

INSPECTION REPORT

BICESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Bicester

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123233

Headteacher: Mrs C Bartlett

Lead inspector: John Godwood

Dates of inspection: 19 – 23 January 2004

Inspection number: 259146

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1244
School address:	Queen's Avenue Bicester Oxfordshire
Postcode:	OX26 2NS
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Roger Dyson
Date of previous inspection:	February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Bicester Community College is a specialist technology college. It received the DfES schools' achievement award in 2001 and 2002. Its other awards include Sportsmark, Investors in People and the International School Award. The college provides services for the local community, including adult education and family learning programmes. It is a lead institution in the increased flexibility programme for students aged 14 to 19. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds but the socio-economic context is relatively disadvantaged, especially in terms of the number of adults with higher education. Attainment on entry is below average in most years, though it was average for the current Year 7 and Year 10. Most students are White British and one in twenty come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A very small number of students speak English as an additional language. Almost one in five students have special educational needs, which is above average. This includes 21 with a Statement of Educational Needs. Of those with more significant needs, most have emotional and behavioural difficulties or learning needs, while a very small number have autism or physical disabilities. There is a Ministry of Defence establishment in Bicester and the number of students who join or leave the college at other than normal times is above average. The college has had significant difficulty in recruiting permanent qualified teachers in mathematics.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18242	John Godwood	Lead inspector	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The college provides a satisfactory education. Students' achievement is satisfactory – it is good in over half of subjects but unsatisfactory in mathematics. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The quality of teaching is often good but is affected by staffing difficulties in mathematics and science. The college has a wide curriculum which aids students' achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Students are provided with good support and guidance. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

The college's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The curriculum provides well for students' individual needs, including high-attaining students, those with special educational needs and those who prefer work-related learning.
- The college has difficulty recruiting qualified teachers in mathematics and, as a result, provision in mathematics in Years 7 to 11 is unsatisfactory.
- Teaching is good in more than half of subjects, but it is not consistently good across the college and at times expectations are too low.
- The headteacher provides good leadership in establishing the college's aims and guiding its long-term development.
- Management is not rigorous enough in ensuring consistency of quality throughout the college.
- There are very good links with other schools and the local community.
- Punctuality is unsatisfactory.

Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards have risen broadly in line with the national trend. Teaching has improved. There has been a satisfactory response to the issues in the last report and much improvement in computer facilities. The college has gained technology college status and made significant improvements to its accommodation and curriculum, providing a better learning environment and more opportunities to meet the needs of individual students.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	C	C	C	B
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	D	C	E	

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 pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Students' achievement is satisfactory in all stages. Year 9 results have improved in line with the national trend and in 2003 were average. GCSE results have also improved and in 2003 were above those of similar schools. Students' total GCSE points score was average, but the number of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was below average. This difference is due to the fact that some students take a large number of GCSE examinations.

Current standards are below average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. They are lower than recent examination results mainly because students' attainment on entry was lower. Achievement is good in more than half of subjects, satisfactory in others and unsatisfactory in mathematics. This variation is related to variations in the quality of teaching. Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of very good support. The small number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve as well as others.

In the sixth form, standards are average overall but vary because the numbers are relatively small; students achieve well in mathematics, geography, psychology and physical education.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Some students have behavioural difficulties, but the college has worked hard to improve behaviour and the learning ethos. As a result, behaviour is good in many lessons, but some are disrupted, particularly when teaching is less strong. Attendance is satisfactory, but a minority arrive late to college and to lessons.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory overall though it varies between subjects. It is good in history, geography, religious education, music, art, ICT and physical education and very good in the work-related programme. In these subjects, students generally achieve well. In mathematics and science, many lessons are taught by unqualified or temporary teachers and, in mathematics, teaching is unsatisfactory. Sixth form teaching is good in mathematics and physics, as well as in geography, physical education and psychology. In several subjects teaching is occasionally unsatisfactory because teachers' expectations are too low.

The curriculum is good, and very good in Years 10 and 11, where it is well matched to students' individual needs. As a result, achievement is somewhat better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Students receive good support and guidance, and induction into Year 7 is very good. Very good links with the local community provide students with additional opportunities to achieve.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear vision of an inclusive community school, and this is shared by staff, governors and most students and parents. Leadership of other key staff is also good and most teachers and support staff work well as a team in students' interests. As a result the college has made steady progress in meeting its challenges. Management is satisfactory. Planning is appropriate and there is regular evaluation of performance, but not enough rigour in ensuring consistency or using evaluation to identify areas for improvement. Governors make a good contribution. They are very supportive, know the college well and provide a good range of expertise. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all students is not met because of a lack of suitable spaces, but through other opportunities their spiritual development is supported satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are broadly satisfied but have a number of concerns. Most believe that their children are happy and are satisfied with their progress. They like the activities and much of the care. Many are concerned about behaviour and believe that while the college has systems, teachers vary in how well they implement them. They are aware of bullying, though in most cases find it is dealt with well. Some would like more information on progress. Students are also satisfied. They like most teachers, who they think provide good care and make lessons interesting. They appreciate the activities and trips and the college's facilities. Many are concerned about behaviour and bullying, though they think most students behave well. They would like more places to go at lunchtime.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- improve teaching and achievement in mathematics;
- ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good, with high expectations in all lessons;
- make management procedures more rigorous in ensuring that the work of all departments is consistently good and that the outcomes of evaluations are used to inform planning;
- improve students' punctuality.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT BICESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

