mature and responsible adults.
7. The majority of teachers have effective skills in classroom management and in most lessons students behave and concentrate well. There are a minority of students, mostly boys, who are restless and lose concentration easily. Through their professionalism, teachers often manage this well or prevent it from affecting the progress of others. In a small proportion of lessons where class management is less effective, the learning of the whole class is slowed or occasionally disrupted by inattention or poor behaviour.
8. The college's intake has in recent years included more students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Parents believe that the standard of behaviour has declined and students are aware that time is wasted in some of their lessons. Both parents and students believe that the majority behave well. The college has responded well to the increased challenge by clarifying its expectations and communicating these to students, teachers and parents. The behaviour policy includes clear guidance to teachers and an effective system of rewards and sanctions. Senior staff are available to help teachers experiencing discipline problems and anticipate likely trouble spots. Many behaviour problems are successfully resolved within subject departments, but the links between departments and the pastoral team are not as well developed as they could be.
9. Behaviour around the college is generally sensible. There is some bullying, but incidents are dealt with seriously and effectively, and this is appreciated by students. There are very few permanent exclusions and the level of recorded fixed-term exclusions is below average. However, exclusions tend to be for five days or more, and for lesser offences parents are asked to keep students at home unofficially, which is not a legitimate practice. The college has addressed concerns about behaviour at the school gates at the start and end of the day. These areas are now well supervised, but clearly staff cannot control behaviour beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the school, where some concerns remain.

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	1225	45	2
White – Irish	8	0	0
White – any other White background	50	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	8	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	9	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	64	0	0

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

10. Students' social and moral values are developed very well. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and respect the feelings and beliefs of others. Most work very well as part of a small group or team. They understand the nature of working in a community and contribute towards its success. The college provides good opportunities for students to take responsibility. Year 11 prefects, for example, make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the college. The school council is regularly consulted on matters of policy and is taken seriously by other students. Younger students are effectively supported by older ones through the buddy system and peer mediation. As a result of these opportunities, many students have a strong loyalty and sense of ownership for the college.

11. The college does not provide an act of collective worship for all students every day because of a lack of suitable large spaces. Students have weekly assemblies which provide an effective insight into the spiritual dimension. For example, a Year 7 assembly focused the students on the unimaginable size and wonder of the universe in a stimulating manner. In addition to assemblies, the college provides good support for students' spiritual development. Many subjects, including religious education and English, effectively incorporate spiritual and moral themes. The college farm makes a particular contribution, in that the cycle of life and death provides a natural introduction to many of life's questions. On the days without assemblies the quality of tutor periods in promoting social, spiritual and moral development is satisfactory but varies considerably. Students' cultural development is good: they learn about their own and other cultures and are tolerant of others' views. In religious education and citizenship, students are reflective and curious about humanity and multicultural issues are emphasised. Art and music lessons include influences from around the world. Many students take advantage of language exchanges. The college works hard to compensate for its largely mono-cultural catchment area and is a member of an international partnership with schools in seven other countries.

12. Attendance is well above average and any problems are quickly identified and followed up. Punctuality is good and students move between lessons efficiently. There is virtually no truancy and relatively few families take holidays in term time.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.8	School data	0.3
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Teaching is good. There is a good curriculum, with a wide range of popular extra-curricular opportunities. Students’ achievement is supported by very good support and guidance and a very good partnership with parents and other schools.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. There is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching in some subjects. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most teachers know their subjects well and plan carefully to ensure all learn at a good pace.
- Many lessons use interesting tasks that involve students and challenge them to think hard.
- In most lessons, students’ learning is enhanced by their very positive response.
- In a minority of lessons, some students – mainly boys – are inattentive and occasionally disruptive.
- In some lessons, particularly in Year 7, the work does not challenge the highest attainers.

Commentary

13. Three-quarters of all lessons seen were good or better and four out of ten were very good or excellent. Teaching is very good in English, science, design and technology, geography, religious education, art, business and the vocational courses. In other subjects it is at least good overall but is more variable.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 138 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10 (7%)	45 (33%)	48 (35%)	31 (22%)	4 (3%)	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

14. In the good and very good teaching, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to give clear explanations and ask questions that encourage students to think. They plan well-structured lessons that make good use of time and include a variety of interesting tasks. Resources are often used very well to make learning real and active. For example, computers are used for simulations in science, to do composition in music and for research and presentation in many other subjects. The college farm is used as a stimulus for debate and writing in English and as a source of real data for students to analyse in mathematics and ICT.

15. Where teaching is very good or excellent, students are highly engaged through imaginative tasks and learn at a fast pace in response to teachers' clear expectations. Students of all abilities are challenged appropriately. In design and technology, for example, students are motivated by teachers' enthusiasm and by designing and making products that they find relevant. In modern languages, they experiment in using the language and in geography and business they develop their ability to think and learn independently by using case studies. Most English lessons challenge students to think deeply about language and literature, though there are a few lessons where the methods do not involve boys actively and, as a result, they achieve less.
16. In some subjects, there is a proportion of lessons which are in most cases satisfactory but are of less good quality. This is the case in modern languages, mathematics, science, history, art and physical education. In many of these subjects it is because some teachers are inexperienced, temporary or less confident in their subject knowledge. Learning is sometimes slowed because classroom management is not strong enough. Most students' learning is much enhanced by their very positive attitudes: they take a pride in their work and complete homework diligently. However, there are a minority of students, mainly boys, who find concentration difficult. Where teaching is less skilled and inattention is not dealt with, learning is slowed or disrupted. Learning is sometimes less good for other reasons. In mathematics and history, for example, the best lessons give students the opportunity to think and understand, but in some lessons learning is too passive. In a few physical education lessons, expectations are not high enough and students are less diligent as a result.
17. Teaching is more consistently very good in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. One reason for this is that some of the weaker lessons do not provide enough challenge for higher-attaining students, and this has a greater effect in Year 7 where students are taught in mixed ability classes. Another reason is that where behavioural problems occur it is more often in Years 8 and 9.
18. Students with special educational needs are taught well, particularly in the learning support department. Other teachers are well informed about their needs and, in most cases, plan appropriately. Students' learning benefits from very good support given by learning support assistants. Teaching and learning in the agriculture and horticulture courses are very good. Students are very well guided but learn to take initiative and work in a team. Their literacy and numeracy are developed in conjunction with practical skills and their achievements in a work setting lead to improved self-esteem and personal development.
19. The college has five advanced skills teachers and is a training school in conjunction with Sussex University and other local schools. As a result there is considerable good practice in teaching which benefits students' learning in many subjects. Through the college's opportunities for review and development, teachers benefit from sharing this good practice. The review procedures are not sufficiently systematic, however, to ensure that the quality of teaching is evaluated consistently throughout the college and the available skills used to bring all teaching up to a similar standard.
20. Most departments assess students' work well. There is particularly good practice in design and technology, geography and English, where students clearly understand the criteria for attaining different levels in examinations. In most subjects, marking is regular and thorough, although the quality of feedback varies considerably. In English and music, students have a clear idea of how they can improve, while in history, not enough constructive guidance is given. In GCSE physical education, assessment is not used sufficiently to inform students of what they need to do to improve their work.
21. Most departments use assessment well to plan changes to the curriculum, either for groups of students or for individuals. In modern languages, for example, analysis of examination results has led to new courses for the average and lower-attaining students. In geography and music, students' individual targets are guided well by the assessment process.

22. All students know their target levels for each subject at the end of Year 9 or Year 11. From a termly progress grade they are aware of how well they are progressing towards their targets. However, in Years 7 to 9 students are not given a level to indicate their current attainment, and often they do not know the next steps towards their target level. They discuss areas for improvement with their teacher and record these in their annual profile. This contributes to their progress, but while in some subjects the improvement targets provide specific guidance, in others they are too general to be helpful.

