

INSPECTION REPORT

THE HATHERSHAW TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Oldham

LEA area: Oldham

Unique reference number: 105730

Headteacher: Mr D Ashley

Lead inspector: Mr I Hodgkinson

Dates of inspection: 15th - 18th March 2004

Inspection number: 258814

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of students: 11 - 16
Gender of students: Mixed
Number on roll: 999

College address: Bellfield Avenue
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mrs B Greaves

Date of previous inspection: April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLEGE

With 526 boys and 473 girls on roll, the college is of average size. It is located in Hathershaw, on the southern edge of Oldham. It is situated in an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage, and draws its students from some of the most deprived wards in the country. Forty-four per cent of students are thought to be eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. The area has been designated as a *New Deals for Communities* regeneration area. Thirteen students are in public care. Racial tension has been high across the town in recent years. Whilst many primary and secondary schools in the town serve mainly either Asian or White students, Hathershaw Technology College brings together students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Forty per cent of students are from minority ethnic groups, with the largest minorities represented being of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. The proportion of students whose first language is thought not to be English is very high at 37.5 per cent, 37 of whom are at an early stage of English language acquisition. Ten children of refugees or asylum seekers are on roll.

The college has undergone significant changes since its last inspection. A key change has been the acquisition of specialist Technology College status over three years ago, which has led the college into much partnership work with other specialist schools and the Specialist Schools Trust. The college has enthusiastically embraced other national initiatives such as the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, as well as local partnerships through *Excellence in Oldham*. The college has the Sportsmark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, and Healthy Schools awards. In 1999, a year after its previous inspection, it was recognised as one of the country's 50 most improved schools.

The attainment of students when they join the college in Year 7 is very low indeed. The 22 per cent of students identified as having special educational needs is above average and has grown considerably since the last inspection; the proportion with statements of special educational needs is below average. Of those students with special needs who require support beyond that which can be provided by the college, most have emotional, behavioural, or moderate learning difficulties. Nine students have specific learning difficulties. Some students have speech or communication disorders, visual impairment or neurofibromatosis, and three have physical disabilities. A special unit for the hearing impaired (a specific focus of this inspection) is attached to the college and is a base for 11 students. There are a further four hearing-impaired students in the mainstream.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20588	Mr I Hodgkinson	Lead inspector	Health and social care Business
9942	Mrs S Stevens	Lay inspector	
23030	Ms C Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
30996	Ms A Higginbotham	Team inspector	Mathematics
31129	Mr J Pickering	Team inspector	Art and design
23499	Mr H Seymour	Team inspector	Music
17015	Mr L Denham	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
12191	Mr C Moxley	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
14633	Ms J Bannister	Team inspector	History Citizenship
12337	Mr A Slade	Team inspector	Religious education
22046	Ms J Joliffe	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Special educational needs
10340	Mr J Lockett	Team inspector	Design and technology
4317	Mr K Madrell	Team inspector	Geography
12016	Ms C O'Leary	Team inspector	Science
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Hathershaw is a very good college with many outstanding features. It brings together students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and provides them with education of a high quality. They achieve very well. The college raises the aspirations of its students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and provides excellent support to help them meet their goals. It gives **very good value for money.**

The college has many strengths. Its main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Leadership and management of the college by the headteacher and senior team are outstanding; they have fostered many innovative approaches which have significantly raised the achievement of all groups of students.
- Students of all backgrounds and capabilities benefit from comprehensive monitoring of their attitudes and progress and excellent support and guidance in meeting their goals.
- Teaching and learning are very good, especially in Years 10 and 11; the effectiveness of teachers' planning to meet the needs of all students is a particular strength.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 meets the needs of students very well, and prepares them very well for later life.
- Links with the community and with other schools and colleges significantly improve the opportunities for students and staff to develop their knowledge and skills. Arrangements for the professional development of staff are outstanding.
- Whilst procedures to improve attendance are very effective and attendance has improved consistently over recent years, it remains below average, and poor attendance by some students adversely affects their achievement.
- The curriculum for music is unsatisfactory because students in Years 7-9 receive too few lessons.

The college has made very good improvement since its last inspection in 1998, and very good progress has been made against most of the key issues of that report. GCSE and GNVQ results have improved dramatically and have risen at a rate above the national trend. The proportion of very good or excellent teaching has more than doubled. The acquisition of Technology College status has boosted resources, encouraged innovation, and raised the aspirations of students and staff. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved considerably, and is now very good, although there is no use of ICT to support learning in art. The college still does not fully meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	E	E	C	A

Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Standards achieved, in relation to students' very low attainment when they join the college, are very good. Students make particularly good progress in developing their skills of literacy, numeracy, and ICT, which helps to raise their achievement in all subjects.

- Year 9 national test results have been well below the national average and have not risen over time. Current standards are, however, below average by the end of Year 9, and this represents good achievement in relation to students' capability on joining the college.

- Standards seen among students in Years 10 and 11 are in line with national averages and their achievement is very good. GCSE and GNVQ results have risen very sharply in the last year; boys and girls of the college's majority and minority ethnic groups achieve very well.
- Students for whom English is an additional language, and those with special educational needs, achieve very well because of the high quality of provision made to support them.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good, and the college takes particularly effective action to promote better attendance and to encourage students' respect for the feelings, values and beliefs for others. In this last respect, the college is successful in overcoming some of the tensions which are evident within the local community. Students' attitudes are good overall, and their behaviour is satisfactory, but attendance, while improving year on year, remains unsatisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the college is very good. Teaching is very good, and students learn very well because teachers plan lessons very well. Assessment systems are of a high quality and enable teachers and students to recognise strengths and weaknesses in their performance and how they can improve. Students receive excellent care, guidance and support, because their progress is carefully monitored and highly effective support programmes are put in place when appropriate. The curriculum is good overall, and meets the needs of students in Years 10 and 11 especially well, preparing them very well for later life. The curriculum is enhanced by high-quality extra-curricular enrichment activities. Partnership arrangements with other schools, colleges and the community are highly beneficial and of a very high standard. The quality of provision in the special unit for hearing-impaired students is very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the headteacher and senior team is outstanding. They have shown much vision and innovation in developing the college and ensuring that standards are high, and rising. Management of the college is very good: evaluation of its performance is thorough and rigorous, and the professional development of its staff is outstanding. Governance is satisfactory; some hard-working governors know and understand the college very well, and are highly supportive of its work, but too many vacancies exist on the governing body to allow responsibilities for scrutiny and decision-making to be shared enough, and some statutory requirements are not fully met.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

Parents and students are strongly supportive of the work of the college. In particular, they think that teaching is of a high quality and students are expected to work hard. Parents feel the college is well run, and students make good progress in their studies and personal development. Students have some concerns over behaviour, though inspectors found this to be satisfactory overall. A significant proportion of students feel that the college does not listen to their views, and inspectors note that the absence of regular meetings of the school council may contribute to this perception.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Continue to take action to improve students' attendance.
- Extend curriculum provision for music so that all students receive their full entitlement to music programmes of study in Years 7-9.

and, further to meet statutory requirements:

- Make arrangements to allow a daily act of collective worship.
- Ensure that students use ICT to support their learning in art and design.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Given students' attainment when they join the college in Year 7, **standards achieved are very good**. Students' attainment on entry to the college is very low compared with schools nationally, yet students leave college with GCSE results which on many key measures equate to the national average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make particularly rapid progress in developing their basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and ICT during their time in college; these are very weak on arrival, but develop very well and support their success in many subjects.
- GCSE and GNVQ results in 2003 represented very good achievement for students concerned.
- Students with special educational needs and English as an additional language make very good progress as a result of very well co-ordinated support through the college's Access department
- A high proportion of students failed to get a GCSE in 2003.
- Results in Year 9 national tests have been above the average for similar schools over the last two years, but have risen at a rate below the national trend, and declined in 2003.

Commentary

1. When students join the college in Year 7, their attainment is very low. For the current Year 7, the proportion of those who reached the nationally expected Level 4 in their national tests in English and mathematics during their last year of primary school was a little over half the national average, and only a very small proportion reached the higher Level 5. A high proportion of students either failed to register a level at all or were working towards Level 1.
2. In Year 9 national tests in English, mathematics and science, attainment over the last 4 years has been well below the national average, but above the average for schools which take students of a similar level of capability. As might be expected given the profile of students' attainment on entry, there has been a very long "tail" in Year 9 test results, with high proportions of pupils attaining the lower levels of performance. In 2003, boys in the college did relatively well in relation to girls, more than matching girls' results overall. Bangladeshi boys were the best performing ethnic group and did relatively well across all three test subjects; Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils generally did better than the borough averages for their ethnic groups. Results in all three subjects declined in 2003, especially in mathematics and science. As a consequence, the trend in the college's Year 9 test results has been below the national trend. Higher attainers did relatively well in mathematics and science in 2003, however; the proportion of students getting the higher Levels 6 and better was well above the average for similar schools.
3. The *value added* indicated by the 2003 test results – that is, the rate of students' progress from their test scores in Year 6 to their test scores in Year 9 – was below the national average for all schools but average in comparison to schools taking students of a similar level of capability on entry to the college. The college's targets for test results were not achieved in English or mathematics in 2003, but they were exceeded in science. Targets for teacher assessments of students' capability in ICT were exceeded by a large measure. 2004 targets are very challenging in the light of these figures, with those expected to score Level 5 rising by around 10 per cent or more for each subject. This reflects confidence within the college that standards are rising, and this confidence is supported by inspectors' judgements.

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

Standards in:	College results	National results
English	29.7 (29.8)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	30.9 (32.0)	35.4 (34.7)
science	28.8 (30.2)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 202 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Inspectors judge current standards by Year 9 to be below average overall. Given students' low attainment on entry to the college, this represents good achievement. Students, including those with special educational needs, make particularly good progress in their acquisition of basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT so that by Year 9, their capability in all these areas is generally above average and supports their learning in a range of subjects. Students' presentation of written work, including their spelling and punctuation, is above average. They speak with confidence and many are articulate. Students use ICT very effectively to support their learning in many subjects. Their significant progress in the development of these key skills is a result of very good planning by teachers and rigorous application of the principles of the National Key Stage 3 strategy with its focus in these areas. Students' achievement over Years 7-9 is at least satisfactory in all subjects; it is good in science, ICT, history, design and technology, art and design, physical education and citizenship, and very good in English, French, German and mathematics. In music, students' achievement is constrained significantly by a lack of curriculum time.
5. The college is rightly pleased with considerable improvements in GCSE and GNVQ performance over time, especially in the light of a dramatic rise in GCSE/GNVQ results in 2003. After the last inspection, results improved from 27 per cent of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A*-C in 1997 to 34.1 per cent in 1999, when the college was recognised as one of the 50 most improved schools in the country. Results steadily fell back to 27 per cent at 5 or more A*-C grades in 2001, since when there has been an improvement sufficient to make the trend in results rise above the national trend. After years of well below average results, 2003 results were in line with the national average for those gaining 5 or more grades A*-C and for students' average points score; they were very high in comparison with similar schools. It was the recovery of boys' results in 2003 which really transformed the overall picture. Boys' results in 2003 rose to above the national average, having been well below it in 2002 after steady decline for a number of years. Girls' results were close to the national average in 2003 and have improved strongly and consistently since 2000. A significant factor in bringing about this improvement has been the success of the college's GNVQ programme, which brought a lot of GCSE-equivalent passes to many of its students in 2003. Whilst the overall GCSE/GNVQ performance of students, as measured by their average points score, is in line with the national average, the table below shows that the average points from their best eight subjects is below the national average. This reflects the fact that in many individual subjects, GCSE results were still below or well below average in 2003, but GNVQ results boosted students' overall total scores.