OVERALL EVALUATION

Bicester Community College has a sound sixth form which is cost-effective. Standards vary according to students' prior attainment but are currently average overall. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory overall and is good in around half of subjects. The sixth form is well led and students receive good support and guidance.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Most teachers have good expertise in their subjects.
- The quality of teaching and tutoring is not consistently good.
- Students feel well supported and have good relationships with their teachers.
- The curriculum provides a broad range of opportunities for students with differing needs and interests.
- Sixth form leadership provides a clear direction and appropriate priorities for development.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Satisfactory in English. Teachers have good expertise and there is a supportive climate for learning. Students do not have enough practice in writing extended essays.
Mathematics	Good in mathematics. Students achieve well because of accurate teaching and encouragement to think for themselves. Their work is assessed well.
Science	Satisfactory in physics. Teachers are supportive and students learn to think through problems. Progress is checked regularly, but written comments need to give more detailed guidance.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory in ICT. There is a good range of courses and teaching is satisfactory. Students are well supported, but their progress is not tested regularly enough.
Humanities	Good in geography. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching, helpful guidance and very good relationships. Good in psychology. The teacher has very good expertise and students achieve well. Progress is tracked well though some marking does not give enough guidance.
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory in art. Teaching and achievement are satisfactory, though students' progress is not monitored carefully enough.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in physical education. A-level students achieve well because of good, challenging teaching. On the NVQ football course, practical elements are taught well, but theoretical work is less well planned.
Business	Satisfactory in business. Teachers know the subject well and students work independently, but some lessons are too undemanding.

The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive good support and guidance. They find teachers and tutors to be approachable and helpful. In most subjects, teachers mark work regularly and provide good guidance, though in some cases written comments are not sufficiently detailed. Students' academic and personal development is monitored and supported well. They know their target grades and how well they are performing in relation to them. They have individual interviews to review their progress and receive additional support where this is needed.

Guidance on careers and university entrance is satisfactory, but students would appreciate more detailed individual guidance in order to be sure they have fully considered the options open to them and are making the right choices.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The newly-appointed director of studies has a clear sense of direction and a drive for improvement. The curriculum is effectively planned to meet the needs of individual students. The quality of provision is monitored and appropriate priorities for development have been identified. Relationships are good and there is mutual respect between tutors and students.

The sixth form runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Procedures are clear and most staff and students adhere to them, though there is not total consistency in their application. Students are encouraged to participate in the management of the sixth form through the elected sixth form committee. Some students are not punctual and this affects their achievement.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students generally enjoy the sixth form. They find it friendly and relaxed and have good relationships with their teachers, who are always available to help. They feel that their courses suit them and contribute to their career plans. Many would like more information on their career options after leaving the sixth form. Some students would like better study facilities and computers.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is satisfactory at all stages. Recent Year 9 and GCSE results were average but current standards are below average overall because students' attainment on entry was lower. Standards in the sixth form are average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in mathematics because of difficulties in recruiting qualified staff.
- Achievement is good in many of the non-core subjects.
- Girls do better than boys in examinations but the gap is narrowing due to steps taken in several subjects.