The curriculum

The college provides a good curriculum, though statutory requirements are not fully met in design and technology in Years 10 and 11. It is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities. Accommodation and resources support learning well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range of courses provides well for students' needs and abilities, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- There is insufficient accommodation for all students to take design and technology in Years 10 and 11.
- The college reviews its curriculum effectively and is planning to increase the number of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.
- The farm is a major strength, contributing to students' experience in many subjects.
- The wide range of extra-curricular opportunities supports learning very well.

Commentary

23. In Years 7 to 9, the college provides the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education. Time is found for a second modern language for almost all students in Years 8 and 9 and for drama in each year. Dance is included within physical education for girls and boys. Most of the courses in Years 10 and 11 are academic, but this reflects the aspirations of most students and their parents. The governors and the academic board regularly monitor the curriculum. Vocational courses in ICT and agriculture have been offered for many years and horticulture has recently been added. The college is planning to offer further vocational courses next year in collaboration with a further education college. The time allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 for students who do not take a GCSE course is low: it is adequate to cover the syllabus but limits the standards students reach. The college does not have enough workshops for all students to take a GCSE in design and technology, but those who wish to follow the course are able to do so.
24. The college strives to build links between separate subjects in order that the curriculum supports the development of the whole child. This is shown in its current bid to become a specialist college in 'science and the visual arts with a rural dimension'. Advanced skills teachers are effective in leading the development of cross-curricular themes such as thinking skills. Consequently, learning in many subjects is enhanced by the use of literacy and numeracy skills, by the application of ICT, and through the growing impact of citizenship.
25. Students with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum and subject teachers are very well informed about their particular needs. They have well-structured specialist support in lessons and, in addition, follow individual programmes that provide good support for their literacy skills. Gifted and talented students are carefully identified and, in Year 8, a group is withdrawn for special lessons on improving thinking skills. Some gain places in the West Sussex Saturday enrichment programme. There are many other opportunities for talented students in the extra-curricular programme, but apart from the Year 8 classes, the provision is not sufficiently well co-ordinated. Several subjects do not plan enough extension work and gifted and talented students' progress is not monitored except through the normal progress grades. As a result, there are lessons in some subjects in which the highest-attaining

students are not sufficiently challenged. The college is planning to review its provision for gifted and talented students.

26. The college has its own farm, and makes excellent use of this unusual facility to support learning in many subjects, as well as to provide vocational courses. The Young Farmers Club is extremely popular and is one of many extra-curricular activities in which participation is very high. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is well supported and many students benefit from exchanges and residential visits to France and Germany. The many sports activities are very well supported and students enjoy the opportunity to participate in an annual production, most recently *Les Misérables*. There is a good range of visits and community links, notably in art, and many subjects provide booster or catch-up classes.

Example of outstanding practice

As well as offering vocational courses, the farm is an integral part of the college and its community. It makes a significant contribution to learning in many subjects and students' personal development.

It is a working farm, which through very good planning and management forms an exceptional educational resource. Links with many subjects are carefully planned – for example, students in English write essays about farming issues and in art they explore how famous artists portray animals. Through their farm visits, students gain insights into aspects of life such as reproduction and the wonder of birth. The farm is very clean and animals are kept in very good conditions; through this students learn about health and hygiene. The Young Farmers Club has a large membership and wins many awards at agricultural shows. Some students work on the farm outside school hours and develop their responsibility and confidence through caring for animals. The farm welcomes visitors from other schools and students improve their communication skills and self-esteem by giving tours and explaining their work. New technology is widely used – digital cameras are used to record farm life and students' work and, through a web link, inner city children follow the cycle of pregnancy and birth. Very good links are maintained with the farming community. Many students of all abilities value the farm as one of the best aspects of the school.

27. There is a good match between teachers' qualifications and experience and the subjects they teach. Most teachers are specialists in their subjects, except for some of the teachers of ICT, religious education and art. The college is very well staffed with support staff in learning support, design and technology, modern languages and the farm.
28. The curriculum is well supported by the accommodation and resources. The accommodation has some important limitations but has been significantly improved through the efforts of governors and the leadership group, including improvements to mathematics, science and learning support and a very good new drama studio, Year 11 common room and staff room. Despite the college's efforts, there is insufficient design and technology accommodation for all students to take a course in Years 10 and 11 and the physical education facilities are barely satisfactory. Very good displays throughout the college add to the sense of achievement and celebration of learning. Textbooks and equipment are sufficient and suitable. The number of computers is above average: they are accessible and used well in most subjects. The learning resource centre is well stocked and well maintained. It is attractive and well used by teachers and students.

Care, guidance and support

There are very good arrangements to ensure students' care and welfare. Health and safety procedures are good. The college provides students with very good support, advice and guidance and involves them very well through seeking and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction into Year 7 is very good and ensures a smooth transfer from primary school.
- Most students have good, trusting relationships with their teachers.
- Students are involved very well in setting their own targets.
- Students have access to well-informed advice and guidance when they need it.

- Health and safety and child protection procedures are fully in place.

Commentary

29. The college provides a safe working environment and has effective child protection procedures. It liaises well with other agencies, such as social services, when necessary. Teachers are well informed about students' educational, behavioural or medical needs. The transfer from primary school is very well organised and is appreciated by parents. All students are visited in their primary school and information is used well to organise form groups and provide additional help for those who need it. As a result, Year 7 students settle in quickly.
30. Pastoral care is very good. Most teachers and other staff know students well, and there is good mutual respect. Form tutors care about their students and there is effective support from heads of year and the leadership group. Staff work well together and respond appropriately if a student is having problems. Many tutors use tutor periods well to monitor and support students' progress. Students feel that there is an adult – usually their tutor – that they can go to with a problem. Additional support includes peer mediation – where older students support younger ones – the college nurse and Connexions.
31. Students' academic and personal development is monitored on a termly basis. Their successes are celebrated through merits and the 'achievement book', while those who underachieve receive additional support. The farm helps some students to build their self-confidence and sense of achievement. Students with special educational needs are very well supported by the learning support department and their progress is carefully monitored. Students who speak English as an additional language receive good support to help them settle, and appropriate help with English when this is needed. There were very few at the time of the inspection and all had sufficient English to cope well with their learning. The personal, social and health education programme is relevant and contributes very well to students' personal development.
32. Students' views are taken seriously and, as a result, students feel that they are valued members of the community. The school council is very active and has good links with other students. It has an annual budget of £1,000 and its deliberations are valued and acted upon by the leadership group. Students are involved very well in setting their own improvement targets and in monitoring their progress.
33. Students receive appropriate guidance in choosing options in Year 9 and good careers guidance in citizenship, vocational and personal development lessons in Years 10 and 11. The careers library is pleasant and well equipped. Students have appropriate support from Connexions, work experience in Year 11 and there are good links with local colleges. The vast majority of students proceed into sixth form courses at local colleges, with virtually none unemployed or in jobs without training opportunities.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are very good links with parents and very good partnerships with the local community and other schools and colleges. These are strengthened by the college's status as a beacon school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are supportive and are regularly consulted on relevant issues.
- The college sees itself as part of the wider Haywards Heath community and uses its local links to encourage students to think beyond college boundaries.
- Very good links with other local schools have considerable benefit to students' learning and to the partner institutions.
- The information provided to parents is comprehensive.