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

	College results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	52 (31)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	81 (85)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	88 (94)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	29.7 (27.1)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 178 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. The college significantly exceeded its GCSE targets on all measures in 2003. As a result of this success, the college's *value added*, which measures the progress students make from their Year 9 tests to their GCSE results, is high in relation to schools nationally. The Specialist Schools Trust, in its survey, *'Educational Outcomes and Value Added by Specialist Schools'*, ranks the value added for Hathershaw's students from their Year 6 primary school tests to their 2003 GCSE results as the eighth highest of 938 specialist schools in the survey. All ethnic groups did better than predicted on the basis of their Year 9 test results, and minority ethnic groups, especially Bangladeshi and Indian boys and girls, did particularly well.
7. One concern in this bright picture is the fall in the proportion of students getting one or more GCSE pass at grades A*-G, which is well below average at 88 per cent and which has declined steadily from 97.2 per cent in 2001. The college's target for this measure, as agreed with its local education authority, has been too low. The students who did not gain a GCSE last year either had serious attendance problems or were educated elsewhere on youth inclusion projects or in further education. The college, however, has recognised that performance on this measure is a weakness, and has set about correcting it. Its policy of early November entry for GCSEs in English has already led to the proportion of students gaining at least one GCSE improving and rising to above 90 per cent for this academic year.
8. There was a considerable improvement in GCSE results for most subjects from 2002 to 2003. 2003 saw above-average results in humanities, and average results in sports studies and design and technology. French and German results were close to the national average. There were few A* grades overall but in sports studies, A* performance matched the national average. GNVQ results were very good overall. All 11 students who took Health and Social Care gained a merit or distinction, and there was a 95 per cent pass rate for the 104 students who took the ICT GNVQ. Science and English (language and literature) results were significantly below average. In these subjects, and in art and design, results were significantly weaker than in other subjects. Students performed much lower than predicted in art and English on the basis of Year 9 test results, though science results were very much in line with prediction. The college has recognised weaknesses in art and English GCSE performance and has taken effective action to improve standards in these subjects.
9. Inspectors judge standards to be in line with the national average overall by Year 11. To reach these standards, students achieve very well. By Year 10, students have overcome many of the barriers to learning which they faced on joining the college. Their attitudes to learning become very good, most students are keen to do well, and they respond very well to the help offered by their teachers in and out of lessons to support their achievement. By Year 10, students have developed good competence in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT which empower them to achieve well in many subjects. Students achieve particularly well in those subjects which support and encourage students to apply their key skills independently in solving problems, such as design and technology, history, physical education and health and social care. In other subjects, including science, art and design, and business education, a lack of independent learning holds back achievement to some degree. Students in Year 10 and 11 also benefit from assessment systems which are very good and generally give them better guidance than those in Years 7-9. In Years 10-11, the achievement of students is very good in English, French, mathematics, history, design and technology, and physical education. Achievement is good in science, ICT, geography, art and design, and music, and it is satisfactory in religious education. Poor attendance by some students continues to hold back their achievement, and has a particularly adverse effect on the completion of coursework in design and technology.
10. Across Years 7-11, students with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs make very good progress as a result of the highly effective structures and support in place to help them. Their achievement is supported by high quality individual education plans incorporated into every lesson plan and the targeted support of teaching assistants in every faculty. Gifted and talented students make good progress but are not always stretched as much as their peers in lessons in Years 7-9. Fast-track courses do,

however, enable these students to take GCSE a year early in a number of subjects, and they boost the confidence and raise the aspirations of higher attaining students. The achievement of students in public care is very well monitored and shows that they too make very good progress.

11. In relation to their learning difficulties, the standards of achievement of students with hearing impairment are very good. Students in Year 7 make good progress in receptive language, with a rapidly increasing understanding of vocabulary and storyline as reading skills are developed. They make steady progress in expressive language, ranging from signing and vocal intonation towards effective speech. In science, they know about the solar system, the names of the planets and understand that they orbit the sun and that some planets have moons. The students in Year 9 have a sound grasp of basic addition and subtraction and apply this to converting 24 hour time to a.m. and p.m. time. They can read a basic train timetable, noting departure and arrival times. Good skills in the use of a ruler were demonstrated in technology where a student completed complex designs from geometric shapes. In mathematics, the students in Year 10 achieve good progress in a GCSE Foundation course, applying fractions to clockwise and anticlockwise half and quarter turns when solving problems about direction using a compass.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes are good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. Students' relationships with each other and with adults are good and the college is generally orderly and tidy. Attendance has improved consistently over recent years but remains below average; poor attendance by some students adversely affects their achievement. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The college's strategies for improving attendance and punctuality are increasingly effective and supported by the majority of parents, but attendance remains below average.
- Relationships amongst the college community are good, with a generally harmonious atmosphere.
- Personal development is good as students progress through the college with increasing maturity and self-confidence.
- Very good behaviour management strategies, coupled with high expectations consistently implemented, result in satisfactory behaviour across the college and positive attitudes to learning. Fixed-term exclusions have, however, risen to high levels as a result of the new approach to behaviour management.

Commentary

12. Although many students have very good records of attendance, overall figures are still below those found in similar schools and a hard core of students stay away from college without a legitimate reason. The college has introduced a range of new measures and a rigorous monitoring system which has resulted in a consistent increase in attendance figures. The concerted effort to improve attendance rates has been supported by the majority of parents and carers. Punctuality is improving, with the majority of students on time for their lessons.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
College data	5.1
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
College data	4.8
National data	1.1

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

13. The introduction of the *Discipline for Learning* strategy is acknowledged by staff, parents and students as a major factor in the improved standards of behaviour, positive attitudes to work and attendance that are seen at the college. The staff have made significant attempts to get students to appreciate the college and understand its importance in their academic achievements. Students have a very clear understanding of how they are expected to behave; most accept the fairness of the strict application of rules which allow them to learn in a purposeful environment. The behaviour of the large majority of students is satisfactory, but a minority misbehave and their conduct is unsatisfactory. Behaviour in lessons and around the college is mostly at least satisfactory and often very good, for example in year-group assemblies. Students are generally polite, respectful and co-operative with staff, and friendly and helpful to visitors.
14. The college's *Discipline for Learning* strategy, with a strict application of the principles for behaviour and attendance, has resulted in a large number of short fixed-term exclusions during 2003-04 for students who persistently flout the college rules or disrupt lessons. For many, one-day exclusions serve as a 'short, sharp shock' and prove to be an effective deterrent, as does detention. However, there is a minority of students for whom these deterrents have not yet proved effective. Individual plans are in place to support students identified with behavioural difficulties which successfully reduce the rate of exclusions for this group.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last college year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	591	78	2
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	11	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	33	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	163	8	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	169	1	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	6	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	1	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

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

15. A significantly strong feature of the college is the racial harmony that exists, which is largely due to the very good strategies for behaviour management, with appropriate sanctions and

rewards, consistently enforced. The rewards offered form a successful achievement strategy which helps to motivate students to work towards targets, to moderate their behaviour and to receive due recognition for academic achievement.

16. Teachers and other adults in the college provide good role models for students, treating them with respect and courtesy, which they expect to see in return. Older students, who are team leaders or peer mentors, set a very good example to others by their positive attitudes and the pride they take in responsibilities, such as the sports coaching of primary school students. Break times and lunchtimes are generally good natured, although many students would like games activities or sports equipment to 'give students something to do' at these times, and a shortage of staff to supervise the playground allows regular gatherings of smokers to assemble in places. The college takes swift action when necessary to counter bullying and threats to the safety of its students. Students with any problems are encouraged to talk to staff or visit 'drop-in' mentor clinics to discuss their worries.
17. Students' personal development is good. The positive ethos of the college celebrates achievement of all kinds and spurs students on to aim as high as they can. As self-esteem and confidence are constantly boosted, students become increasingly motivated to do well. Lessons in citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) assemblies and the *Discipline for Learning* strategy encourage students to develop a very good awareness about right and wrong. The majority accept basic disciplinary rules in college and learn from their mistakes.
18. Good spiritual development is encouraged through religious education lessons and opportunities for reflection in the year group assemblies. Moral and social development are very good, and fundamental to the college ethos, based on the importance of trust and respect. Students who take on responsibilities, such as peer mentors or college messengers, carry out their duties conscientiously and gain respect. The absence of regular college council meetings limits students' opportunities to a forum for their views. The wide cultural mix within the college and lessons and other activities which explore cultural issues ensure that students become aware of the traditions of a range of cultures. This results in good cultural development and an awareness of the diversity in their local surroundings. The college is very effective in encouraging respect for feelings, values and beliefs of others and, as such, is successful in overcoming some of the tensions evident within the local community.
19. Students with special educational needs and those in public care develop the confidence they need to take a full part in the life of the school. Students with hearing impairment have very good and positive attitudes to learning; through the close support of the Educational Communicators and the skilled specialist teachers, they learn to concentrate and make best use of their senses to understand, write, spell and use essential vocabulary such as sweet, sour, salty, on, under, downstairs, anticlockwise etc. Students with hearing impairment enjoy their achievements and often become sufficiently confident to volunteer answers to questions during class discussion.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE COLLEGE

The overall **quality of education provided by the college is very good**. Students are very well taught by specialists who plan lessons very well and help students to make very good progress in the development of key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Students learn very well, especially in Years 10 and 11. A good well-balanced curriculum is organised with flexibility to meet individual needs and enhanced by a very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Students have access to excellent advice, support and guidance and there is very good care for students' welfare and safety.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teaching is very good, and students learn very well because teachers plan lessons very well. Teaching and learning are better overall in Years 10 and 11, because students' attitudes are better and the curriculum is organised more effectively to meet students' needs. Assessment systems are of a high quality, and enable teachers and students to recognise strengths and weaknesses in their performance and how to improve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan lessons very well to ensure that students are fully engaged in learning.
- Information from the assessment of students' work is very well used to show the students, their teachers and the whole college how to improve performance.
- Strategies to improve achievement, learning and behaviour in the classroom have been consistently implemented by teachers throughout the college, and have been very effective.
- In the few instances where teachers do not follow the college's procedures for managing learning and behaviour, pupils' attitudes and their learning can become unsatisfactory.
- Work in lessons is very well adapted to help lower attainers and those with special educational needs or English as an additional language to learn effectively. Work is, however, not always organised well enough to challenge and extend higher attainers in lessons in Years 7-9.
- Class teachers and support teachers or support assistants work very well together as a result of very effective planning.