Commentary

1. Year 9 results were average in 2003. Results have improved in line with the national trend and in 2003 were the best yet in mathematics and science and for students' combined points score. English results were below average but they also were higher than in 2002. Girls do better than boys by the same amount as that found nationally.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.4 (30.0)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	34.9 (32.7)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.0 (30.4)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 215 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results in 2003 were average for students' total point score but below average for five or more A* to C grades and for students' best eight subjects. The total points score is better than other measures because some students take a large number of examinations. There is an improving trend, which until 2002 was in line with the national trend. Results overall improved again in 2003, though the percentage gaining five or more A* to G grades (including English and mathematics) went down. Results were better than in similar schools, though value-added calculations show that students make satisfactory progress through the college. The highest-attaining and lowest-attaining students generally make the best progress. Girls' progress exceeds that of boys.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	44 (39)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	82 (88)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	30.8 (31.2)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 183 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. For current students, standards at the end of Year 9 are below average overall. However, these students' attainment on entry was also below average and their achievement is satisfactory. There is considerable variation in the standards reached in different subjects. Standards in English, mathematics and science are below average. In mathematics and science this is partly because of difficulties in recruiting teachers, with a significant number of lessons being taught by temporary or unqualified teachers. Achievement is satisfactory in English and science, but unsatisfactory in mathematics. Standards in mathematics have declined this year because there are more temporary teachers and management is also temporary and unsatisfactory. In design and technology, geography, history, religious education, art and physical education standards are average and in music they are above average. In these subjects students' achievement is good, due in most cases to good teaching. Achievement in ICT is only satisfactory even though teaching is good, because lessons are too infrequent to provide good continuity in learning. Standards in Year 7 are average, reflecting these students' average attainment on entry.
4. Standards seen at the end of Year 11 are below average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Students in Year 10 reach average standards because their attainment on entry was higher. Achievement is somewhat better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 because the curriculum is very well matched to students' abilities and interests. Standards in the core subjects and modern languages are below average. Achievement is satisfactory in English, science and modern languages and unsatisfactory in mathematics. Standards in design and technology and physical education are average and those in history, geography, religious education, art, music and GCSE physical education are above average. Achievement is good in these subjects, generally because of good teaching. In ICT, standards are average in the examination course, but below average for other students because their ICT learning is not well planned. Students on the work-related programme achieve very well because they are very well supported and find it highly motivating. In many subjects, girls achieve better than boys because they are more confident in class and more diligent in completing homework. The gap is narrowing, however, because teachers have adapted the work to suit boys. In English, for example, teachers use more non-fiction texts and in geography, short-term targets have improved boys' coursework. Boys achieve better than girls in physical education and ICT.
5. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and make good progress in reaching their individual targets, and in improving reading and spelling. They achieve well in most subjects and many do well in examinations. The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve at least as well as other students. The achievement of gifted and talented students is satisfactory overall. They are offered additional challenges through fast track GCSE courses in music and humanities subjects and often achieve very well in these courses.

Sixth form

6. A-level results have varied considerably because the numbers taking individual subjects have often been small and results very dependent on individual students' abilities. The average total points score was in line with the national average in 2002 but well below average in 2003. Students did better than expected from their GCSE results in 2002 and as expected in 2003. Girls did better than boys, in line with the difference found nationally.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	91.4 (92.9)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	17.8 (22.9)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	190.2 (229.1)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 50 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

7. For current students on A-level courses, standards at the end of Year 13 are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Of the subjects inspected in detail, standards are average in physics and psychology and above average in mathematics, business studies, geography and physical education. In most of these subjects, students achieve well because teaching is good. Standards are below average in English, ICT and art, but, because students enter these courses with below average GCSE results, their achievement is satisfactory. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls.
8. Standards in vocational courses are above average. Students studying for the Intermediate GNVQ in ICT and NVQ in football are achieving well because they find these courses highly motivating and usually receive good teaching.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Attendance is also satisfactory in both the main school and the sixth form, although punctuality is unsatisfactory for main school students. Students' moral and social development is good; their spiritual and cultural development is sound.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Weaknesses in some students' concentration and behaviour remain a challenge, despite the college's considered and energetic approach.
- In many lessons, particularly when teaching is good, behaviour is good and contributes positively to learning. However, some lessons are disrupted by the behaviour of a minority.
- The college has clear expectations of behaviour and a strong system of rewards and sanctions.
- There is a range of support to help students with unsatisfactory patterns of behaviour.
- Several subjects provide good support for students' personal development.
- A minority of students arrive late and are slow moving to lessons during the school day.

Commentary

9. In lessons that are well taught, most students are interested in learning. In physical education, for example, expectations are high and attitudes are very good. Students also enjoy art and music lessons and, in history and religious education, they contribute well to class discussions. A significant number of students take part in extra-curricular activities in sport, music and drama. Where teaching is weaker or less confident, however, students become restless and in some cases lessons are disrupted. This is the case in some lessons in mathematics, science and modern languages. Both parents and students are concerned about the behaviour of a minority and about disrupted lessons. Students are also concerned about bullying. Most parents and students believe that bullying is dealt with effectively once staff know about it, though some students are reluctant to tell staff about problems.
10. The college's intake includes some students with particular behavioural problems and it works hard to address their needs and prevent disruption. This starts in work with primary schools to identify students who need particular support. Rewards and sanctions are well planned. Senior staff are on call to support individual teachers and visit classes where they anticipate difficulties to check that students are settled. Equally good practice is the Star Zone – a separate building with a calm environment for students who find lessons too much of a challenge. These include school-phobic students being re-introduced to school and students who experience difficulties in specific subjects and work in the zone for certain periods each week. The college makes every effort to keep disaffected students in education and the work-related learning programme in Years 10 and 11 is very successful in motivating those who have lost interest in the mainstream curriculum. Internal exclusion is used well to reduce the number of students who are excluded from school. So far this school year, there have been about 30 fixed-term exclusions, which is broadly average for a school of this size.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1183	107	1
White – any other White background	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	2	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	16	6	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	11	2	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	5	3	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	7	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