Commentary

34. Parents are very well informed about the curriculum and college policies. The governors' annual report, a twice-termly newsletter and the college web-site are well designed and provide a good insight into the college's ethos and events. Students' planners provide parents with routine information, and the college is quick to contact parents if their child is having problems. The Oathall College Association is very strong and, in addition to raising funds, acts as an effective forum for parents' views. The college regularly seeks parents' views through questionnaires and responds to any issues that emerge. Parents of Year 7 students have a meeting with tutors in the autumn term to discuss progress, but some would welcome a chance to meet subject teachers earlier than the current parents' evening in April. The college provides three written reports on progress per year. The two interim reports are computer-generated lists of subject grades and would benefit from more explanation on what the grades mean. The full report is far more comprehensive. However, much of the space is taken up with students' own comments and targets that they negotiate with their teachers. Although useful, this leaves restricted space for the teacher's comment. The accompanying leaflet that explains the progress grades is hard to understand in places.
35. As a beacon school, the college has developed very productive and well-organised partnerships with other local schools. Links with primary schools improve understanding and continuity through teachers' meetings and exchanges. Primary schools receive additional support that they much appreciate. The mathematics department, for example, provides classes for more able primary school pupils and the science department runs a science fair. Year 10 students working towards their junior sports leader award help primary schools to organise and run their sporting events. Students from a local special school join physical education lessons. The college is applying for specialist college status, which if successful will extend the links still further. As a training school, the college works with Sussex University to train new teachers. In addition to giving trainees the chance to learn from practising teachers and students, this gives Oathall teachers valuable opportunities for professional development. Teachers are represented on several national bodies for training and research and are hence kept up to date with the latest developments. There is extensive use of the college premises for adult education. College choirs visit local nursing homes and day-care centres. The college farm is a particularly valuable asset for other schools and the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides good leadership and the leadership of other key staff is also good. Management is very good, with a very strong commitment to staff development. Governance is good. The college does not meet the statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students and to ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 follow a course in design and technology.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is successful in encouraging a shared commitment to the college's values and a quest to build on the college's strengths and make further improvements.
- The strategic plan is well organised and includes appropriate priorities, but lacks precision in identifying objectives and how they will be achieved.
- Review is regular and well organised, but does not result in a full evaluation of the college's work.
- The college has very good management systems that result in a strong team structure.
- There are very good arrangements for the professional development of staff.
- Governors play a central role in planning and provide very good support and expertise.

Commentary

36. The headteacher provides strong support for the college's values and a clear sense of direction for further development. She maintains a visible presence and gives good support to students and staff. Her commitment to consultation and collegiality is widely appreciated and, as a result, morale is high and the college has maintained its high standards in a climate of change. The college has a strong ethos which is widely shared among governors, teachers, support staff, students and parents. Leadership, innovation and collaboration are encouraged at all levels. The headteacher receives good support from the leadership group, who have a shared understanding of the college's priorities for improvement and a strong commitment to build on its strengths.
37. Equality of opportunity is integral to the college's ethos. Students believe that they all are encouraged to achieve, no matter what their ability. Students with special educational needs are well supported and the college provides very good opportunities for some of them to succeed. The college has begun to respond to changes in its intake, which includes an increasing number of students with behavioural difficulties and other needs. Behaviour policies are being reviewed and the curriculum is being extended to include more work-related courses. Gifted and talented students are challenged in many subjects and through some additional enrichment, but this provision is not sufficiently well co-ordinated or monitored. In planning its new buildings the college has ensured that students with physical disabilities have good access though it has not been possible to establish this across the whole site. There is a good race equality policy and the performance of students from ethnic minority groups is monitored and reported. There are satisfactory arrangements for supporting the few students with English as an additional language.
38. There is a highly organised structure of planning. The strategic plan includes the areas of focus set by the governors and links the separate plans for the curriculum, staff development, premises, pastoral work, departments and finance. Through this there is good coherence between the plans and a clearly defined cycle for planning and review. However, the individual plans vary in their quality. Taken as a whole, the plan includes appropriate priorities but does not give a clear and detailed picture of what the college wishes to achieve. This is partly because it is not based on a thorough evaluation of current strengths and weaknesses and partly because some plans lack specific targets. The headteacher and governors are aware of these shortcomings and improvements are being considered.
39. The college regularly reviews aspects of its performance. The reviews are very well managed but do not provide a full and rigorous evaluation of the college's work. Examination results are analysed carefully, including the performance of groups of students and value-added from one stage to the next. Reports to staff and governors give a clear summary of results, but could usefully be developed to show the progress made by groups of students. Performance management of staff is well established and includes observation of teaching. The work of each department is monitored every two years through a 'biennial review'. These are very well organised and consist of lesson observations around an agreed aspect of teaching. Each review leads to a report on strengths and areas for development that is presented to governors and the leadership group. The biennial reviews provide very good staff development but do not evaluate all aspects of departmental work. In addition, the outcomes of the various review procedures are not drawn together to provide a systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching and other provision across the college. As a result, strategic planning is not precise and some teachers do not get enough support to bring their teaching up to the quality of the best.
40. Governors carry out their duties well and provide good support for the college's development. They are fully committed to the college's aims, contribute to policies and plans and are involved in setting the major priorities in the strategic plan. Governors provide a good range of expertise from their own professional backgrounds and strong links with the local community. They know the college well from reports from the headteacher and subject leaders and from regular meetings with parents at the Oathall College Association. They have a good knowledge of the

college's strengths and weaknesses and provide challenge as well as very strong support. Their ability to question strengths and weaknesses in the performance of different areas is somewhat limited by the format in which examination results are reported. Governors are fully aware of their statutory duties though two statutory requirements are not met. The college lacks the accommodation to provide all students in Years 10 and 11 with a course in design and technology. Since the last inspection, the governors have made efforts to rectify this and from its own funding the college has improved the technology facilities, but it is still short of workshops. Accommodation difficulties also prevent the college from providing a daily act of collective worship, though through other means students' spiritual development is supported well.

41. Heads of department and heads of year are given very clear guidance on their roles. The management of the college is very clear and thorough and results in a good level of consistency. The management of departments is good and often very good. There is very good commitment and teamwork in many departments. The monitoring of teaching by heads of department is very good in some subjects but lacks rigour in some others. Special educational needs provision is well managed. The newly-appointed co-ordinator has accurately identified the priorities for development in order to build on the department's many strengths and respond to the increasing range of needs. Management of the farm is excellent, providing an exceptional facility for the college and the wider community.
42. Staff development is very good and is a high priority. Newly-qualified teachers are provided with very good induction, though the quality of support from heads of department varies. In-service training is well funded and is very well organised to meet the needs of the college and individual staff. As a training school, the college provides workshops for trainee teachers from Sussex University and in-house training for teachers who are unqualified graduates and wish to gain a teaching qualification. The beacon school activities provide further opportunities for sharing good practice. There are five advanced skills teachers who lead on developments in teaching and learning in Oathall and other local schools. Leadership is encouraged at all levels and some teachers are given specific responsibility to lead on whole-college developments. Several teachers are involved in educational research. All of these activities help with recruitment and retention.
43. Financial management is very good. There are clear links between planning and spending, although these are not built into the annual strategic plan. The college's funding is below average and yet through careful planning, the governors and leadership group have been able to make significant improvements to the accommodation and to fund professional development generously. The headteacher is creative in raising additional funds. Financial procedures are very efficient. Budget planning includes forward projection over several years and comparisons of costs with similar schools, though these developments are at an early stage.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,188,451
Total expenditure	4,201,848
Expenditure per pupil	3,022

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	83,884
Balance carried forward to the next	70,487

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Very good leadership is focused on maintaining high standards and improving practice.
- The subject develops students' literacy and their skills in understanding texts very well.
- Some groups of boys underachieve in some lessons.