Commentary

20. Students join the college with low standards of attainment and weak basic skills. For a significant minority, poor social skills contribute to restless behaviour and some unsatisfactory attitudes to learning in class. Such attitudes and behaviour, can present a real challenge to teachers, but teachers' highly effective planning and consistent implementation of college policies ensure that students make very good progress in lessons and develop an enthusiasm for learning. Teachers incorporate many of the principles of the National Key Stage 3 strategy into their planning. This ensures that students are clear about what they are learning and why, that they are enthused by a good variety of activities and approaches which are well suited to their abilities, and that they review their progress regularly. Lessons incorporate many opportunities to develop and apply students' key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, so that over time, students learn to apply these skills with accuracy and independence. Teachers make very good use of resources, including ICT, to get their messages across and to keep students' interest.
21. In seeking to raise standards and overcome barriers to learning, the college has adapted the best practice seen in its many partner schools and colleges to suit its own purposes, and the results have been very effective. The use of assessment has been central to the drive for improvement, starting with a focus on Years 10 and 11 and now moving to Years 7, 8 and 9. Day-to-day assessment is well used in the classroom and supported very well by the good quality of marking which is informative and constructive. The use made of assessment across the college is mostly very good, especially in Years 10 and 11, although it is not so effective in religious education and citizenship. In a number of subjects, assessment is not as effective in Years 7-9 as it is in Years 10 and 11 in identifying where and how improvements can be made. Overall, there is a very clear process in place to set challenging targets for students and for subjects, based on careful analysis of information. The assessment information is gathered and analysed on a regular basis and the information on departmental and student progress forms the basis for regular monitoring. The reports to parents are very helpful and informative. They clearly identify the students' targets and show progress towards them clearly. The training of teachers and governors in the types of data and its use has been very effective in moving the process forward. Teachers and governors now have a common language through which they can discuss college and student targets effectively. The result is that students, parents and teachers are aware of how well students are doing and students know what they must do to improve. This dialogue enables the governors to participate more fully as 'critical friends' in raising attainment. Students with special educational needs are carefully assessed,

and parents and students are involved in regular meetings to discuss their progress in achieving the targets agreed.

22. Effective monitoring through the use of assessment identifies where problems are arising, and allows the college to take action to overcome those problems. Individual students and their parents, as well as teachers, become aware of the students' potential and all work hard to support this achievement in and outside of lessons. Boys' underachievement has been countered effectively through such close monitoring, and also by in-class strategies such as boy-girl seating arrangements in classrooms. The *Discipline for Learning* strategy, with its sanctions and rewards, has established a clear code of conduct for behaviour in lessons and enables very good learning to take place. These strategies are so effective because most teachers apply them consistently, and students are fully aware of the teachers' expectations; in the few cases where the strategies are not applied by teachers, learning is sometimes unsatisfactory because of poor behaviour or lack of appropriate challenge in tasks set.
23. As a result of the effective strategies followed by teachers, teaching and learning are good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are better in the later years for a number of reasons. The system of assessment is used better in most subjects in Years 10 and 11 for tracking students' progress and taking effective action to improve it when necessary. Students' attitudes and their key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are better by Year 10, and these support more effective learning. Most teaching in Years 10 and 11 is undertaken by subject specialists, whereas for some subjects non-specialists contribute to teaching in Years 7-9. There are better grouping arrangements in some subjects by Year 10, and smaller classes; setting arrangements are better for mathematics, for example, in Years 10 and 11. Overall, teaching and learning are very good, and the proportion of very good and excellent lessons seen by inspectors has more than doubled since the last inspection.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 116 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
7 (6%)	39 (34%)	36 (31%)	27 (23%)	7 (6%)	0 (0%)	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.

24. Students with special educational needs are very well supported through the effective deployment of teaching assistants in every faculty. Under the close and expert supervision of the Access faculty manager and special needs co-ordinator, the well-trained teaching assistants enable students to learn very effectively. There are particularly effective and well-planned partnerships between teachers and teaching assistants in English, mathematics, ICT and modern languages. Teachers know students' learning needs well because of the quality of individual education plans.
25. The provision for students with English as an additional language is outstanding, and again organised through the Access faculty. Students are able to make very good progress in ordinary lessons through excellent teaching in English and remarkable support by teaching assistants. There is very good joint planning between specialist- and support-teachers; teaching assistants support students extremely effectively, particularly in design and technology, modern foreign languages and geography. There are very good opportunities for gifted and talented students from ethnic minorities; some have visited leading universities.
26. Although gifted and talented students are identified in teachers' planning, teachers do not always cater for their specific needs. The college has identified this as a development priority, and plans are in place to improve provision. There is already some successful practice in English, ICT, mathematics, and modern foreign languages, where tasks or setting arrangements enable more able students to progress at a faster rate.

27. The quality of teaching for students with hearing impairment is consistently good. Very good teamwork between the specialist teachers, Educational Communicators and class teachers ensures that these students are effectively included in main-college lessons alongside their peers. Specialist teachers use a very effective range of strategies to enable the students to develop good learning skills. Through close individual work they help the students make full use of their senses, including residual hearing through good use of appropriate hearing aids, to understand and extend their vocabulary. Educational Communicators, skilled in signing, provide very good teaching support as they work, with individuals, and support them in lessons. Main-college teachers have a good awareness of the learning needs of students with hearing impairment and use radio microphones and appropriate visual aids in their teaching. They ensure that these students are prominently placed in the class and actively encourage them to become involved in class discussions. Several class teachers have gained, and use, basic signing skills and this significantly enhances these students' learning.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good overall and meets the broad statutory requirements. There is a very good range of enrichment activities. Overall, staffing, accommodation and resources are good. There is very good provision for students with special educational needs.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A carefully considered curriculum supports and raises the students' self-esteem, allowing them to achieve well.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students very well in Years 10 and 11, but the range of modern foreign languages available to study is too narrow.
- A well-developed PSHE programme has a positive impact on the students' personal development.
- Very good implementation of National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy has led significantly to the raising of standards.
- There are very good links with local schools and colleges which provide students with the opportunity to follow vocational courses that are not on offer at the college.
- There is not enough time to cover the programme of study for music in Years 7, 8 and 9 in sufficient depth.
- Lack of access to ICT adversely affects learning in art and design.

Commentary

28. The college has improved its curriculum since the last inspection. It has carefully considered the needs of all the different groups of students and has endeavoured to find courses that will challenge them and allow them to achieve very well relative to their ability. This is also well supported by a popular extra-curricular programme and a series of revision clubs after the college day and at weekends.
29. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. A particular strength is the way literacy and numeracy have been developed across all subjects, leading to a positive impact in the raising of standards. The range of literature covered reflects different cultures and is used effectively to develop speaking and listening skills. National Curriculum citizenship is included in the personal and social education programme and has been developed to reflect local citizenship issues. Whilst ICT now effectively meets National Curriculum requirements, there is insufficient use of ICT in art. At present there is too little time in music for the full programme of study to be covered and this is limiting the students' learning experiences. The students do some drama but only a small amount of time is dedicated to this within the curriculum.
30. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is of a very good quality and range, and is very well suited to the students in the college. Students choose from a good range of GCSE options and

vocational courses at the college and also at other institutions. In addition, there are some pre-vocational courses for a number of students who have difficulty coping with a full range of GCSEs, which provide well for the students and which raise their self-esteem and confidence. The management of the curriculum is very good and ongoing review establishes where things might be improved. The new programme that is to be introduced with all the other schools in the town from September 2004 has been planned exceptionally thoroughly, especially for tracking attendance. It is innovative and will allow all different groups of students to follow courses that suit their interests and needs. Currently, there is careful consideration in selecting a range of students to take exams early in subjects such as mathematics and modern foreign languages.

31. The quality of the curriculum is weakened by the very narrow range of foreign languages available for study, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where only French is now taught. No community languages are taught to any year groups. The college has pre-empted a change in the law to make modern foreign languages an entitlement rather than compulsory for students in Year 10, and very few opt to continue with languages as a consequence.
32. Students receive full information when choosing optional subjects in Year 9. The careers advice programme is well planned and very effective. Work experience for Year 10 students makes good use of local businesses. There has been a considerable increase in the proportion of students going into further education when they leave, from half at the time of the last inspection to two-thirds now.
33. The college is quick to respond to all possible funding opportunities and is innovative in its approach to the use of such funding both within the college and in linking with the local community. Popular mentoring schemes provide students with the opportunity to help younger students with their reading. They are taught to use the principles of the National Key Stage 3 strategy, ensuring continuity in approach. An innovative 'grow your own' scheme encourages local people to become qualified in a range of skills from learning mentors to coaching sport. Many students follow a Junior Sports Leaders' Award and coach students from primary schools in extra-curricular time. These students are then employed as coaches in holiday clubs and many go on to further coaching awards and sometimes teacher-training colleges. This creates positive relationships within the community and improves links with primary schools. In addition, the students' first-hand experience of coaching has vastly improved the quality of their theory course work in GCSE physical education. It contributes to them becoming mature, responsible young people. Close links to local colleges and universities give students a good insight into further education and often broaden their horizons.
34. The provision for personal, social and health education is very good and led by a dedicated team of teachers. It is well supported by a range of visiting speakers. These occasionally vary in quality but are carefully monitored and areas for improvement quickly addressed. This provision is well planned to cover all the required topics and the quality of teaching is very good. The students value the opportunity to discuss relevant issues in their lives. Citizenship is being taught mainly through this programme.
35. The college has responded well to the newly-attained Technology College Status. All subjects have been audited to assess their ability to contribute to the college's specialist aims, and improved use of technology has been effective in helping to raise standards in most areas. The college is now writing the Phase Two bid and would like to alter the requirement for all students to follow the double award science course because this does not suit the needs of all students at the college. Implementation of the Technology College development plan has been well co-ordinated, ensuring that local primary schools are well involved.
36. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. It is especially strong in sport where individuals and teams do well in local and county competitions. There is a strong culture of encouraging students to achieve and join local clubs. There are many opportunities for exploring different cultures. Students go on trips to France and arrange 'French days'. Drama

and dance extra-curricular programmes combine well to give many students the opportunity to perform in college and community productions. There is a good range of visits to theatres and galleries to support learning. There are missed opportunities for extra-curricular or enrichment activities in some subjects; the range of fieldwork available to the students in history and geography is limited. There is a strong revision club programme with innovative approaches to encouraging the students' attendance. This has effectively tackled the issue of boys' underachievement.