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

11. The college provides good support for students' personal development by helping them to develop the values on which to base their own moral and social judgements. Pastoral support begins with form tutors, who are well supported by committed heads of year. Each week there is a moral or spiritual theme, which is considered in a year assembly and a tutor period. Through this, the college compensates for the fact that it does not have enough large spaces to provide an act of collective worship for all students every day. Several subjects are particularly effective in supporting students' personal development. Religious education is very effective in developing spiritual awareness and in history, students consider social issues and reach their own conclusions. Through well-organised activities in physical education they improve their self-esteem and teamwork. Year 9 students also work in teams to carry out a citizenship community project. Lessons in geography, religious education and art help students to understand other cultures. The college holds the International School Award in recognition of its fund-raising for charities in Nepal and Africa. The college's values are at times at odds with those the students bring in from the wider community and it is a result of its strong ethos that it is able to provide an effective education for so many of its students.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.6	School data	1.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

12. Students' attendance is satisfactory. However punctuality in the morning is unsatisfactory – few students arrive very late but a significant number are too late to be registered on time. Students are also often slow moving between lessons. There is some truancy, but this is dealt with very firmly when students are caught. The college has effective procedures to telephone parents of students who do not come to school and there is good liaison with the education welfare officer

and the community police. A police liaison officer is attached to the college and her work with students is effective in reinforcing the school's expectations.

Sixth form

13. Sixth form students almost always participate well in lessons and are interested in learning new ideas, although there are a few exceptions. They behave well and sometimes show sustained concentration in tackling difficult tasks. There are good relationships and a good working atmosphere in most classes. In an ICT lesson, for example, students were quick to help when the teacher made an error. In one art class, however, attitudes were barely satisfactory, and absence and lateness caused some students to underachieve. Most students believe that the college treats them as responsible young adults and appreciate the support they get from teachers and the friendly atmosphere. Students are encouraged to develop the self-discipline of independent learning and most rise to the challenge. Some, however, lack confidence and tend to rely too much on their teachers. The sixth form council provides an opportunity for Year 12 and 13 students to contribute to decision making. The sixth form is active in supporting charities and all students are expected to carry out a community project in Year 12. Some help in Year 7 classes, where their input is useful and valued by pupils. Attendance is satisfactory but some students are not sufficiently punctual in arriving to school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory. The curriculum is good, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Support, advice and guidance are good. There is a good partnership with parents and very good links with the community.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is good or better in six out of ten lessons but unsatisfactory in almost one in ten. Where teaching is good, students generally respond and learn well, but when teaching is weak, they often fail to engage. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory, and is good more often than in the main school. Assessment is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in the majority of subjects, but unsatisfactory in mathematics.
- Most teachers have good subject knowledge, though in mathematics and citizenship some teaching is done by non-specialists.
- The better lessons are well planned, with tasks that interest and challenge students.
- Where teaching is unsatisfactory, it is often because expectations are too low.
- Students behave well and are interested in many lessons, but in a minority of lessons attitudes are unsatisfactory and prevent learning.
- Teaching assistants make a very positive contribution to lessons.

Commentary

14. There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching across different subjects. It is good in history, geography, religious education, ICT, music, art and physical education. It is unsatisfactory in mathematics, largely because the college has been unable to recruit sufficient permanent, qualified teachers. Recent staffing difficulties also have a significant effect on science teaching, which is just satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory in other subjects.
15. In most subjects, teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to explain clearly and to ask questions that make students think for themselves. Teachers of practical subjects such as music or physical education provide good examples that students emulate and hence develop their own skills. In mathematics, however, some of the lessons taught by non-specialist

teachers use less effective methods that fail to develop students' understanding. Citizenship is taught by form tutors, some of whom have limited knowledge of the subject and, as a result, lessons vary in how well the activities are organised to support students' learning through practical experiences.