Commentary

44. Year 9 results in 2003 were well above average and well above those of similar schools. There has been a rising trend over the last four years. GCSE results were well above average in English and English literature and students did better than expected in relation to their attainment on starting the course. Results have improved over the last three years.
45. Current standards in Year 9 are well above average and students achieve very well. Most write accurate, extended pieces, with correct punctuation and paragraphs. The highest-attaining students write very effectively in a range of styles. For example, one very good story was written in a Dickensian style after reading 'Great Expectations'. Lower-attaining students write shorter, less-developed pieces and make more spelling and punctuation mistakes. All students understand and use the basic vocabulary of literary criticism, and higher-attaining students analyse literary extracts confidently, with perceptive insights into writers' intentions.
46. Students continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 and standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average. They read a wide range of literature and can give a clear account of the plot and characters. The highest-attaining students write well-structured essays of an appropriate length that are confident and stylish. One excellent essay explored the themes and techniques used by HG Wells in 'The Time Machine'. Lower-attaining students understand texts effectively, but write shorter, straightforward pieces and sometimes fail to appreciate underlying themes. Students with special educational needs achieve very well. They get good support from learning support assistants, and teachers plan effectively for their needs. The great majority of students express their ideas in discussion fluently and confidently. They use a wide vocabulary and speak formally when appropriate. Higher-attaining students read aloud with confidence and assurance though some lower-attaining students stumble over unfamiliar words and lack expression.
47. Teaching is very good and most students learn very well. Teachers are subject specialists and very effectively challenge students to think deeply. They teach literary analysis expertly, carefully building students' knowledge and understanding from Year 7. They prepare students very carefully for examinations. Work is marked helpfully, with clear guidance on how to improve. Students' own attitudes contribute positively to their learning. Not all, however, behave consistently well. There are small groups of students in some lessons, usually boys, who learn less well than others. This is because the range of learning methods does not stimulate those who prefer to learn practically, or through using visual images. Computers are used well for drafting coursework, producing newspaper articles and research. English contributes very well to students' moral and spiritual development. The college farm is used very well to stimulate creative writing and debate about ethical issues.

48. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department is reflective and with the rest of the department is focused on maintaining and improving high standards. Teachers' skills are enhanced by doing research into the teaching of English and contributing to teacher training. Assessment data is used very well to identify students who are underachieving. The quality of teaching is monitored very well through observing lessons and discussing students' work. The department has made good progress since the last inspection: high standards and very good teaching have been maintained and students' achievement has improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

49. Literacy is well above average across the college. Students write accurately, usually with correct spelling and punctuation. English teachers encourage wide reading and students are used to reading for many purposes, including relaxation. Oral skills are well above average and most students discuss issues confidently using a wide vocabulary. Most subjects support literacy very well. In design and technology and ICT, for example, good attention is paid to technical vocabulary. Students write in a variety of styles in geography and learn how to structure an essay. In agriculture and horticulture, they improve their ability to express themselves through talking and writing. In history, however, while students write extended pieces, they do not get enough guidance in how to structure an essay. Students with weak literacy skills are identified early in Year 7 and get good additional support. They have their own literacy programme and regularly practise their reading with support from Year 10 students.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Nearly all students achieve well in French and German; higher attainers achieve very well.
- Some very good and excellent lessons provide opportunities for students to work creatively and independently.
- In a minority of lessons, achievement is limited by restlessness and lack of challenge.
- Very good leadership and management focus strongly on raising attainment.
- Very good visits and exchanges, the contribution of foreign language assistants and high quality display stimulate learning well and promote very positive attitudes.

Commentary

50. GCSE results in French in 2003 were well above average, especially for boys and higher-attaining students. German results declined to below average. This was due to an increased number of average and lower-attaining students choosing German, and the shorter time available for study. Although girls' results declined significantly in both languages, they did better than boys. An unusually high percentage of candidates gained grades A* to B.
51. Current standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and students achieve well. Higher attainers achieve very well, in both French and German, producing accurate written work and speaking confidently with very good pronunciation. In a minority of lessons, achievement is only satisfactory, limited by difficult behaviour, lack of commitment and lack of challenge in tasks. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average and good achievement is sustained. Higher attainers achieve impressive standards in speaking and writing creatively. Standards seen in lower sets are a little disappointing in oral work, but lower attainers, including students with special educational needs, benefit from well-structured coursework to produce good written work in simple but understandable language. All students recall vocabulary well, so that comprehension skills, especially listening, are well developed.

52. Teaching and learning are good overall. Nearly all the teaching by permanent teachers is good or better. There is more variation in lessons taught by temporary teachers or when teachers are teaching their second language. This is most evident in the extent to which teachers use the foreign language to conduct lessons. In the best lessons, students hear a lot of French or German, which improves their listening and provides a good model for imitation. Activities are brisk and varied, sustain interest and provide students with opportunities, supplemented by homework, to experiment with language independently. An end product, such as a leaflet or poster, gives purpose to acquiring new language. There is a real sense of enjoyment in learning, and the more able are extended well. In less successful lessons, there is too much reliance on textbooks and unvaried work is not well matched to individual needs, particularly in classes with a wide range of ability. In these lessons, concentration and behaviour deteriorate as students become restless. Generally, teachers use resources, ICT and foreign language assistants very well to support learning. There is a strong focus on improving study and thinking skills. Assessment in class is effective in making students aware of their progress, but the quality of guidance in marking is inconsistent. Students' learning is enhanced by their very positive attitudes, which are evident in the take-up for languages in Years 10 and 11, especially the unusually high number who continue with both French and German.
53. Leadership and management are very good. Excellent documentation, and very good monitoring, review, data analysis and display support the drive to raise standards, with a high level of shared commitment from departmental staff. Their efforts support successful and popular exchanges and e-mail links with French and German schools. Concerns about falling results in GCSE and the attitudes of some boys are reflected in measures to amend provision, including a change of GCSE course for some students. Minor weaknesses identified in the previous report have been rectified, and strengths have been sustained, so that improvement has been good and there is good capacity to deal with current concerns.

Example of outstanding practice

In Year 11 German, students made excellent progress in using and understanding the language through imaginative role play in a relevant setting.

From the start, the teacher's consistent, fluent use of German created an environment in which students understood that German would be the only means of communication. Using an overhead projector, the teacher presented new language relevant to road accidents and breakdowns, well supported by gesture and visual signals to ensure comprehension, and injected humour which students understood and appreciated. By setting homework at an early stage – the creation of an AA-style handbook for tourists in Germany – the teacher gave a clear sense of purpose to the activities which followed. Students created and practised role play about a road accident and subsequent contact with a garage or hospital. Some left the room to practise with the foreign language assistant. Ultimately, students performed their sketches to the class, showing an impressive command of sophisticated language in inventive and amusing scenarios. The teacher used each pair's performance as a comprehension exercise for the rest of the class. Students quickly acquired and applied new language in conjunction with language learned in other topics. Performance increased their confidence and made a significant contribution to their personal development. Excellent planning led to excellent learning in a very enjoyable lesson.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Higher-attaining students achieve very well, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Some middle and lower-attaining students underachieve in Years 8 and 9.
- The department is well led and very well organised.

Commentary

54. Year 9 results in 2003 were well above average and in line with schools with a similar intake. Results have slightly fallen over the last three years, although they are higher than five years ago. GCSE results were well above average and slightly higher than in 2002. The proportion gaining the top grades A* to B improved dramatically and half the students achieved this level. Many students also take GCSE statistics, in which standards are well above average.
55. Current standards are well above average in all years. Achievement is good overall for several reasons. Most students have good attitudes to work and come to lessons expecting to work hard and make good progress. They use processes accurately to answer mathematical questions and receive help and encouragement from their teachers. Most take care and pride in the presentation of their work. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11, particularly for higher-attaining students, due to very good teaching and very good attitudes to learning. Some students underachieve, particularly some boys in middle and lower-attaining sets in Years 7 to 9. In some cases this is because of a passive approach to learning, which results in students being unwilling to ask for help when they don't understand; in other cases it is because of poor attitudes or behaviour. Too many students are over-reliant on calculators. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others because they are in appropriate, slightly smaller, sets and receive additional support from teachers and learning support assistants.
56. Teaching and learning are good overall. More than half of lessons are good or better, and two in every five are very good. However, two lessons in every five are satisfactory, and contain, as well as strengths, some weaknesses that inhibit students' learning. Many of these lessons are with middle and lower-attaining sets, particularly in Years 8 and 9. All teachers are good mathematicians, and in most lessons, clear and accurate explanations give students a clear model to follow. Teachers provide individual students with very good support, though higher-attaining students in mixed ability Year 7 classes are not provided with extension material. ICT is integrated well into lessons to support students' learning. In the best lessons, there is a good variety of activities that engage students, with a starter activity to review learning or practise a key skill in preparation for the main part of the lesson. In these lessons, students are challenged to think and to solve problems, but in too many lessons mathematics is presented as a set of processes to answer standard questions and there is not enough challenge or pace. In some lessons, teachers do not systematically check that the students understand what they have been taught, so that the lesson continues with some students becoming increasingly confused, and their misconceptions uncorrected.
57. The department is very well organised, with very good written guidance for teachers and a strong, supportive team ethos. Although a good start has been made in using the Key Stage 3 national strategy, some of the methods have yet to be applied consistently by all teachers. The department is well resourced and a new system for assessing each student's progress in Years 7 to 9 has very good potential. Improvement since the last inspection is good: high standards and good achievement have been maintained; the curriculum has been extensively improved, notably the use of ICT and numeracy lessons for lower-attaining students in Year 7.