37. The overall provision for pupils with special educational needs is of a very high quality because of the outstanding work of the Access faculty. Students are fully involved in the mainstream curriculum of the college which is very well adapted to suit their needs, particularly through the high quality of students' individual education plans and the support of the teaching assistants. Students with hearing impairment have full access to an appropriate broad and balanced curriculum through a combination of lessons in the Hearing Resource Centre and lessons alongside their peers in the main school. Students in Year 10 are following a variety of courses towards accreditation, according to their learning needs. These courses include Certificate of Educational Achievement in English and Religious Education and opportunities to follow practical NVQ Level 1 courses at a local college of further education. However, the range of suitable accredited vocational and educational courses for these students in Years 10 and 11 is too narrow and needs to be extended. The students are encouraged and supported to take part in extra-curricular activities. Some are enabled to benefit from provision for gifted and talented students. For example, one with artistic talents was involved in the Summer School and an able sportsman achieved the Young Disabled Sports Achiever Award
38. The match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is good. The college is making exceptional efforts to counter the difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers to the region. Most subjects have qualified specialists but the shortage of a teacher limits the music curriculum. The religious education department is supported by teachers from the humanities department, and two part-time non-specialists are teaching in the English department until a full-time teacher is appointed. The recent appointment of an advanced skills teacher will reduce design and technology group sizes while improving the curriculum. Teaching assistants and communicators provide good support for students with learning needs or hearing impairment. Learning mentors work closely to assist students with challenging behaviour.
39. The college has made good use of its site and resources to meet its development aims and to support the learning of people with a range of needs. It has given a high priority to improving access to classrooms and to other facilities for those with physical disabilities. Hearing impaired students benefit from their well-appointed specialist facility onsite, and from many rooms which have been equipped with sound field systems which help all students to listen to their teachers. The college has just opened some attractive community learning rooms in which well-subscribed courses are offered to local people. A newly-erected fence around the site is not popular with students but has been very effective in improving site security and security for students during the college day. Whilst the college building is old-fashioned and shows signs of wear and tear, good efforts have been made to create very effective classrooms in many subjects. Accommodation for modern foreign languages is particularly good and supports teaching and learning very well. Air-conditioning and ventilation in ICT rooms are, however, poor, and create uncomfortable working conditions; there is also a lack of a suitable extractor fan to remove fumes from the kiln in art. Many subjects have benefited from improved access to ICT facilities and computers are mostly very well used for teaching and learning. The library is very well used as a resource centre and teaching area, and its ICT facilities are good, but its book stock is, for most subjects, rather too limited and outdated to enable students to undertake effective research.

Care, guidance and support

The college takes very good care of its students. Arrangements to ensure the care, welfare, health and safety of students, including those in public care, are all very good. Individual support and guidance, both academic and personal, are excellent as a result of comprehensive monitoring systems and a caring, committed staff. There is good provision for seeking and valuing students' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Monitoring and support of all students, including those with special educational needs and children in public care, are very good.
- Tutors and heads of year provide excellent academic and pastoral support and guidance.
- Learning mentors support students very well.
- There is very good careers advice, along with impartial guidance and support on further study or career opportunities through external agencies.
- The lack of regular meetings of the school council contributes to a feeling among a significant minority of students that the college does not listen to their views.

Commentary

40. A well-structured pastoral system ensures that the personal and academic progress of all students is closely monitored to ensure that effective advice and guidance can be provided for each individual student. Record keeping is extensive and records are readily available to staff through the college's Intranet. Any concerns about attendance and behaviour, and the effect on students' achievement, are quickly identified. Relevant information is provided to the head of year, learning mentor, attendance officer or outside agencies who provide the necessary support where needed.
41. The college has comprehensive procedures for child protection and all staff receive basic training. A very high level of focused support is given to the students who are in the care of the local authority. Parents are immediately contacted if their child does not arrive at college and the rate of truancy has declined significantly, due to systematic strategies put in place by the college's attendance officer. The college is a safe environment and buildings are well maintained and clean. Health and safety procedures, including for Internet access, are routinely followed, with regular health and safety inspection and risk assessments undertaken.
42. Excellent support and guidance are provided through heads of year and form tutors, with substantial contributions made by learning mentors, whose role in supporting students helps them to overcome barriers to learning. The college makes excellent use of assessment and performance data, enabling comprehensive guidance, based on realistic targets, to be offered through tutors. Staff come to know students very well and build up relationships of trust and confidence that make it easier for students to approach them if help is needed. Students' personal development is equally well monitored. They are constantly encouraged to achieve, through regular morning tutorial times, review meetings, mentoring sessions and the personal, social and health education programmes, as well as by regular informal contact during the day. The college has good links with its partner primary schools and continues to develop a comprehensive and supportive programme to integrate students into Year 7.
43. Students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language receive high quality individual care and support. These students are fully integrated into all activities in the college, feel valued and are enabled to make good progress. Students are clearly identified and their needs met through very good individual learning plans which are kept by all teachers concerned. Their progress is closely monitored and analysed in order to raise standards. Students with behavioural difficulties are very well supported, reducing the rate of exclusion for this group. Leaders have an excellent knowledge of students' cultural

backgrounds, and disseminate information effectively to colleagues. Several teachers have visited Bangladesh.

44. Provision to meet the needs of students with hearing impairment is very good. The support of skilled teachers of the deaf and of learning support assistants as Educational Communicators enables these students' individual educational and personal needs to be effectively met. The Individual needs of the students are thoroughly assessed by a range of specialists, including audiologists, educational psychologists, paediatricians and teachers of the deaf so that their individual needs are identified. Statements of special educational needs are drawn up and individual education plans are established for each student. Particular attention is given to providing the most suitable up-to-date hearing aids according to individual needs and staff are familiarised with these to ensure their effective use and maintenance, with technical support being readily available. The college has made very good use of available technology to enhance the acoustics in many classrooms. Each student's progress is carefully monitored, their needs and provision are reviewed regularly and individual programmes are suitably updated to promote their personal and educational development. Good provision is made to prepare students for transition to further training or employment on leaving college. The careers service is effectively involved in enabling good work awareness preparation to enable the students in Year 10 to take part in the work experience scheme.
45. Students have good opportunities to express their views on the college in discussions with their tutors and during PSHE lessons. However, regular meetings of the school council are in abeyance and students say they would like a more structured programme for them to express their views clearly and forcefully.
46. Students in Years 9, 10 and 11 are given very good guidance to help them make choices and appropriate decisions about continuing education or jobs, and personal support in preparation for post-16 courses. There is effective involvement with the county Connexions service. The well-planned scheme for careers education is overseen by an experienced and knowledgeable college team that ensures all students receive appropriate information, advice and guidance to help them decide on the next step after college. Very good support is given through local colleges, and local employers take part in mock interviews for Year 11 students as well as providing them with well-structured work experience placements.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The college has very good links with the majority of parents and very good beneficial links with the community, other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good information is provided for parents on students' progress, development and success, including those whose children have special educational needs.
- The majority of parents are very supportive and express confidence in the work of the college and the care of the students.
- Annual written reports are clear and informative.
- Links with local businesses and the community are extensive and beneficial to students.
- Very strong partnerships with other schools and colleges are providing increased opportunities for students.
- There is no newsletter for parents to inform them of day-to-day developments in the college, nor are parents' views regularly sought and acted upon.

Commentary

47. The college is a fully inclusive community, where students are encouraged to achieve their full potential and co-exist in a tolerant, orderly atmosphere. The college is successful in gaining the

confidence of the majority of parents and the local community in the pursuit of these aims, which underpin the ethos of the college.

48. Parental involvement with matters directly concerning their own child is generally very good because of the quality of the support given by the college. Parents of students who have special educational needs, or who are experiencing difficulties such as behavioural or emotional problems are very fully involved in setting targets and reviewing progress. Information supplied to all parents about their child's progress is very good and parents feel the college is well run, with students making good progress in their studies and personal development. Reports to parents on students' progress are very good. Regular review meetings, including *Preparing for Success* days and parents' evenings, ensure that parents are given plenty of opportunities to discuss their children's progress. The college prospectus is informative and of a high quality, and the governors' annual report is lively, informative, and sent to all parents. The college makes strenuous efforts to communicate with those parents who are difficult to reach, or where there are language difficulties, through letters and telephone calls. Translators are available as needed. Parents and students comment that the college does not produce a newsletter to inform them of day-to-day activities in the college, such as college trips and alterations to lessons, or to seek their views on a regular basis when changes are being considered.
49. The college has very good links with the community and it uses these well in enhancing students' experience and overall educational provision. Students raise money for charities and undertake work experience in the local area through very good links with businesses. External speakers come into college to give students practical relevance to their learning. Staff have been appointed, as a team, to develop wider links with business and other educational establishments in a very beneficial partnership, providing students with a supportive and very well-managed careers and further education programme.
50. The college enjoys very productive links which have been forged with its partner primary schools, particularly since the awarding of technology status. A robust partnership has been developed with the sixth-form college which has resulted in a steep rise in the number of students entering into further education. The arrangements with the feeder primaries are very effective, enabling a smooth transition for students. Support, for example in ICT for the primary schools, taster days, joint training sessions and meetings with staff from other colleges, all benefit from this partnership. Strong sporting links, such as Years 10 and 11 students in the Junior Sports Leader Award project, are helping to raise standards in primary schools and to improve the confidence and maturity of the college students involved. The wide range of vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11, the informed support they receive to make appropriate choices about the next stage of their education and the committed staff who monitor and guide these students are strengths of the college. The long-term benefit to the students of this dedicated informed guidance is excellent.
51. Provision for students with hearing impairment is very well supported through very good multidisciplinary partnerships with other agencies. Specialists from the health, social and educational services work together effectively to meet the needs of the students. Very good close links are established with parents of students with hearing impairment. They are fully involved in the assessments and reviews of their children's needs and progress and very good partnership with the college staff is established. A Home/College Liaison Officer provides support for parents through home visits. Very good liaison with the Resourced Junior School ensures that students are well prepared for transfer to the college and that there is good continuity in meeting their needs. After-college clubs and parent groups are held in college to enable them to learn sign language and discuss support needs and arrangements. Parents value the support they receive and the contacts made enable their families to use local facilities and services.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. The headteacher and senior team provide excellent leadership. The effectiveness of management, including financial management is very good. Governance is satisfactory but some statutory responsibilities are not fully met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and senior staff have set a very clear direction for the college and offer outstanding guidance in its short-term and long-term development.
- Financial management is very good and excellent use is made of additional funding.
- Governors support the college well but the college does not fully meet the statutory requirements for collective worship, for information and communication technology in art and design, or for music in Years 7 to 9.
- Too many vacancies exist on the governing body to allow responsibilities for scrutiny and decision-making to be appropriately shared.
- Planning is very good and there is a very rigorous programme of self-evaluation.
- The monitoring and use of performance data are very good.
- There are very good arrangements for the performance management of staff and the induction of new staff. The continuing professional development of staff is excellent.

Commentary

52. The outstanding leadership by the headteacher has established a clear vision for the college which he has effectively communicated to staff, governors, parents and the wider community. The vision sees the college at the heart of the community and one that meets the needs of all learners. There is a very clear focus on raising the achievement and aspirations of all students.
53. The headteacher is very well supported by his senior team in providing excellent leadership across the college. They provide inspirational leadership that has created a very positive learning culture within the college. Successful teams have been built at all levels and the college has excellent capacity to implement the programme of college improvement. Priorities for improving behaviour, attendance, teaching and learning have been successfully implemented and are having a very good impact on raising students' standards.
54. Planning is very good and is helping to raise standards. The college improvement plan identifies an appropriate set of priorities aimed at raising students' performance. The whole-college plan is underpinned by well-structured departmental development plans. Weaknesses relating to costs and success criteria identified in the previous inspection report have been addressed. Department plans are very well supported and rigorously monitored by members of the senior team.
55. Overall, the leadership and management of subject areas are good and for many they are very good. The use of performance data in curriculum planning and target setting is very good and the college is a centre for excellence within the local, regional and national partnerships. Procedures to monitor and evaluate the work of departments are very good. Each autumn, a detailed scrutiny of examination performance takes place between the headteacher and heads of department. This informs target setting and priorities within the department development plans. Senior staff are involved with formal programmes to observe teaching and with scrutinising students' work. There is excellent leadership and management of special needs provision in the college. The strategic partnership which brings together the energy and determination of the co-ordinator for special educational needs and the vision and expertise of the Access Faculty manager is having a significant impact on the high quality of provision for special educational needs and the inclusive nature of the college. They are well supported and challenged, where appropriate by the chair of governors.