16. In order to promote consistency in teaching and improve students' concentration, the college has introduced a common format to lessons – the 'Bicester lesson'. This is based on the guidance in the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, in which lessons begin with a fast-paced starter activity, have a main section of individual or group work, and finish with a whole-class review of what has been learned. The focus of the Bicester lesson is on informing students what they are to learn and keeping them engaged in interesting activities. The structure aids teachers' planning and students' concentration is improved because they know what to expect. In many lessons where classroom management is confident, the Bicester lesson is implemented well and has a positive effect. Where control is less secure, however, teachers sometimes find it difficult to maintain the structure. The three-part lesson is used consistently in English and, as a result, students work at a good pace. In art, the better lessons have a good structure, though they often lack a review session; the weaker lessons, however, leave students to get on by themselves for too long. In business, teachers make very limited use of the three-part lesson.
17. In the subjects where teaching is good, many lessons use imaginative teaching methods that enable students to be actively involved in discussion and practical work. In such lessons, students usually behave and respond well and enjoy learning. The subjects they particularly enjoy are physical education, art, music and design and technology. The best mathematics and science lessons include interesting and challenging activities, but in some lessons taught by temporary teachers, students' attitudes are unsatisfactory and little learning takes place. In modern languages, the better lessons engage all students in speaking and listening, but in the weaker lessons, students are not given enough opportunities to be involved and, as a result, they develop poor attitudes. Just occasionally, poor behaviour prevents learning even in lessons taught by experienced teachers, but this is rare.
18. The level of challenge offered to students is a significant factor that distinguishes the better from the weaker teaching. Where teaching is unsatisfactory it is often because students are not challenged sufficiently. In the small minority of excellent lessons, however, teachers plan very carefully to involve students physically and intellectually in making links between different parts of the subject, resulting in very high motivation. There is consistently high challenge in physical education and, as a result, students rapidly build up their skills. They become engrossed in ICT because the work is challenging and teachers have high expectations. In history and religious education, students enjoy discussions in which they can test out their ideas. Within design and technology, there is more challenge and discussion in food and textiles than in resistant materials and product modelling, where teaching is sometimes too slow. Students work independently in business, but some lessons are too leisurely.
19. Students with special educational needs are taught well. Their individual needs are well known and are particularly well supported in the learning support department, history, geography, physical education, music, ICT and design and technology. In some other subjects, teachers do not plan sufficiently for students' particular needs. In all subjects, students' learning benefits from very good support provided by the teaching assistants. Teaching on the work-related programme is very good, both in basic skills lessons within school and in off-site vocational courses. Students are motivated by the practical work and learn very well because they have very good relationships with staff and good personal guidance. Teachers, vocational tutors and support staff know the students well and work very well as a team.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 168 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5 (3.0%)	30 (17.9%)	65 (38.7%)	52 (31.0%)	15 (8.9%)	1 (0.6%)	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.

20. There is a good policy on assessment that aims to ensure that students' work is assessed regularly, that their progress is monitored and that they have clear targets to work towards. However, the implementation of the policy is not consistently good in all subjects. Marking, for example, is accurate and helpful in geography, history, religious education, design and technology, music and business; it is of variable quality in English, science and physical education and sometimes unsatisfactory in mathematics. The use of assessment records to track students' progress is good in history, but unsatisfactory in art. Students are well informed on how to improve their work in geography, history, design and technology, music and business. They need clearer guidance in English, modern languages, religious education and in the weaker lessons in mathematics and science.
21. There are good arrangements for monitoring individual students' progress across all their subjects. Their attainment is regularly assessed in each subject and their progress is overseen by the three key stage directors, who send letters of commendation for good progress or intervene where students are underachieving. All teachers are provided with data on each student and the college is planning to streamline this through establishing a computer database that all staff can access. Assessment records are used satisfactorily to determine appropriate teaching groups, and used well to set students' targets for Year 9 and GCSE results. The progress of students with special educational needs is closely monitored through testing and regular reviews. Most subjects use assessment data satisfactorily in planning developments in their courses.

Sixth form

22. Most sixth form teachers have good expertise in their subjects, which they use to give clear explanations and prepare students well for examinations. Many teachers are skilful in asking questions that encourage students to think deeply and develop their understanding. Lessons are often well planned, with activities that interest and challenge students. In mathematics and geography, for example, students are encouraged to work independently and contribute well to discussions. Where teaching is weaker, however, it is often because the pace is too leisurely and not enough is expected of students. This is the case in some business lessons.
23. A strong feature of teaching in many subjects is the good relationships between students and their teachers. Students find teachers to be helpful and approachable and there is good mutual respect. Many teachers make good use of tutorials and provide good individual guidance.
24. Assessment is satisfactory in the sixth form. Most teachers mark work regularly and their comments provide good guidance, though in physics and psychology, the comments do not always show clearly enough how the work can be improved. Most subjects track students' progress carefully, though in art this is inadequate and English teachers are not consistent in their use of A-level grades to check progress.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. The curriculum is supported well by good accommodation. Staffing is good in many subjects but is unsatisfactory in mathematics.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well planned and is flexible in meeting students' needs and aspirations.
- Higher-attaining students are challenged by taking additional GCSEs.
- There is very good support for students with special educational needs.
- The work-related programme is very motivating and boosts students' achievement.
- There are many enrichment activities in the main school, particularly in music, sport and drama.
- The new accommodation is well planned with good display of students' work in classrooms.