Mathematics across the curriculum

58. Standards of numeracy support learning well in all subjects. A consistent approach to numerical methods is encouraged by the numeracy policy and by linking mathematics teachers to other departments in an advisory capacity. This works particularly well in science, where teachers have a good understanding of when skills are learned in mathematics, so that they can time their applications effectively. Many departments plan the use of mathematics carefully and in some cases mathematical methods are applied very well. In physical education, for example, the teacher used the idea of a tangent to a curve in discussing movement, and checked that students understood the concept well enough for the purposes of the lesson. Graphs and statistics are used well in physical education, religious education, and modern

languages. In design and technology and horticulture, students measure accurately in their practical work.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are consistently well above average; the proportion of students gaining A* and A grades is more than three times the national average.
- Students achieve very well because teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Lesson planning does not always ensure that higher-attaining students are well enough stretched or that the attention of middle and lower-attaining boys is fully engaged.

Commentary

59. Results in Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations were well above average in 2003, as they have been for several years. Students do very well in comparison with schools with a similar intake. Those currently in Year 9 achieve very well. Their attainment on entry to the college was about average but standards seen during the inspection were well above average. Students continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. Standards are well above average in Year 11, demonstrated for example when students used their knowledge of the movement of molecules to explain osmosis in potatoes. GCSE results have declined a little since 2001, but almost one third of all Year 11 students gain A* or A grades. Overall, girls do better than boys, particularly in the A* to C grade range.
60. Most students' progress is enhanced by their very good attitudes. They seek to gain the highest possible grade in tests and examinations, usually working to full capacity in lessons, then consolidating their learning through homework and thorough revision. However, a minority are not fully stretched by lesson content, particularly in Year 7, while some boys are sometimes inattentive, particularly in Year 9. Although achievement in some individual lessons is less good than it should be in Years 7 to 9, students' overall achievement during the three years is still very good.
61. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Nearly half the lessons seen were very good, but nearly one third were barely satisfactory, mostly in Years 7 to 9 and mostly taken by inexperienced teachers. Key features of very good lessons are a clear focus on the learning of different groups of students, interesting and varied activities that engage and maintain interest, and high expectations of behaviour and work-rate that are communicated at an early stage. In one very good lesson, the teacher very effectively used timed slots for each activity to encourage students to work at a brisk pace. Higher-attaining students were asked to display results in pie charts as well as bar charts and to develop their skills in analysing results. Students' learning is often enhanced by computer simulation, for example helping them to visualise what happens at the particle level when changes of state occur. In barely satisfactory lessons, teachers do not ensure that higher-attaining students work to their full capacity, particularly in groups where students' abilities are wide-ranging. Boys in middle and lower sets sometimes achieve less well than they should because teachers do not deal with inattention at an early enough stage. The quality of marking is inconsistent. About half the teachers mark thoroughly, with helpful written comments, but others make superficial comments that do not show students how to improve.
62. Leadership and management are good. The department works well as a team, for example in reviewing and modifying schemes of work. Teachers are committed to further improvement in standards. However, students' experience of science is inconsistent because there is too much variation in the quality of teaching, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the last

inspection is good. Year 9 results have improved and GCSE results have been maintained at their previous high level. Students continue to make very good progress.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Many subjects provide good opportunities for students to develop and apply their computer skills.
- Teaching is good and students are well motivated.
- Plans do not take sufficient account of the needs of the highest-attaining students.

Commentary

63. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average overall. However, standards in using ICT are well above average because students learn most of their ICT through a very well-planned programme across a range of different subjects. This develops their ability to apply their skills purposefully and to good effect, but generally does not give them an in-depth knowledge of the software they use. This is because not all teachers have sufficient depth of ICT knowledge and there is insufficient time in lessons to extend students' knowledge to the highest level. Lessons in computer-aided design (CAD) are an exception to this and students reach very high standards.
64. In Years 10 and 11, students study ICT in one of three ways – as part of GCSE business, through a vocational (CLAIT) course or within their other subjects. Students on the business course reach well above average standards in ICT. They have a very good grasp of many software packages and apply their computing skills well in solving business problems. On the CLAIT course, standards are below average because most students are of lower ability. However, in 2003 all students passed the level 1 examination and their results were better than expected. Boys and girls gained similar results. A few of the current students are reaching average standards as a result of good teaching and will be capable of entry at level 2. Other students, who learn ICT through their other subjects, reach above average standards overall. Their use of word processing and desktop publishing is often well above average, as are their skills in doing research on the internet. Students use ICT very effectively to create compositions in music and to design products in design and technology. Standards in using databases are below average because students have few opportunities to learn these skills.
65. Achievement is good overall. Students enter the college with above average skills and make satisfactory progress in their knowledge of many software packages. Achievement in using CAD and music software is very good. Students make very good progress in applying their skills to their work in other subjects. There are opportunities for higher-attaining students to extend their skills after school through designing web-pages or programming, but lesson plans do not systematically take account of these students' needs. Students with special educational need make similar progress to other students.
66. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations and make the work challenging and relevant. Lessons are conducted at a lively pace and, as a result, students work hard and are very productive. Classes are well managed: students behave well and are thoroughly engrossed in their work. In a minority of lessons, learning is slowed by difficulties students have in retrieving their work and finding files on the shared area of the computer.
67. Leadership and management are very good. The curriculum is exciting and well planned. There is a firm commitment to training teachers in order to raise standards further. Very good forward planning has provided a good range of resources that meet the needs of the college well. Progress since the last inspection is good. Standards have been sustained, resources are now

satisfactory and are improving. The very good cross-curricular provision mentioned in the last report has been extended.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

68. Students reinforce and extend their ICT skills well in almost all subjects. Their use of computers is particularly good in business studies, design and technology and GCSE music. It is satisfactory in physical education and also in art, though students do not have enough opportunities to use computers for creative work. Many subjects provide good opportunities to undertake research and to word process assignments. In design and technology, students use CAD and CAM (computer-aided manufacture) to understand how computers are used to design and control machinery. In science, they improve their understanding through computer simulations and use probes to measure and record experimental data. Computers are used well in French and German to improve language skills. The ICT department makes very good use of the farm by gathering information for data analysis, producing booklets for visitors and logging data via a web-cam.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and sometimes excellent.
- Examination results are high.
- Students develop skills in thinking and learning independently.
- Case studies and geographical simulations are used very effectively.
- There are too few opportunities for field study in Years 8 and 9.