56. Arrangements for performance management are very good indeed and closely linked to the college development plan. The professional development of staff is excellent.

Example of outstanding practice

The professional development of staff is excellent. It enables management and teachers to adapt the best practice they see elsewhere to meet the particular needs of the college and its students.

Considerable in-house training is provided, especially for the development of ICT. Regular lesson observations enable good practice to be shared. The college is a Specialist Schools' Trust local training centre for ICT and a regional training centre for technology teachers. It is also linked to other secondary schools to share good practice through the Leadership Investment Grant partnership and Excellence in Cities funding. Teachers visit colleges recognised as centres of excellence, including Walker College in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Upon their return good practice is shared with colleagues. Four teachers and colleagues from a nearby primary school visited Norway to observe new innovative methods. Other initiatives include a £500 bursary for teachers to plan self-programmed experiences to raise standards; a Technology Plus course aimed at developing Young Managers for Tomorrow, and a Department for Education and Skills 'Leading from the Middle' course for line managers. Induction programmes for newly-qualified teachers and those new to the college are very good and include specialist training and visiting other schools. The college has excellent relationships with Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester Victoria University, Liverpool John Moore's University and the University of Bradford, hosting their initial teacher training students each year. The college has encouraged three of its support staff to embark on professional training so that they might qualify as teachers.

57. The Hearing Resource Centre is very well led and managed. Specialist staff are effectively deployed to deliver individual learning programmes, support the pupils with hearing impairment during main-college lessons and provide individual or small group tuition to supplement important coursework. Good arrangements are in place for the monitoring and performance management of the specialist staff and good training opportunities are provided to raise their expertise. A very good ongoing process of events such as a Deaf Awareness Week and presentations to staff about the needs of the pupils has effectively established a positive whole-college approach to the inclusion of the pupils with hearing impairment. Very good provision is made for training teachers, learning mentors, other pupils and ancillary staff in basic signing and as a consequence, several staff use signing to enhance teaching in classes and enable the pupils with hearing impairment to be included socially with their peers. The contributions of other professionals are very well co-ordinated to provide a very good comprehensive service that meets pupils' needs. A good plan for development of provision is in place and includes enabling the pupils and their families to develop their skills and inclusion within the community, providing more opportunities for accreditation of their achievements and establishing links for further education and training as students approach school-leaving age.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,619,339
Total expenditure	3,619,027
Expenditure per student	3,622.64

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to the next	312

58. Financial management is very good. The headteacher and senior staff are creative in finding additional sources of income from the community and national projects. Excellent use has been made of Technology College funding to improve the provision of information and communication technology and to refurbish areas of the college. The administration of finances is very effective and governors and senior managers are provided with reports in order to plan and monitor expenditure. The college takes decisive action to keep its finances under control, for example the reduction in the number of forms of entry from eight to seven. There are very clear links between planning and spending. A disciplined approach to budgeting

ensures that each year, the existing curriculum is adequately resourced and there are funds available for developments. Day-to-day management of finances is very careful and financial reports to governors are well designed to give them exactly the information they require. The college's most recent audit report indicated that overall, the college's financial systems were well operated. Recommendations made in the report have now been acted upon. The financial management of the college is successful in applying the principles of best value to its work.

59. Leadership and management are well supported by a dedicated team of administrative and support staff. The college runs smoothly and the administrative and support staff are highly valued by their colleagues.
60. Governance of the college is satisfactory. Many members of the governing body are very experienced and have served the college for a long time. However, there is a serious shortage of governors and the leadership of most committees is undertaken by the chair of governors. The governing body is kept well informed of college developments through regular written reports from the headteacher; these are of high quality and enable them to monitor the progress of the college satisfactorily. Governors are developing a more strategic approach to the college and are actively involved with the college development planning process. They have a satisfactory knowledge of the college's strengths and weaknesses and provide challenge as well as strong support. For example, they are involved with the approach to a number of issues, including the disability access plan, and in directing the college to address the underperformance of boys. Governors are aware of their statutory duties and have worked hard to address those areas identified in the previous inspection report. However, statutory requirements are not met for collective worship, or for music in Years 7-9, or for the use of information and communication technology within art and design. In all of these areas, the school has been working to make progress towards meeting requirements. There is a provision to supplement the spiritual experience of the school's assembly programme with a "Thought for the Week" to allow students daily time for spiritual reflection in tutor periods, but this is not carried through consistently by tutors. Expansion of music provision in the school has been constrained by difficulties in recruiting staff. ICT provision and use has expanded rapidly in the school, and the need for further development into the art department is recognised.
61. The college has identified low attainment on entry, low self-esteem and limited aspirations as the principal barriers to students' achievement. The headteacher and senior staff have successfully identified a range of aids to address these barriers. The successful application for technology college status has been a very significant step in realising the vision for the college. It has had a very good impact on raising the aspirations of the students and on the morale of staff. Programmes such as the National Strategy and *Discipline for Learning* are supporting improvements in teaching and learning and are impacting positively on raising standards and improvements in students' behaviour.

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

- Students achieve very well overall.
- Strong and focused teaching enables students to learn very well.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- There were insufficient opportunities for students to use computers in English at the time of the inspection.

Commentary

62. When students enter the college, standards in English are very low. Their Year 9 national test results in 2003 were well below average compared with all schools but above average compared with similar schools. Results have been well below average over time in the Year 9 tests but standards seen during the inspection in Years 8 and 9 were approaching, though still below, the national expected levels. The improvement is due to the focused teaching and very good attitudes of the students, and represents good achievement for the students.
63. Standards at GCSE dropped after the last inspection to well below average in 2001. They are rising but remained well below average in 2003. However, the current Year 11 students have already obtained more grade C or above passes than their immediate predecessors because they took GCSE early, in November 2003, as part of a successful drive to improve results. Standards seen during the inspection showed that they had improved further and now meet national expectations. Students' achievement by Year 11 is therefore very good, given their capability on joining the college. Students reach average standards in their extended writing and their responses to their reading in the library trail. They read well for inference but many are hesitant in reading aloud. Their presentation of written work, including spelling and punctuation, is above average. They speak with confidence and many are articulate. Almost all students take English literature as well as English at GCSE; the results are below average but better than those for English.
64. Students achieve very well because of precise teaching, very good planning and very good use of assessment. Students from ethnic minorities, including those with English as an additional language, achieve slightly better than all students, whilst students with special educational needs generally achieve as well as all others.
65. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In Years 7 to 9, students learn well; in Years 10 and 11 they learn very well, because of more experienced and specialised teaching. Students are focused by lessons which are well planned, using the new National Key Stage 3 strategy effectively. Behaviour is generally good and often very good. The best teaching seen was exemplary. In Year 7, special needs students were excited by reading chorally and using role-play; in Year 11 students showed a mature and sophisticated response to "Of Mice and Men" as a result of stimulating teaching. Reading is promoted well through the library trails. Teachers and assistants collaborate well, and there is very good team-teaching to assist students who have English as an additional language. Assessment is used particularly well to inform students of the standard that they have reached, and as a basis for the targets which are set regularly. Students' speaking skills are well developed, but drama is not used enough in

English lessons. They learn very well to write in a variety of forms, but there were insufficient opportunities to use computers at the time of the inspection. Significantly more computer resources were due to be brought into commission shortly after the inspection.

66. The faculty is very well led and managed, with clear direction and sensible priorities. The decision to enter Year 11 early for GCSE English in November 2003 has already raised overall standards and motivated students. The faculty is well resourced, and superb displays of students' work were seen. There are good extra-curricular opportunities in revision clubs, the reading challenge and theatre trips.
67. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Although the standards at GCSE dropped until 2001, the current rise indicates that they are on target to exceed those of 1999. Spelling, accuracy and general writing skills have improved. Speaking skills are significantly better; students now answer in full sentences. Literacy across the curriculum has improved. The provision of computers has very recently improved but they were not fully used at the time of the inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

68. English language and literacy skills are good across the curriculum and support students' learning in all subjects. Students use correct terminology and give extended answers in mathematics. Grammatical awareness is promoted in English and modern foreign languages. Key words are taught well. Students develop good reading techniques in geography, and their language is developed well in physical education through teachers' comments.

French and German

The quality of provision in French and German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is mostly very good.
- Accommodation and resources for learning are very good.
- The curriculum is enhanced by visits, revision classes and other activities.
- The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is too limited and does not provide sufficient opportunity for students to learn a modern foreign language.

Commentary

69. Results in the 2002 examinations for students in Year 11 show that standards in French and German were close to the national average. The results for boys were below those of girls. The picture was very similar in 2003.
70. Standards seen during the inspection were broadly in line with nationally expected levels at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 in all areas of learning, with students in higher sets working at levels above, and sometimes well above, average, particularly in listening and writing. Students are reaching nationally-expected standards by Year 9, although they do less well in tests. Some students are reaching very high standards and a few are expected to gain a GCSE qualification at least one year early. The standard of work in Year 11 is in line with national averages in class and there is no significant difference between the standards of boys and girls. Students are achieving very well overall. Students with special educational needs are enabled, by the very well-placed support of the teaching assistant, to achieve their targets, and most gifted and talented students are also achieving very well, due to extra support and "fast tracking", which gives them early entry for examinations.

71. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They use the target language (French or German) very well and use questioning effectively to set a very good pace and challenge. Very good use is made of ICT to develop students' language skills, although there is not yet enough equipment to fully meet needs. The teaching and the foreign language assistants work effectively with teachers to support students' learning. Planning is mostly very thoughtful and takes account of individual learning needs, although in one lesson it lacked clear purpose and students lost some interest. There is usually a good range of tasks, useful homework is set and marking is generally helpful.
72. The majority of students concentrate, although a minority of older boys do not make sufficient effort (particularly where teaching is less interesting) and this impacts on their achievement. Students enjoy those lessons where ICT is used to good effect. The new accommodation is having a positive effect on teaching and learning.
73. The curriculum in Years 7-9 is good but in Years 10-11 it is now very narrow owing to the new option system. This has resulted in a low take-up of languages in Year 10, and only French is now offered. Extra revision sessions, master classes (offered through the *Aim Higher* programme), along with visits, such as to the Christmas market in Cologne, add to students' cultural experiences.
74. Leadership and management are very good. The department has led on many initiatives, including the use of ICT for learning. The subject leadership has made very wise decisions in relation to the way the curriculum is taught, and improvement since the last inspection is very good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are mostly very good and promote effective learning.
- The subject benefits from enthusiastic and committed leadership and staff who work well together as a team.
- Relationships in lessons are very good; the students behave very well and work very hard.
- Information and communication technology is used extensively to support learning, though not consistently to its best effect.
- The ends of lessons are not always used well enough to consolidate students' learning.

Commentary

75. Results of Year 9 national tests in 2003 show that the proportion of students reaching the nationally-expected Level 5 was well below the national average. When compared with similar schools, the proportion was above the national average. The proportion of students reaching the higher levels is well above the national average when compared to similar schools. Boys' results were slightly better than girls', largely because Bangladeshi and Pakistani girls did less well than the other groups of students. The test results are not quite as good as the previous year but results have been improving over the last few years.
76. In GCSE examinations in 2003, the proportion of students gaining A*-C and A*-G grades was just below the national average. There were fewer A* and A grades than nationally. Boys achieve considerably better results than girls. In the last seven years the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades has doubled.