Commentary

25. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 provides the National Curriculum and some additional opportunities. Almost all students take two modern languages in Years 8 and 9. Higher-attaining students are additionally challenged by starting a GCSE course in geography, history or religious education in Year 9. Music GCSE can be started outside school hours in Years 8 or 9. These arrangements allow students to take additional GCSEs by the end of Year 11. The progress of Year 7 students with low levels in English is effectively promoted by a strong focus on literacy in several subjects and additional classroom support. However, in several subjects some classes are shared between two teachers, which in some cases disrupts continuity in learning and slows progress.
26. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 meets statutory requirements and is very flexible in providing opportunities for a wide range of students. All students take a GCSE course in religious education; they choose from three foreign languages and four technology courses and a wide range of other GCSE options. There is a good range of vocational courses. The college carefully identifies students who may become disaffected before the end of Year 11. They complete essential GCSEs by the end of Year 10 and then choose to improve their grades or take more vocational or work-related courses. The work-related programme is very well organised and has a positive impact on students' self-esteem and confidence.
27. Technology college funding has been used to expand the number of computers and provide technical support. This has raised the profile of ICT and the college now meets statutory requirements. However, students in Years 8 and 9 do not have enough ICT lessons to develop their capability in full. In Years 10 and 11, the learning of ICT across the curriculum is not well planned, which affects the achievement of students who do not follow an examination course. Several of the technology college targets for raising examination results in science, mathematics and technology have not been met. In some cases the targets were too ambitious but staffing difficulties have also been a factor. There have also been training problems in science and art, where new software and hardware remain idle because staff have not yet acquired the skills to use them.
28. Gifted and talented students are provided for well through the accelerated curriculum and some enrichment activities. The new co-ordinator is planning to widen the range of activities and improve the monitoring of students' progress. Students with special educational needs are very well supported. In addition to the normal curriculum, they have individual programmes to develop literacy and numeracy and their learning from Year 7 to Year 11 is carefully mapped.
29. Extra-curricular activities are particularly good in music, sport and drama. In music, many students receive instrumental lessons and take part in concerts. The sports programme is very popular: older students help with activities and good use is made of local clubs. Many students are involved in drama productions. Clubs in ICT, modern languages and design and technology are also popular. There is an interesting range of visits in religious education. In geography, however, fieldwork is very limited and the GCSE business course lacks external links. The annual activities week includes residential trips to outdoor adventure centres.

30. The match of teachers' qualifications and experience to the subjects they teach is good in many subjects but is unsatisfactory in mathematics. This is because of recent recruitment difficulties. Almost all teachers of mathematics have appropriate subject qualifications, but several are temporary and a few lack teaching qualifications or have overseas qualifications. Science teachers are almost all appropriately qualified, but the team includes many who are inexperienced or temporary. There are also teachers with overseas qualifications and teachers being trained by the college in English, design and technology, art and ICT. Only in mathematics and science is this having a significant impact on standards. The college is well staffed with experienced teaching assistants, technicians and other support staff.
31. Since the last inspection the college has significantly improved its accommodation. This has been carefully planned; the new buildings provide a good learning environment and have a positive effect on students' attitudes. Students' achievements are celebrated by good displays in classrooms, though displays in corridors are less effective. Increasing security has also been a priority and the college has made effective improvements to the site boundaries. Landscaping was not included in the building project and is being slowly improved, largely through self-help. A voluntary 'schoolforce' of parents, students and staff has planted trees and painted fences; paving and seating are being provided through sponsorship. There remain shortcomings in some of the older buildings: some toilets are in a poor state, the dining hall is congested and the physical education changing rooms and gymnasium are in need of refurbishment. Textbooks and equipment are sufficient and suitable. The library is used well and the librarian provides students with a safe and caring educational environment.

Sixth form

32. The sixth form curriculum meets students' aspirations well. In addition to a wide range of A-level courses, there are advanced vocational courses in business and ICT and intermediate vocational courses in ICT, health and social care and leisure and tourism. Students can take the European computer driving licence and a recently introduced NVQ in football coaching is very popular. All students take a course in personal, social and health education. This includes religious education, though the study of religious education in Year 13 is minimal.
33. There is a satisfactory range of enrichment activities. These include involvement in sixth form activities through the sixth form committee and helping with younger students as a prefect, in sports clubs or in paired reading. Activities to widen students' horizons include a United Nations conference, workshops exploring marriage and world challenge. There is a satisfactory range of trips to support learning in subjects. Geography is well supported by fieldwork and a residential course. Business students have Young Enterprise but there are too few links with local businesses. There is no timetabled programme of recreational sport, though this is planned for next September. However, students play in regular school fixtures and reach high standards.
34. Most sixth form teachers are well qualified in their subjects. The sixth form common room is adequate and students have computers available to use in their studies. Some of these have been out of use but the college is increasing the number that are available.

Care, guidance and support

There are satisfactory arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety. The college provides students with good support, advice and guidance and involves them soundly in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good induction procedures ensure a smooth transfer from primary school.
- Most students have good, trusting relationships with their teachers.
- Students are involved well in setting their own targets.

- Students have access to well-informed advice and guidance when they need it.