Commentary

69. GCSE results were above average in 2002 and well above average in 2003. Students did as well as in their other subjects and as well as expected from their prior attainment. Girls did better than boys by a similar amount to that found nationally.
70. Standards in Year 9 are well above average. Students achieve very well in relation to their knowledge of geography on entry to the college. Students with special educational needs also achieve very well, especially when provided with extra classroom support. Students quickly acquire very good skills in map work and can undertake geographical enquiries. Their written work is generally very good and their use of number is well developed. Students develop a good understanding of how physical and human aspects of geography interrelate and of the issues surrounding human development.
71. Standards in Year 11 are also well above average. Students achieve very well, including those who have special educational needs. Students gain a good understanding of geographical concepts. In urban geography, for example, Year 11 students analyse theoretical models of city structures and identify reasons for different types of land use. They have a clear understanding of the positive and negative effects of out-of-town shopping centres. They can identify the impact of tourism in Kenya and analyse the reasons. Their coursework is very good because they plan and structure it effectively and successfully apply the geographical techniques they have learned. Students use computers well to analyse and present data.
72. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they are enthusiastic and committed and use a range of imaginative methods that stimulate students' interest. Lessons are well structured in

three parts and students have many opportunities to learn independently and develop their thinking skills. High expectations, rigorous pace and challenge lead students to make very good progress. Higher-attaining students and those with special educational needs are provided with appropriate tasks. Most students have very positive attitudes and behave well. In one lesson, however, many students underachieved because their attitudes were unsatisfactory and they were not well managed. Case studies and geographical simulations are used very well to consolidate understanding of geographical ideas. Assessment is good and students are informed of what they need to do to meet to reach their target grades.

73. The subject is very well led. Schemes of work and lesson plans are very good and the department is well resourced. However geography rooms are spread around the college, which creates difficulties in managing resources and supporting less experienced staff. Departmental work is monitored well through lesson observations and analysis of assessment data. Fieldwork was a weakness in the last report and is still too limited in Years 8 and 9. The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Since the last inspection results have improved and new teaching methods have been developed. Improvement has been good and the department has good capacity for further improvement.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve well throughout the college.
- Teaching is good but does not always provide enough opportunity for students to discuss and explore issues in depth.
- Assessment data is used well to track students' progress but marking does not give enough guidance for improvement.
- Provision is well planned but is not monitored rigorously enough.

Commentary

74. GCSE results have been well above average in recent years, but in 2003 dropped to above average. Current standards in Year 11 are similar to the 2003 results. The drop in standards is largely due to a significant increase in the number and wider range of ability of students opting for history. Standards at the end of Year 9 are also above average. All students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.
75. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of events and people in the past, and in lessons they develop good skills in using evidence to answer historical questions. Year 8 students, for example, presented soundly-based views about whether Mary I deserved to be called Bloody Mary. They use historical sources as evidence, place events in time and empathise with people and situations in the past. This was shown particularly strongly in the work of Year 9 students on working conditions in nineteenth century factories. Higher-attaining students have very good research skills and confidently link factors such as the influences of class and religion on the changing role of women. The quality of written work varies significantly, especially in Years 10 and 11. The work of higher-attaining students is usually detailed and well structured, providing fluent description and very good explanation, enhanced by good literacy and ICT skills. The work of other students is not always well organised: points are not fully developed or explained, and introductions and conclusions are weak. Much work is not sufficiently analytical and critical, especially in the use of historical sources. In some cases it is careless and poorly presented.
76. Teaching is good overall, but is inconsistent in quality, ranging from excellent to satisfactory. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and all lessons benefit from clear presentations, good classroom management and harmonious relationships. Learning is enhanced by good

resources and good support for literacy. The better lessons offer students challenging opportunities to think and explore issues in depth, to which they respond very well. Year 9 students, for example, relished the challenge to research aspects of World War 1. They worked enthusiastically and responsibly in small groups using a wide range of resources to do independent research. They were constantly challenged by the teacher to work at even more demanding levels. In the weaker lessons, however, too great a concern with covering content limits the opportunity for in-depth analysis and discussion of evidence. In these lessons, questioning is not used sufficiently to check students' understanding or encourage thinking. The marking of students' work is regular but does not consistently provide enough guidance for improvement. Their progress is tracked closely through regular assessment, though the National Curriculum levels assigned in Years 7 to 9 tend to be too generous.

77. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader is very experienced and work is planned meticulously. She is well supported by the head of humanities. The monitoring of provision is well established but is insufficiently rigorous in checking whether development priorities have been achieved. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in maintaining high standards and good teaching.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving and students achieve very well.
- Teachers use resources very well to motivate students and reinforce their understanding.
- Students enjoy lessons because teaching is enthusiastic and challenging.
- Standards reached by students who do not opt for GCSE are limited by the time allocation.
- Occasionally a few students, mainly boys, lose concentration because tasks are too long.

Commentary

78. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were above average and students did better than expected from their Year 9 results.
79. When students enter the college, their knowledge of religions is broadly average. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average, which is very good achievement for all groups of students. Students develop a very good knowledge and understanding of the main beliefs and practices of the major world religions. Their standard of writing is well above average and many students in Years 7 to 9 write accurate, sensitive and thoughtful pieces. They make good use of ICT to do research and present their work.
80. In Years 10 and 11, about one fifth of students opt to study GCSE religious studies. This number is increasing and standards are steadily improving. Standards by Year 11 are well above average and students achieve very well, building confidently on their previous learning. Students move beyond the externals of religion to probe deeper questions of meaning and morality. They use religious language with increasing confidence: they write accurately and their oral skills are well above average. Students in Year 11, for example, skilfully debated different Christian attitudes to abortion, with very good knowledge of the issues and understanding of different points of view. For students who do not follow a GCSE course, standards are average. The time allocated to religious education has been increased since the last inspection, but is still below that recommended, which limits the standard that students can reach. Teachers and students work very hard within this constraint, however, and achievement is very good. In one lesson, for example, students talked knowledgeably about the Turin Shroud and concluded from the evidence that it is probably genuine.

81. Teaching and learning are very good overall, with some excellent features in Years 10 and 11, where all lessons are taught by specialists. Teaching is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and very well planned. Tasks are varied and challenging, with clear starts and finishes so that students know exactly what they need to do and why. Occasionally, some tasks last too long, so that a small number of students, boys particularly, lose their concentration. A significant strength in teaching is that resources such as religious artefacts, music and video are used extremely well. As a result, students enjoy lessons, work hard and take a pride in their achievements. Marking is often very good, with clear comments on what students have done well and what they need to improve, though not all teachers mark to this standard. Religious education makes a very good contribution to students' personal development through well-planned opportunities to consider spiritual and moral issues and to gain a better understanding of other cultures.
82. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has a clear vision for the development of the subject and there is a shared commitment to improve. Teachers are very good role models and work very well as a team, sharing good practice and concerns. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

The curriculum does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum in Years 10 and 11 because not all students take the subject. This is because there is insufficient accommodation. All who wish to take a GCSE in design and technology are able to do so. The current curriculum will meet the new requirements that come into force in September 2004.

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good because students are given a high level of individual challenge.
- Very good teaching motivates and engages students.
- The curriculum provides a very wide range of experiences.
- Teachers' plans do not take sufficient account of the needs of the highest-attaining students.

Commentary

83. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and students achieved better than expected from their attainment at the end of Year 9. Only in textiles were results lower than expected, which was a result of staffing difficulties. Girls did better than boys but the difference was less than is found nationally. High standards have been sustained over recent years.
84. Current standards at the end of Year 9 are above average in designing and making. Students develop good practical skills, using hand tools and simple machine tools to cut and join materials safely and accurately. Their knowledge of structures and materials is above average and their work in electronics and CAD is well above average. The standard of their folders is variable. In jewellery, folders are well organised and students take great pride in them as a record of their work. In some other areas folders are not kept tidy, which makes it difficult for students to evaluate their work.
85. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average. Students' designs are thorough and systematic, and are usually based on detailed, carefully analysed research. Occasionally, the research they do is not entirely relevant to the project. Students always plan and model a good range of ideas and choose the product they will make after careful evaluation. Their products are made to a very high standard and are very well finished. They evaluate their work thoroughly and their folders are of a very good quality. Students have a very good understanding of materials and of batch and mass production.