77. Standards of work seen in lessons and in the students' books were below the expected level at the start of their time in college but, by Year 8, were at the expected level and by the end of Year 11 were above the expected level for many students. Students' attainment on entry is well below the national average. Achievement is therefore very good. Students with special educational needs work and achieve as well as other students in their years. Most students are able to draw accurate graphs and interpret and analyse data. Students' understanding of algebra has been well developed in line with their attainment.
78. Teaching is very good overall. Lessons are very well planned, with clear objectives which are shared with students. The department is responding very positively to the National Numeracy Strategy and this is raising standards. In the best lessons, the teachers have high expectations of the students, the pace is good and a variety of tasks had been prepared to challenge the students. The extensive use of ICT is a strength of the department and it is used very effectively by the students for producing spreadsheets and graphs, although where computers were used for undemanding work, learning was unsatisfactory. Some good exercises were seen to start lessons, for example computer programs were used effectively to do short revision exercises. The ending of lessons is sometimes not so well focused, with students' learning not always appropriately consolidated. Teachers make effective use of questioning, encouraging students to explain their answers and solutions to the rest of the class.
79. As a result of effective teaching, students learn very well. Most students acquire knowledge of basic skills and concepts which enable them to work on their own to improve their understanding. Literacy skills are improved very well by the emphasis on key words, the insistence of teachers on the correct use of mathematical language and the very good oral work in lessons. Students have a positive attitude to mathematics, they behave very well in lessons and relationships between students and with their teachers are very good.
80. Leadership and management of the mathematics department are very good. The head of department has a clear vision of what needs to be done to raise standards. She is well supported by the commitment and hard work of the team of teachers who share good practice and resources. The department improvement plan is closely linked to the college improvement plan. Assessment procedures are very good. Marking is usually both encouraging and informative. Students' attainment data is used to monitor their progress and set targets.
81. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. Teaching has improved. Results in tests and examinations have improved. The use of ICT is now an integral part of the curriculum. The staff have worked hard over time to minimise the effects of the past staffing problems on students' learning.

Mathematics across the curriculum

82. Students' numeracy skills are good and support their learning in many subjects. The key features of the National Numeracy Strategy have been shared with all staff in the college at a training day and a very good booklet has been prepared by the very enthusiastic numeracy co-ordinator. This booklet helps staff appreciate the variety of calculation methods used and has helped in raising awareness of how students can develop their mathematical knowledge and skills in other subjects across the curriculum. This has ensured that students cope well with the mathematical demands made in other subjects.
83. In ICT, numeracy is built into the schemes of work and lesson plans and this enhances the students' mathematical skills. Students were able to analyse and interpret data and draw different types of graphs in science, geography, physical education and history. Measuring and weighing were carried out accurately in design and technology and students' spatial skills were developed in art.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well.
- Very good subject knowledge of specialist staff enhances the quality of provision.
- There are very good relationships between students and with teachers.
- Thoroughly planned lessons illustrated by clear lesson objectives provide a very good focus to learning, and a good range of teaching styles and activities help students concentrate and use time effectively.
- Opportunities for students to work in a variety of groupings are too few.
- All students, but especially those with special educational needs and where English is not their first language, are too dependent on their teachers.

Commentary

84. Attainment on entry to the college in Year 7 is very low. Results in national tests in Year 9 are well below the national average but in line with the average for similar schools. Results declined somewhat in 2003 but between 2000 and 2002 had shown consistent improvement. Boys' test results were better than girls' in 2003, with Bangladeshi girls performing less well than other groups. GCSE results in 2003 were well below average and relatively not as strong as most other subjects, but show a considerable improvement on previous years, especially in the attainment of boys.
85. Currently, students' attainment is in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9, and below nationally-expected levels by Year 11, which indicates a considerably improving picture. Students' understanding, and their knowledge and use of scientific terminology, together with their positive attitudes towards learning, are good and sometimes very good. This is especially the case in Years 10 and 11. Skills associated with working independently are not so well developed. Overall, students achieve well. Achievement in lessons and the standards of attainment seen in students' work confirm that students are making good, and often very good, progress especially students with special needs and those with a first language that is not English.
86. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The most significant factor in students' effective learning is their interest, application and productivity. The very good subject knowledge and high expectations of teachers create a positive environment and encourage enthusiastic learning by students. Teachers' lesson planning is very good and they employ a good range of teaching styles. However, the opportunities for students to work in a variety of different groupings are limited, resulting in too few opportunities for them to develop skills required for independence. Teachers' very effective use of assessment and targets ensure that students know what they are aiming for and how they are progressing towards achieving their targets. The marking of students' work enhances this process providing informative and developmental comments.
87. Leadership and management are very good. A clear vision for the department and strategies to deliver this are in place and the head of department and teachers with posts of responsibility provide very good role models and well articulate the vision for the department. The use of assessment information to identify departmental targets, monitor progress and inform departmental development is a strength in the department and the use of performance management and other monitoring systems contributes to this process very well. The use of information technology is developing well.
88. Very good improvement since the previous inspection is demonstrated by results at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. The gap in achievement of boys and girls is less marked and the progress

of the least able is now good. Good and very good teaching now predominates and results from good pace and challenge in lessons. The use of information technology is developing well.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been outstanding improvement since the previous inspection.
- Teaching is consistently good and frequently outstanding.
- Provision is grounded in excellent planning and departmental management.
- The standard of work in all year groups is consistently above national expectation, representing good achievement.
- There is strong implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy in Years 7, 8 and 9 and an increasingly successful GNVQ programme in Years 10 and 11.
- Some poor ICT accommodation constrains teaching and learning, and the absence of air conditioning or proper ventilation makes several ICT rooms intolerably hot to work in.

Commentary

89. Standards are above those seen nationally by Years 9 and 11. There are improving pass rates in GNVQ - from 88 per cent in 2002 to 95 per cent in 2003, with the percentage of merit grades moving from 6 per cent in 2002 to 15 per cent in 2003, although those are rather below national averages for high grades and there is still some disparity in the standards achieved by boys and girls. Nearly all the work scrutinised during the inspection was above average or better.
90. Achievement is good overall. Given that students enter the college with very varied levels of prior attainment in ICT, their progress between entry and their assessments at the end of Year 9 and 11 represents good achievement, built on the high quality of teaching and planning and on the students' positive response to the respect and affection with which they are treated. Students develop good ICT skills, which underpin progress in other subjects and equip them for success both in and after college. The college secures good achievement for all the groups represented, particularly those who have special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language.
91. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching is good in Years 7-9, but the quality is better overall for Years 10 and 11 because these older groups benefit from the consistently high quality planning and expertise of full-time subject specialists. The profile of teaching quality is substantially above national benchmarks, with 73 per cent being rated good or better and 60 per cent very good or better. Students learn well in lessons that are challenging and well structured; time in class is productive and students work well together and acquire good knowledge, skills and understanding in ICT. Work in multimedia is particularly impressive, informed by good design values as well as burgeoning technical skill. Monitors which are situated around the building allow the department to share and celebrate this success, adding to students' pride in their work, and setting up exemplars for others.
92. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy in ICT has been very well implemented in Years 7 to 9 and creates strong ICT lessons and a firm foundation for success in future years. Thorough assessment practice is a consistent strength of the department; helpful feedback and accurate diagnostic comments contribute to the tracking and improvement of performance. Lesson plans, schemes of work and imaginative teaching materials are created and shared among members of the department. Strong teacher commitment offers lunchtime and afternoon clubs and 'catch up' sessions, whilst there is very good extra-curricular provision for gifted and talented students, and input to work with children from partner primary schools.

93. Leadership in ICT is excellent. Students and their achievement are at the centre of a clear vision for ICT, which is grounded in excellent planning and very strong departmental management in which leaders create excellent role models for other staff and students. (In this context, the response of trainee teachers is particularly illuminating!) An effective team has been created in which there is mutual support and challenge. Procedures are well established for self-evaluation, the monitoring of performance data and the application of the resulting analysis to improvements in teaching and learning. Departmental documentation is thorough and strongly focused.
94. There is still some poor ICT accommodation which constrains teaching and learning, whilst classes in the library are frequently interrupted, and the absence of air-conditioning or proper ventilation makes several ICT rooms intolerably hot to work in during the summer months. But those are minor problems in a department which has shown outstanding improvement since the previous inspection, not simply in capital investment but in the skills, resources, training and personal commitment which have helped drive up and sustain standards and achievement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

95. Departments make very effective use of ICT to support learning and in the development of literacy and numeracy skills - particularly science, mathematics and technology - although in a few areas (art and design, for example, and music), provision and use are not yet satisfactory. Skilled use of whiteboard technology is a feature of the college (notably so in modern foreign languages) and teachers use laptops for preparation and presentation of lessons. Students, including those with special educational needs, use computers in exploring ideas, in the presentation of their work, in the design and making of artefacts, for manipulation of sounds or data and for analysis of information. Spreadsheets are used to analyse information from data capture and data logging; in physical education, digital imaging equipment is used to analyse movement and performance; and the internet (with suitable filters) is increasingly used as a research tool. All staff have received NOF and further training, and the level of hardware and software provision allows them to exploit this to good effect. The college offers an excellent service to partner primary schools, both in technical support and through curricular links.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although GCSE results are below the national average, they are improving.
- Good leadership and management have established very effective approaches to planning and to monitoring the work of the department.
- There is very good use of assessment to help students improve.
- The use of fieldwork is still too limited.
- Very good use of teaching assistants.

Commentary

96. The Year 9 teacher assessments in 2003 show the standards students attain in geography are below the level expected nationally. In 2003, at the end of Year 11, 75 per cent of students secured a GCSE pass grade and over 50 per cent gained passes at the higher grades A*-C. These results are below average but are improving due to good planning and the support given to students in examination techniques. There is little difference between the performance of boys and girls.

97. Inspection findings are that standards in the current Year 9 are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement for many students in relation to when they started at the college in Year 7, including those students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Students of all abilities demonstrate increasing factual knowledge and understanding of both physical and human geography. However, map work is unsatisfactory. Students demonstrate good numeracy skills as seen in the analysis and interpretation of graphs and tables.
98. Inspection findings are that standards in the current Year 11 are average. This represents good achievement by the small number of students who opt for geography. Students use technical language accurately and have good skills in map work and in analysing and interpreting evidence. Students' use and application of information and communication technology is very good, for example the use of Excel for data presentation and analysis.
99. The quality of teaching and learning in geography is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge but overall, the team lacks experience in classroom management, so that in some lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of students are barriers to learning. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good, students display good attitudes to learning and teachers implement effective strategies to manage behaviour. Teaching assistants provide very good support to students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Resources and information and communication technology are used very effectively to make lessons interesting and to help students consolidate their learning. Assessment procedures are good and students have good guidance on what they need to do to improve. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on shopping hierarchies, students were given very good guidance on GCSE grades through a model answer showing the use of technical language and information extracted from graphs.
100. At the time of the inspection, the head of department was on extended maternity leave. Overall, the leadership of geography is good but the temporary absence of the head of department has reduced the effectiveness of the day-to-day management in support of teaching. Planning is very good and the department has identified appropriate priorities for improvement. There are very good procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the department; this is helping to raise standards. Accommodation and learning resources are of good quality and meet the needs of the curriculum well. Although there are now more opportunities for fieldwork than at the time of the previous inspection, much is in the local area and students do not experience contrasting regions. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well.
- Standards are rising from a low base as a result of good teaching and good leadership and management.
- Very good learning results where lessons in Years 7 to 9 have clear objectives and opportunities to reflect on progress.
- Students with special educational needs and English as an additional language do very well in lessons where their developing skills in using and understanding historical language are well supported.
- Assessment is very good in Years 10-11 but not as effective in Years 7-9.
- Not all teachers prepare a full range of different materials and approaches to help students of all levels of ability make progress.