Commentary

35. The college provides a safe working environment. Child protection procedures are effective and the college works well with other agencies, such as social services, when necessary. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) ensures that students with special educational needs and children in public care receive the support that they need.
36. Many teachers and support staff know students well. There is often a good rapport and mutual respect between students and staff. Induction arrangements in Year 7 are very good. Each student is interviewed in their primary school and information from the primary schools is used well to organise form groups and provide for particular needs. As a result, Year 7 students settle well. Most parents believe that staff encourage students to become mature and independent and that the college has a positive ethos. Form tutors care about their students, and work well with heads of year to respond if a student is having problems. Students' personal development is monitored informally, assisted by satisfactory systems for subject teachers to inform tutors of successes and problems. Students feel that there is an adult that they can go to with a problem. The college provides useful additional support, including counselling, links with sixth formers, Connexions, and a new, confidential Bodyzone service.
37. Students are involved well at the start of each year in setting their own targets. Form tutors and parents are informed of successes or problems through the students' planners. Students' academic progress is monitored carefully and achievements are recognised. Students who underachieve receive additional support. Modified programmes are organised where appropriate, including fast track programmes, the Star Zone or work-related learning. These help students to build self confidence and find an area in which to achieve. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and guided.
38. Students are well prepared for later stages of education or work. There is good guidance in choosing GCSE options in Year 9 and the 'Going for It' careers fair provides a useful opportunity to meet local businesses and widen horizons. The careers programme informs students how to seek information and prepares them well for well-organised work experience in Year 11. The quality of careers advice and guidance has improved considerably since the last inspection.
39. The college makes considerable efforts to involve students and develop their sense of ownership of the college. It is an 'eco-school' and the student committee is active in improving the college environment, litter campaigns and building a wildlife garden. There is an active school council, whose deliberations on topics such as the new school uniform or changes to the school day are valued and acted on by the senior management team. Members of the school council also take part in interviews for senior staff. The council could be still more effective if students took more responsibility for its operation by, for example, acting as chairman and secretary and if members' links with their constituents were improved. Prefects in Year 11 and the sixth form help to supervise younger students.

Sixth form

40. Students receive good support and guidance in the sixth form. Induction into the sixth form is well organised. Students meet their tutors regularly, and find tutors and senior staff to be approachable if they need additional help. There is, however, a small minority of tutors who are less conscientious in their duties. Students have individual interviews to review progress and any problems are followed up by the management team. Targets are set for performance in Year 12 and Year 13. These arrangements are effective and are appreciated by students; all are clear about their target grades and how well they are performing in relation to them.
41. The new sixth form director of studies is taking appropriate steps to improve the work ethos. These include a sixth form contract to reinforce the expectations of students and staff, although, as it has been only recently introduced, it is too early to evaluate its impact. There is

also a greater emphasis on students' attendance at assemblies and personal, social and health education lessons. Students believe that they are treated fairly and with respect. They are encouraged to study independently. There is an elected sixth form committee which gives students the opportunity to run their own affairs. Typically this involves managing the common room and organising social and charity events. Sixth form students take on responsibilities with younger students and the head boy and head girl attend governors' meetings. Most students enjoy life in the sixth form and would recommend it to others.

42. Students would appreciate more guidance on career opportunities. Careers advice and information is satisfactory, but students do not get enough systematic, individual guidance before they complete their university application forms to ensure that they consider all the options open to them and make the right choices.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are good links with parents and very good partnerships with the local community and other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The college is rooted in the wider Bicester community and encourages students to think beyond school boundaries.
- As a technology college, it provides ICT support for other schools and the community.
- Very good links with other local schools have considerable benefit to students' learning.
- Information provided to parents is comprehensive and gives them a good understanding of what is being taught and how their children are achieving.
- Parents are generally supportive but have concerns about students' behaviour.

Commentary

43. The college has good links with parents and keeps them well informed. Although some parents do not feel well informed about their child's progress, the flow of information is in fact better than in many schools. There is a very good range of brochures about the curriculum, homework and college policies. The prospectus is comprehensive, and the annual governors' report provides a very full account of activities and successes during the year. Further information is provided in a half-termly newsletter and on the college's web-site. Parents are involved along with their children in setting targets at the start of the year. Written reports on students' progress are informative and contain comments personal to the child. Some parents find consultation meetings with teachers to be too rushed, but a Year 9 evening during the inspection appeared efficient, with parents not having to wait too long. In addition to routine information in students' planners, the college is quick to contact parents if their child is having problems. The learning support department works closely with parents of students with special educational needs in monitoring progress and providing guidance. The college welcomes parents' views and parents are invited to join the parent council, which acts as a forum and sometimes consults parents through questionnaires.
44. The college has very good links with the other schools in Bicester. Local primary schools are very appreciative of its support, including the technical support it provides as a technology college. The physical education department helps primary schools with sporting events, involving students who are working towards their junior sports leaders' award. Year 9 students often use their community projects to help in primary schools, whilst students from the Star Zone regularly help in a local special school, which results in improved attitudes and self-esteem. The college leads a partnership of four secondary schools which provides work-related learning in several locations, including a school farm.
45. The college places great emphasis on its links with the wider Bicester community. The business community links manager has forged many links with local businesses, particularly

through the chamber of commerce. As a result, staff from local firms visit the college to talk about their work and many firms provide work experience for Year 11 students. The Year 9 careers fair is successful because of the large number of local businesses that take part.