86. Students achieve very well because they are very well taught and because their interest is engaged through being given choice over the products they design and make. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others. In some projects, such as electronics, higher-attaining students are given extension work, but this is not generally the case and, as a result, they do not always achieve to their full capacity.
87. Teachers are enthusiastic and use their very good subject knowledge to develop students' skills to a high level. As a result, students are inspired and take great pride in their work. Lessons are very well planned to ensure that students learn in a relevant context. In a Year 10 project on multicultural diets, for example, students researched a foreign festival and then cooked a recipe associated with it. During practical work, students' progress is enhanced by very good individual help and encouragement. Work proceeds at a very lively pace: in an excellent Year 9 CAD class, for example, students mastered professional drawing software in just two lessons. In a small minority of lessons, teaching is less good because expectations of students' work are too low and the context of the work is uninteresting.
88. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers are committed to attaining high standards and work very well as a team. Students' progress is assessed carefully and they are given additional support where necessary. The curriculum is very broad and includes modern technologies. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. High standards have been consolidated and design work is now well established in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum has been broadened, though statutory requirements are still not met in Years 10 and 11.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and music were inspected in detail but drama was also sampled.

89. Students in Years 7 to 9 have a fortnightly **drama** lesson, and drama is a GCSE option. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. Two lessons were seen during the inspection: one was excellent and the other was very good. Students learnt very well because the lessons were very carefully structured and the most was made of the available time. Teachers are confident subject specialists and build up students' understanding of dramatic techniques systematically and very thoroughly. Students are enthusiastic and appreciate the opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities, such as theatre visits and productions.

Example of outstanding practice

Young students developed their awareness of bullying and how to deal with it through drama and empathy.

Year 7 students enthusiastically responded to the challenge to move like Year 11s – confidently, with a swagger, as though they owned the school! Then they switched to role-playing new Year 7 students who had just arrived – tentative, almost apologising for existing. This was the warm-up, and the teacher very cleverly used elements from this all through the lesson, as in groups students built up short improvised pieces exploring issues to do with bullies and victims. Students learnt very rapidly, throwing themselves into the drama, using body language, facial expressions, movement, and later dialogue, to play different roles in a bullying incident. The teacher wove in discussion throughout the lesson: How does it feel to be physically superior? What is it like to be scared of someone? Almost subliminally, students were learning dramatic techniques such as freeze frames and thought tracking, and at the end they were introduced to a 'conscience corridor' when they became themselves again, giving advice or simply speaking their mind to the bully. This was powerful learning, both about drama and about themselves.

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Three-dimensional work is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good and lead to high achievement for middle and lower-attaining students.
- Very high attaining students do not always achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Drawing, particularly in sketchbooks, is not good enough.
- ICT is used well to do research, but not well enough as a creative tool.

Commentary

90. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. The number of students who took art was significantly higher than in 2002, and standards rose, though no students achieved A* grades.
91. Current standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. Students' skills when they enter the college are average and they achieve well. Standards in three-dimensional work are well above average in a good range of media. Students' research is also very good and they understand the styles and work of many artists, mainly from the twentieth century. Painting skills are above average, but students' drawing, particularly in their sketchbooks, is average.
92. The subject is popular at GCSE and standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average. Students achieve very well overall, including those with special educational needs. Relatively little work falls below grade C standard. However, the work of several students who are capable of A* grades does not yet display the originality or flair that is expected. Drawing remains weaker in Years 10 and 11 than three-dimensional work, research or painting.
93. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The difference is because there is some non-specialist teaching in Years 7 to 9 where learning is not always so good, partly because class management is less secure. Most younger classes are noisy but very well controlled, so that students' energy is channelled into productive, creative activity. Teachers have high expectations and challenge most students very effectively. Lower-attaining students in particular get good grades because teachers engage their interests well through three-dimensional and other non-graphical work. They do not, however, have enough opportunities to make creative use of ICT. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and most classes have a fulfilling, busy atmosphere, particularly as students get older. Sketchbooks are not used well enough in Years 7 to 9 to teach students how to produce imaginative records of their investigations. This means that students, especially boys, are not well prepared to produce their work-journals for GCSE. The teaching of very high attaining students is not sufficiently open-ended and, as a result, their work is not sufficiently individual early on in their studies.
94. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department is energetic and has a clear vision of giving all students the opportunity to develop their skill and understanding of art. There are good links with the local and wider community that support students' learning and interest. High standards have been maintained since the last inspection and improvement has been good.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good in the GCSE course.
- Teaching and learning are good and incorporate good use of ICT.
- The department is very well organised and managed.
- A minority of boys underachieve.

- Vocal work is underdeveloped.

Commentary

95. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and higher than in the previous two years.
96. Current standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Students join the college with average standards and achieve well. In Years 7 to 9, they learn the correct technique for playing the keyboard, and develop an understanding of a range of western and non-western musical styles. In Year 9, they improvise confidently within a blues structure and some do so with a sense of style. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average, which is very good achievement because students who choose the course have a wide range of ability. GCSE students develop independent compositions, making good use of computers and instrumental skills. They perform well and learn how to evaluate their work. They are less confident about their skill in listening to music, and this is reflected in recent examination results.
97. Teaching is good and is characterised by a warm and engaging approach. ICT is used well by teachers and students. Lessons are carefully planned to help students learn musical concepts through practical activity. In the best lessons, students are engaged in a learning activity from the very start. Occasionally, however, teachers talk for too long without involving students in musical activity and, as a result, interest wanes. Lower-attaining students are well supported and included in whole class activities, but their progress is less good in individual activities because they do not have the concentration to follow instructions accurately. Students' attitudes are good overall, although a minority of boys do not take the subject seriously and this affects the learning ethos. Students' progress in Years 10 and 11 is enhanced because they are taught in small groups and receive additional help from a trainee teacher. Students' work is marked thoroughly, with very clear feedback. In Years 10 and 11, this enables them to refine their work, although in Years 7 to 9 they are less aware of what they need to do to improve.
98. Leadership and management are very good and have effectively steered the department through a challenging period of change. Priorities for development are appropriate and planning is thorough. Staff have good opportunities to further their own professional development. The additional support provided by a trainee teacher has a positive impact on standards in Years 10 and 11, and the involvement of a Hungarian teacher is enriching students' cultural awareness.
99. Accommodation is very good and resources are good, although there is a lack of good quality percussion instruments. Students have a range of extra-curricular opportunities and there is good provision for learning instruments. In addition to well-organised groups, students are encouraged to manage their own rehearsals. The take up of choirs is very small, which reflects a lack of vocal work in the curriculum. The college mounts regular, high quality musical productions and students perform in the local community. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have risen, as has the quality of teaching. Weaknesses in the teaching of composing have now been rectified.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent links with primary schools give students a thorough introduction to the college.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students lead to high levels of motivation.
- There is a very wide extra-curricular programme in which students reach high standards.
- Monitoring of teaching is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the best practice is shared by all teachers, especially for GCSE theory.