Commentary

101. Standards on entry are well below national averages, rising during Years 7 to 9 to near national levels. This represents good achievement. Standards seen in Year 10 and 11 lessons are in line with national averages. There have been no GCSE history groups in recent years, although the subject is now popular. 2003 results in GCSE humanities showed above average attainment for girls and boys, and results were very good in comparison with other subjects. Achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
102. Students in Year 7 need, and receive, different levels of support for understanding historical terms, expressing opinions in groups and communicating ideas in writing. By Year 8, all are confident learners, using a variety of methods to present their work. Very good marking encourages students to make further efforts. In Year 8, high attainers can back opinion with evidence well. By Year 9, many use tables to compare long and short-term causes of the First World War, for example.
103. All make at least good, and mostly very good, progress in Years 10 and 11. High attainers are encouraged to aim for A*/A grades by good examination technique. Average attainers develop skills and confidence to tackle challenging tasks, by short-term targets, to ensure a C or higher grade where appropriate. Low attainers, those at an early stage of language learning, and those with special educational needs make very good progress with targeted support for individual needs. In a lesson on the American West, the mixed-ability set showed empathy to Sioux traditions, and having written a newspaper article from the settlers' viewpoint as well, could talk about the clash of cultures which led to genocide.
104. Teaching and learning are good, with very good and excellent features. The best lessons are well structured; their objectives are made clear to students, and opportunities are taken to review the progress being made against those objectives. Co-operative working and harmonious relations allow each student to make progress. In Year 8, the link with citizenship education reinforces understanding of Parliamentary democracy over four centuries. The GCSE local history work is excellent, giving opportunities to research and to use mathematical and ICT skills well. History contributes well to moral, social and cultural education. Not all teachers prepare a full range of different materials and approaches to help students of all levels of ability make progress; there is not enough sharing of the good practice that exists in this regard within the teaching team. Assessment is satisfactory in Years 7-9, but it does not offer students as clear an indication about how they can improve as it does in Years 10 and 11 where assessment is very good, clear and helpful.
105. Leadership and management are good. The humanities faculty has successfully met the challenge to improve both the popularity and achievement of the subject since the last Inspection. Good resources and well-written schemes of work support the focus on learning. The department continues to address the few remaining issues of concern. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection.

Religious education

The provision for religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department is well led and organised.
- There have been significant improvements in time allocated to RE in the timetable and the attainment of pupils in Years 10 and 11 since the last inspection.
- There is a need for staff development for the non-specialist RE teachers.

Commentary

106. The standards reached by pupils by Year 9 are below the national levels, but the pupils have a sound knowledge and awareness of Christianity and the five other main world religions. They are encouraged to empathise with many of the main features of these religions. They learn in accordance with the Oldham Agreed Syllabus with its aims of developing respect, morality and relationships as well as encouraging a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the variety of religious beliefs and practices. Achievement of students in Years 7-9 is satisfactory.
107. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils follow the GCSE course with its emphasis on the study of major moral issues, but not all take the examination. The results are below national levels (and those of some other subjects at the college) but within the context of the college and the restraints of time, pupils' achievements are satisfactory. There has been a big improvement in results in the last two years and brighter pupils come up to national expectations. Pupils know some key religious concepts such as the eight-fold path of Buddhism, explaining the Holocaust and analysing the mission of Jesus. They analyse some major moral issues such as sex and marriage, prejudice and discrimination. This makes an important contribution to their personal moral development. Pupils with special needs and English as an additional language make appropriate progress, thanks to teachers being fully aware of the wide range and needs of pupils.
108. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The teaching in all lessons is at least satisfactory, with some good lessons. Teachers plan their lessons well and have clear aims as to what they want to do. They often adopt an imaginative approach and thus ensure that pupils find the lessons interesting, enjoyable and valuable, hence pupils respond well. There is a good atmosphere and good relationships, with pupils showing mutual respect for each other's opinions.
109. Teachers generally have a secure grasp of the subject, but many non-specialists teach the subject and their range of knowledge is more limited. Topics are linked to the pupils' own lives; for example, a lesson on how Jesus was treated led to a consideration of how people might treat outsiders today. The written work in Years 7-9 is generally short, with very little depth of analysis, but in Years 10 and 11, there is much more evidence of reflective and extended writing. Most pupils clearly take a real pride in their work. The quality of assessment of pupils' work by the teachers is variable; too much in Years 7-9 has a simple tick, while sometimes there is a good detailed scrutiny of the work and an explanation of what could be done to improve it. Only a small amount of work is specially prepared to cater for different needs of pupils. Resources are satisfactory and the head of department is currently phasing out some old books. Some outstanding recent events were organised by the department: the Holocaust Day and the Service for Peace in Iraq which was led by local religious leaders from the Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities. This made a very deep impression in all the local community. There are also visits to Chester or York where pupils make a co-ordinated study of religious, historical and geographical issues.
110. The leadership and management of the department is a strong feature. The enthusiastic and well-informed leadership is characterised by detailed planning, the full implementation of the Oldham Agreed Syllabus, a thorough analysis of data, the development of full policy statements (which are fully in tune with the college's) and a good knowledge of the subject and how to teach it. The head of department encourages high expectations and standards and keeps up to date with developments in the subject. However, there are six other religious education teachers (most are also in the Humanities department); the head of department co-ordinates their work very well but there is a need for further staff development in the teaching of religious education among the non-specialists. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good, because two major improvements have been effected: all pupils now receive a lesson of religious education every week and there has been a substantial improvement in the progress and attainment of pupils by Year 11.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is consistently good teaching in all areas which enables students to achieve well.
- The department is managed well and this allows staff to work efficiently and provide a good standard of education.
- There is a good standard of accommodation and resources, especially ICT, which motivates both teachers and students.
- Insufficient staffing in food studies has allowed standards to fall in Years 7 to 9.
- The group sizes in Years 7 and 8 are too big for the facilities within the classrooms and are a potential health and safety risk.
- There is insufficient teaching of metal, plastics and wood techniques and skills and control technology in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

111. GCSE results in 2003 were broadly in line with the national average: a little above average at grades A*-C, a little below at grades A*-G, and with a relatively small proportion of students gaining the higher grades of A*-B. The A*-C pass rate for boys was well above the national average, and that for girls below average, but only girls attained the higher grades of A* and A. Results have improved consistently since the last inspection.
112. Students come into the college with low standards of presentation and drawing skills. Handwriting is poor and spelling is weak. By the end of Year 9, standards of work in design and technology have improved so as to be below, but close to, the expected standards nationally. This represents good achievement for these students. Students have a good grasp of textile and graphical techniques and a satisfactory ability in resistant materials. Their skill in using ICT is especially strong. However, students' sketching and drawing skills have not increased sufficiently and this handicaps their design abilities at GCSE. There is insufficient control technology taught in Years 7 to 9. Students' progress is good or better in textiles and graphics and satisfactory in resistant materials but has been unsatisfactory in food technology due to a lack of a permanent teacher. Some students have had up to three teachers in a year. This has a negative effect on standards and on the motivation of students. In the resistant materials area, there is insufficient teaching of techniques and skills in wood, plastics and metal and this may handicap the complexity of design and make in the future GCSE projects.
113. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are close to the level expected nationally and students achieve very well. Students in Years 10 and 11 make very good progress in food technology. Students make good progress in the other areas and some excellent examples were seen of textiles GCSE coursework. The materials and techniques used in the GCSE resistant materials projects were limited and formed a barrier, preventing students from achieving the highest grades. The research skills using the Internet, and the computer-aided design skills seen were, however, impressive. Overall, there is currently little difference in the attainment of boys and girls and no difference between different ethnic groups. It was pleasing to see boys doing GCSE textiles courses.
114. Teaching and learning are good in all areas and years and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. All lessons are well planned and lesson objectives are met. Work is always marked and assessed well so students know their National Curriculum or GCSE attainment level. Very good use is made of ICT to enhance learning. Teachers give good individual help, and the teaching assistants are invaluable in providing very effective support for students with special

educational needs. The department benefits greatly from the input of the advanced skills teacher. There is insufficient exemplar material on display in some classrooms and what there is not labelled well enough to help students understand the requirements of the National Curriculum or the GCSE syllabus. Students' attitudes improve as they move up through the college. In Year 7, some immature and inattentive behaviour was seen. However, by the time students reach Year 11, they are mostly mature and diligent.

115. The department is well led in some difficult circumstances. There are problems in recruiting a food technology teacher. Five sets have been reduced to four in Years 7 and 8 and this has resulted in some over-large class sizes, with a potential health and safety risk due to overcrowding. There is a very good assessment and monitoring system and a fast-track group for the talented students. Staff in the department work well together. The technicians give valuable support. There are very good links with other secondary schools in the area, and the college has a leading role in subject development locally. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards at GCSE are much improved, as is the quality of teaching.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the department is very good, providing strong direction.
- Standards of achievement are good, and improving.
- Teachers' planning and use of resources are very good.
- The failure to use ICT in Years 7 to 9 is a breach of statutory requirements.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning does not yet ensure consistent provision.
- The teaching of drawing and the use of sketchbooks need further development.

Commentary

116. Examination results in 2003 were well below average. The boys' results were better than the girls'; these results were much better than those of 2002. Poor attendance prevented a small number of students sitting the examination.
117. The standard of work in college is below average by Years 9, but improving. Students arrive in Year 7 with well below average skills but by the end of Year 9, their achievements are good. They appreciate the different intentions in portraits by Holbein, Matisse and Picasso. Students' drawing skills are not, however, well developed. These students see drawing as another way to make a picture rather than to record particular information. Their design skills are more refined in paintings, collage and mixed media. Sketchbooks are not used for experimentation. Students do not use computers to produce artwork. They have improving literacy skills but find it difficult to talk or write about their work in any critical way.
118. By Year 11, standards are below average, but students' achievement is good and reflects their response to challenging work. They are confident working from observation and producing decorative two- and three-dimensional compositions reflecting their teachers' interests. Drawings are often overworked. Self-portraits influenced by Hockney and Freud are well above average. Too many students rely on imagery from the Internet or magazines. The most able students achieve well, using sketchbooks for personal investigation in creative innovative ways. Those who are least able or from minority heritage groups also achieve well. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Teachers know their students well and plan for all to work at an appropriate level.

119. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are challenging, very well planned and build on previous learning. Initial activities focus on new words being defined and used by both students and teachers. Occasions for students to reflect on their progress at the ends of lessons are sometimes missed. Teachers relate well to their students who arrive in class expecting to work. Relationships are based on mutual respect and students recognise their teachers' enjoyment of their subject. Students' weak basic drawing skills are a barrier to their progress and prevent them from fully understanding how to improve their work. They depend on their teachers for guidance more than is usual. Gossip occasionally interferes with progress and concentration. In the only unsatisfactory lesson seen, the teacher was unable to combat the unsatisfactory behaviour of students who interfered with others' learning.
120. Leadership is very good and management is good. The head of department has brought rapid improvements and is ambitious for staff and students. Subject documentation is thorough and aimed at raising standards. Assessment procedures are good but assessment data is not used to remedy weaknesses in the curriculum. The monitoring of teaching and learning does not ensure consistency of approaches across the department. Resources for learning are unsatisfactory. The difficulty accessing computers makes delivery of the National Curriculum impossible. Links with Gallery Oldham enrich the curriculum. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Teaching, learning and achievement are now good but the use of ICT remains inadequate.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is insufficient curriculum time in Years 7 and 8.
- The development of core skills and subject knowledge, including the use of ICT, need more attention and consolidation in Years 7 to 9.
- Leadership of the subject is strong and effective.
- Good teaching motivates pupils and helps them make progress.
- Very good pupil/teacher relationships are promoting a positive ethos for the subject.

Commentary

121. Teacher assessments and work seen during the inspection indicate that standards are below average. This does, however, represent satisfactory achievement, given that pupils' musical attainment is low on entry to the college and that they receive insufficient teaching time for the subject in Years 7 and 8. This achievement could be better if the shortfall in learning was able to be targeted in a weekly lesson. There has been no GCSE course for the past two years, but the small group of students now studying the subject in Year 10 are achieving well and are a hopeful sign for the future. Pupils enjoy their lessons and respond well to the encouragement they receive. Even though work in composition and performance is rudimentary, pupils do try and make some progress. They become familiar with the electronic keyboard and use it as a means of shaping and expressing their musical ideas. The Blues compositions of the Year 10 students are a significant step forward from earlier work. They show an understanding of structure and idiom and make effective use of computer software programs.
122. The standard of teaching is good, with some examples of very good classroom practice evident. Positive student-teacher relationships are a striking feature of the lessons and contribute to motivation and achievement. Students' needs are recognised and appropriate support is provided. As a result, all groups are able to respond and achieve. Schemes of work are broadly in line with National Curriculum requirements. However, the structure and sequence of lessons in Years 7-9 do not always allow students to build up their knowledge and

skill in areas such as singing and use of notation. There are also insufficient opportunities for more regular listening, particularly to music from the western classical tradition and that from the British Isles.

123. The department is very well managed on a day-to-day basis and is given positive and committed leadership. There have been some significant innovations and areas of growth. Instrumental tuition has increased and although numbers are still below average, the generous financial support provided by the governors is having a beneficial impact. Opportunities for musical enrichment outside the classroom are developing – the enthusiasm and the high standard of achievement of the drumming group is an impressive example. In all areas of work in music, there is a strong commitment to opening opportunities for all students, regardless of background. Links are being made with outside agencies to provide wider experiences, for example, the project with the Oldham Gallery and work with professional musicians.
124. Valuable though these opportunities are, they cannot offset the basic impediments which are holding back improvement. Since the last inspection, staffing, curriculum time and accommodation have each been reduced, and improvement has been unsatisfactory. In music, there is vision, enthusiasm and response but at present, achievement is being impeded by these constraints.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are average and the students achieve very well.
- Leadership is very good.
- Opportunities to work with young children in the community contribute very well to the students' career aspirations and their personal development.
- The quality of teaching is not sufficiently consistent between teachers.

Commentary

125. Standards reached by the end of Year 9 are average. When they arrive at the college, students are well below average but immediately make rapid progress with specialist teaching and achieve very well. The boys are able to apply strategies in games such as football and hockey but their skills in badminton are less well developed. Their progress is slowed by poor footwork and lack of racket preparation. The girls have a good all-round knowledge of throwing events in athletics and are able to coach each other, which leads to improvements. The boys are less confident to evaluate each other's performance. In Year 9, a small minority of Asian boys are underachieving because they have poor attitudes to learning.
126. Only Year 10 students were observed in core physical education, but standards were average and students achieve well. A minority are above average in games such as netball, football and volleyball. They are quick to anticipate and are able to use their knowledge of skills and strategies to analyse and improve their performance.
127. 2003 GCSE results were in line with national averages, including at the highest grades A*-A. Standards reached by students currently following the GCSE course are above average and they achieve very well. Their coursework is of a high standard. It is well researched and greatly enhanced by their experiences of working with primary school students in the Junior Sports Leaders' Award course. Their presentation skills are excellent. They use word-processing, tabulation and graphics very well and analyse the data effectively to show how and why the students made progress. A minority of lower attaining students make slower progress in some

- lessons and underachieve because they are not given tasks that challenge them or the opportunity to think for themselves.
128. Students with special education needs, including those with hearing impairment, achieve very well because of the quality of support from their mentors, and tasks are designed to meet their needs if required. There is very little difference in achievement between students from minority ethnic groups. Asian girls tend to be less confident in games such as netball, but contribute a rich cultural dimension to dance both in movement and in costume.
 129. The students reach good standards in extra-curricular activities, with many individuals playing for local clubs and the district in games such as rugby league, football, volleyball and netball. They also experience invaluable opportunities to become involved in the community in the *Disabilities Week*, coaching schemes and working with younger students at college. They readily attend revision sessions after college and respond in a mature manner.
 130. The overall quality of teaching and its impact on learning is good, with some excellent features. Teachers use their expertise very effectively to immediately challenge the students when they arrive in Year 7 leading to rapid progress in learning new skills and techniques. Methods used to teach evaluative skills are less effective for the boys than the girls. This, combined with some instances of unsuccessful behaviour management, results in a slowing of progress in Year 9 for some boys. Information and communication technology is used well to support learning both in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Photography and diagrams are used particularly well to stimulate visual knowledge of skills. Very good practice in most of the teaching of GCSE results in the students becoming independent in their learning, very well motivated and having a readiness to take on challenges both in practical and theory sessions. However, in some lessons, the level of challenge is too low for different groups leading to underachievement. Questioning does not always encourage the students to give detailed answers necessary for examination requirements. The teaching from student teachers and coaches employed by the college is of a high quality.
 131. Leadership of the faculty is very good and inspirational in creating harmonious relationships in the local community through arrangements with the Junior Sports Leaders' Award. There is an innovative approach to securing every possible funding and access to local resources which impacts positively on the students' personal development and standards. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection, most notably in the raising of standards at GCSE and curriculum improvements to meet the needs of the students. Management is good. Assessment has improved but needs a more consistent approach between teachers. Self-evaluation is good and appropriate strategies are put in place to counteract weaknesses. The teachers create a challenging yet caring environment for their students which undoubtedly impacts strongly on their self-esteem and personal achievement.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

132. Lessons were sampled in the applied health and social care and business studies GCSE courses offered by the college to students in Years 10 and 11.
133. Students achieve very well in health and social care. Results in the General National Vocational Qualification were strong in 2003; all 11 students who took the course passed with either a merit or a distinction. Standards remain above average for the current Year 11, who show good empathy with clients and professionals, and who are able to write well in a variety of forms. The course is very well managed and taught. Students – mostly girls - have a very clear understanding of what they need to do to organise and improve their work, as a result of the well-planned assignments they are set and very clear assessment by their teacher. As a result, students are able to work with a good degree of independence, and portfolios are well organised. Relationships in lessons are very good. Good pace is maintained in lessons by very effective teaching, which features very good use of resources (including ICT), highly effective teamwork between the class teacher and support teacher, and energetic circulation and intervention by the class teacher. Students have experienced relatively few visits to

workplaces, but a range of professionals have visited the college to talk about care issues. Good use is made of the Internet to obtain resources and information directly from care providers.

134. The business studies course is in its second year, and there are as yet no results for analysis. In a small sample of two lessons seen with one group of Year 10 students, most students were able to make little independent progress. They were heavily dependent on the teacher for guidance, and were presented with concepts which were too difficult for most of them to understand. Work in their folders is mostly well presented and set in a local business context, but again indicates much reliance on the teacher's class notes and guidance.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The provision for personal, social and health education is very good and led by a dedicated team of teachers. It is well supported by a range of visiting speakers. These occasionally vary in quality but are carefully monitored and areas for improvement are quickly addressed. It is well planned to cover all the required topics and the quality of teaching is very good. The students value the opportunity to discuss relevant issues in their lives. Citizenship is being taught mainly through this programme.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good planning leads students from experience through reflection to become informed citizens.
- A good range of learning opportunities and some very good teaching enable students of all abilities to achieve well.
- Year 10 and 11 provision is still in a development stage.

Commentary

135. Standards are in line with national expectations overall in Years 7 to 9, with high standards in oral communication. Students are articulate in expressing views and giving evidence to back them up. They participate as far as they are able in college decisions, but would appreciate more opportunities to take responsibility in the college and wider community
136. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9. Students respond with maturity to teaching about cultural diversity and equal opportunities in PSHE lessons. Excellent locally-prepared materials help young people achieve an understanding of the background and trigger factors which led to the Oldham disturbances in 2001. National survey results show that students now in Year 8 at this college are very positive about participating and taking responsibility at college, local and national level, including voting in elections. There were insufficient opportunities for the direct observation of citizenship activities in Years 10 and 11 to make a judgement on the achievement of pupils in these year groups.
137. Good learning results from teaching which is good overall, with considerable strengths. Where teaching is very good, students contribute ideas and show sensitivity to the needs of others, for example those with disability. The planned extension to the Year 8 curriculum of knowledge and understanding of democratic society works well, with teachers from a range of subjects well prepared to introduce students to political terms, in which they are assessed by multiple choice questions. Visiting speakers offer support to the citizenship programme, and whilst their contributions vary in quality they are monitored by teachers who intervene and support when necessary.

138. Leadership is good, and management is very good. There is an annual audit of opportunities across all college subjects. History and science provide good experiences in knowledge and understanding of the role of moral and ethical issues involved in decision-making. Physical education provides an excellent opportunity for participation in the Junior Sports Leadership Award, where older students work with local primary school pupils. The team of staff teaching citizenship work well together to enable students of all abilities to understand, communicate and participate well. Teacher and student assessment takes place regularly in Years 7 to 9 but this still needs further development as advice is generated locally and nationally.
139. The college in its introduction of citizenship has built on existing strengths in PSHE and humanities faculties to deliver a coherent course for Years 7 to 9. Further work is needed to plan for Year 11 opportunities, and give coherence to the current Year 10 curriculum.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the college	2
How inclusive the college is	1
How the college's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the college	2

Overall standards achieved	2
Students' achievement	2

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	5
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	4
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

The quality of education provided by the college	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well students learn	2
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets students' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-college activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for students	1
How well the college seeks and acts on students' views	3
The effectiveness of the college's links with parents	2
The quality of the college's links with the community	2
The college's links with other schools and colleges	2

The leadership and management of the college	2
The governance of the college	4
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
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).