Commentary

100. Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average and students achieve well. They do particularly well in games such as rugby, football and hockey. They develop good ball skills and use strategies effectively in competitive situations. Lower-attaining students are less confident in transferring their skills into a competitive game but achieve well relative to their ability. In dance, students have a good understanding of choreography and are able to memorise difficult routines but as yet lack the technical ability to perform with precision and refinement. Students' skills in planning their ideas and evaluating their performance are not always well developed.
101. In Years 10 and 11, all students follow a core course and about one fifth opt to take a GCSE. Standards in the core course are above average and students achieve well. In games, many students play with accuracy and refinement and communicate well with their team. They successfully take on the role of coach or official. Students with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as others.
102. GCSE results in 2003 were just above average and most students gained better grades than in their other subjects. Current standards in Year 11 are above average in theory and well above average in practical activities. Achievement overall is satisfactory, though students make slower progress in theory lessons because the tasks set are not always well designed for the highest and lowest-attaining students. Higher and middle-attaining students complete coursework to a high standard. They use statistics very well to analyse and interpret results from fitness tasks. Lower-attaining students' work is not always complete and they have a limited recall of facts under test conditions.
103. Teaching is good overall though it varies considerably. Teachers are specialists and demonstrate activities effectively. In the best lessons, they inspire students by setting challenging tasks and communicating high expectations. They use questions well to develop students' technical vocabulary and their understanding of health-related fitness. Students' very good attitudes help them to learn at a good rate. In some lessons, however, expectations are not so high and, as a result, students are less diligent in practising skills. Teachers do not always consolidate learning by asking questions and at times this leads to unsatisfactory progress. The teaching of theory in GCSE classes is satisfactory. Homework is set which links well to lessons but does not always extend the most able. Assessment is not used effectively to inform students of what they need to do to improve their work.
104. There is a very good extra-curricular programme, with many activities and high participation. Individuals and teams enjoy success at local, county and national levels. The popular Rock Challenge dance competition involves students in creating and performing their own dance on a theme such as animal welfare. Talented students achieve very well and are involved in many schemes in the district and county.
105. Leadership is good, with clear direction and very good team spirit. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The curriculum has been improved with the addition of GCSE, junior sports leader award, and dance for boys. Exceptional links with primary schools provide students in Years 5 and 6 with some specialist teaching and a good introduction to life at Oathall. Monitoring of teaching has highlighted areas for improvement but these have yet been put into effect. The college uses off-site facilities to add breadth to the curriculum and to support the lack of indoor facilities on site.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business was inspected in detail. The college also offers NVQ level 1 courses in agriculture and horticulture on the college farm. These courses were sampled.

106. Thirty-six students in Years 10 and 11 follow a course in **agriculture**. Standards are above average for the course and students achieve very well. They have excellent attitudes – they

enjoy agriculture and are proud of the farm; many spend time there outside school hours. Many of the students have special educational needs and gain self-confidence through their achievements and through the skills they learn in managing livestock. Their communication skills are developed through showing visitors and younger students around the farm. They gain a good level of practical skill in farming, health and safety and marketing. Students' portfolios are well maintained and are a good record of their achievements.

107. Teaching and learning are consistently very good or excellent. Students are very well managed and make the most of their time. The teacher guides students very well but ensures that they solve problems and carry out tasks for themselves. Students learn to take initiative and to work together in a team. Through constant question and answer their understanding is developed and previous learning consolidated. Every opportunity is used to apply the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in their practical work. ICT is applied well using digital cameras and a web-cam to record and communicate their work.
108. **Horticulture** has been introduced this year and has six students. One lesson was observed which was very good. Students learned the practical skills of establishing plants and displaying them in hanging baskets, with proper attention to health and safety. They were engrossed in their work and proud of their achievements. All the students had special educational needs and in their theory work achieved very well in applying literacy and numeracy to their practical work. The teacher managed the students very well and pitched the work at an appropriate level in order to aid them in thinking through the practical implications of the task.

Business

Provision in business is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are high.
- Teaching is very good and enables students to achieve very well.
- Students use computers very well to do research and prepare their assignments.
- There are not enough links with the real world of business.

Commentary

109. GCSE courses are offered in business and in business and communications systems (BCS). These are popular option choices. GCSE results in both courses were well above average in 2002 and 2003. In 2003, students did better than in their other subjects and achieved very well in relation to their attainment on entry to the course. Girls did better than boys by more than is found nationally.
110. For current students, standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average and they achieve very well. They have a very good knowledge of business practices and, in the BCS course, of the impact of modern technology on business. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others. There is no significant difference currently between the standards reached by girls or boys. Students are very good at working independently and use computers very well to do research and prepare their assignments. In a business lesson, for example, students did their own research into marketing methods; they organised their findings well and drew intelligent conclusions. Students' files are well organised and indicate very good knowledge of financial systems, business organisation and the external factors impacting on business.
111. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons very carefully to ensure that students learn to their full capacity. Lessons have good pace and students are motivated by teachers' high expectations. Students have very good attitudes to the subject. They are given many opportunities to develop skills in thinking and

learning independently. In one BCS lesson, for example, students confidently did their own research and wrote a report on the effects of modern technology on a simulated business. Their assignments develop their skills in numeracy, communication and ICT. Case studies are used very effectively to enable them to relate theoretical knowledge to real situations. Students' work is assessed well and they are given constructive feedback on how to make improvements.

112. The subject is very well led and managed within the ICT department. It is very well resourced and this contributes to the high standards that are reached. More opportunities to visit or meet people from business would be beneficial in widening the curriculum and giving students more opportunities to relate theory to practice. The department has successfully maintained the high standards reported in the last inspection and progress over the five years has been good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship was inspected in full and is reported below. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) was sampled.

113. Provision for students' **personal, social and health education** is very good. Students in Years 7 to 9 have one lesson a fortnight, taught by tutors. In Years 10 and 11, this is supplemented by a health and vocational programme that also includes citizenship and religious education. Four lessons were observed, in which teaching was good or very good. The college makes very good use of outside speakers to support the programme. A particularly strong feature is the college's PSHE website, which includes information on a variety of issues, helpline numbers and a very well-used problem page. The course is very well managed, with clearly identified priorities for development.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Planning is very good, with a clear vision for the development of the subject.
- Citizenship makes a good contribution to students' personal development: many are active in the college and the local community.
- There is a varied enrichment programme that involves students in diverse activities.
- Assessment procedures are not yet closely linked to National Curriculum attainment levels.

Commentary

114. Citizenship is actively promoted in the college through citizenship lessons, themes taught in other subjects and a very good enrichment programme.
115. Standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 and students achieve well. They are enthusiastic, have a good sense of belonging to their local community and appreciate the opportunities to get involved. They make sensible suggestions to improve facilities for groups such as the elderly, mothers and young children, and refugee families. Many speak positively about their involvement in schemes supporting these groups. They are aware of the attributes of a good citizen and use the knowledge they have learned to debate issues effectively. Students understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. Many have an insight into human rights and understand the role of the United Nations. They compare their lives with those of others in less favourable circumstances and use the Children's Charter to plan a fairer world. A number of students took part in a mock United Nations conference in roles of delegate, chair and debaters. Teachers are successful in motivating many students to become involved in citizenship activities.

116. Teaching is good overall. Most teachers have a good knowledge of the topics and plan lessons well. Question and answer sessions promote lively debate and engage students in planning events for charity or community projects. Most students have very good attitudes, but there are some who are less interested and do not achieve well when tasks are not challenging or behaviour is not well managed. The contribution that other subjects make to citizenship is systematically mapped and topics are carefully planned into their schemes of work. In history, for example, students developed their communication skills by debating different views from Tudor times of the actions taken by Queen Mary I. While the planning of citizenship themes in other subjects is thorough, teachers need to make the link more explicit to students.
117. Students' skills of participation and responsible action are developed well through many extra-curricular activities. In the buddy scheme and peer mentoring, for example, many students use their own personal experience to help younger students and this in turn builds their self-esteem. The school council is effective in involving all students and influences college policy. In addition to many local initiatives, the college has links with a community in Uganda and has provided textbooks and other resources for their school. These links start at primary school and it is hoped at a later date to visit the community.
118. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision for the development of the subject and great care is taken over planning, taking note of good practice developed in other schools. Assessment is at an early stage of development. Students' attainment in citizenship is reported to parents but this is not yet linked to National Curriculum levels. Further training is required for some teachers who do not feel so confident with the subject.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).