46. As part of its technology college role, the college makes extensive provision for the community. It has met all the targets for community provision that it set itself in its original bid. Services include adult education, family learning programmes and community use of its facilities. The college provides computer courses for local people and access to the internet. It also helps to fund an outreach worker who promotes learning in the community.

Sixth form

47. The sixth form is active in supporting charities and all students are expected to carry out a community project during Year 12. Several of the enrichment activities make effective use of the community, including Young Enterprise and the workshops exploring marriage. A small number of staff from another secondary school in Bicester teach in the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher provides good leadership in establishing clear values and setting the college's direction. The leadership of other key staff is also good. Management is satisfactory but in some respects lacks rigour. Governance is good. The college does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all students.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher sets a clear direction and guides the college well in its long-term development.
- Governors provide strong support and good expertise.
- Many teachers and support staff are very dedicated to the students and work well as a team.
- There are good arrangements for the induction of new staff.
- The oversight of departments is not rigorous enough to ensure consistency in the quality of departmental work.
- The timetable has too many classes shared between teachers and some classes have a poor spread of lessons.

Commentary

48. The headteacher has a clear vision of a school based on strong moral values which is rooted in its community and in which all students have opportunities to achieve. This vision is successfully communicated and is shared by governors, teachers, support staff and many students and parents. As a result, many staff work hard to provide students with appropriate care and opportunities and the college has made steady progress in meeting its challenges and raising standards. The headteacher receives good support from the senior management team, most of who are very recently appointed. Their expertise and commitment provide good capacity for further improvement.
49. The provision of opportunities for all students to achieve is a major college priority and has guided developments in recent years. As a result, the curriculum has been developed to extend high-attaining students and to provide a very good work-related programme. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and those who have behavioural difficulties are provided for well in the Star Zone. In planning its new buildings the college has ensured that students with physical disabilities have access to almost the whole site. There is a satisfactory race equality policy and the performance of students from ethnic minority groups is monitored and reported. The arrangements for supporting students with English as an additional language are adequate but are at a very early stage of development.

50. The headteacher and senior management team have a good knowledge of the challenges facing the college and its strengths and weaknesses. The priorities in the college development plan are very appropriate. Departmental plans reflect the whole college priorities but vary in their quality. The college regularly reviews aspects of its performance, through observation of teaching and consultations with students, staff and parents. The value of the reviews is weakened because they are not systematically summarised in reports with conclusions and recommendations. Heads of department monitor the work of their departments and write a report each year for the governors. Examination results are analysed carefully, including the performance of groups of students and value-added from one stage to the next. However, reports to staff and governors do not allow them easily to identify strengths and weaknesses and plan corrective action.
51. There are satisfactory arrangements for managing the performance of departments and individual staff. Each department is linked with one member of the senior management team and these arrangements provide the headteacher with information on departmental work and departments with regular support. The links are not used systematically enough, however, to ensure consistency in the quality of departmental planning, evaluation and assessment.
52. The leadership and management of many departments are good, though they are unsatisfactory in mathematics because of the current staffing difficulties and in art. Special educational needs provision is well managed by the SENCO and the behaviour support co-ordinator: teaching assistants are very well supported and deployed and the quality of provision reviewed, though this needs to be done more systematically. The work-related learning programme is very well managed: the programme has expanded rapidly and the department manager is aware that procedures for the tracking of students' achievements need to be refined.
53. The college generally runs smoothly and administrative staff are efficient, but there is a lack of rigour in some of the administration. Minor examples include inaccurate data published in the annual report, but more importantly there are weaknesses in the construction of the college timetable. In Years 7 to 9, too many classes are shared between more than one teacher and some classes have a poor balance of their lessons over the two-week cycle. This makes teaching more difficult and has a negative effect on the continuity of students' learning.
54. Governors carry out their duties well and provide good support for the college's development. They are fully committed to the college's aims and contribute to policies and plans, though they are not involved in setting the major priorities in the development plan. Governors provide a good range of expertise from their own professional backgrounds and strong links with the local community. They know the college well from reports from the headteacher and subject leaders and from regular, well-organised visits. They have a good knowledge of the college's strengths and weaknesses and provide challenge as well as strong support. However, their ability to question strengths and weaknesses in the performance of different areas is limited by the format in which examination results are presented to them. Governors are fully aware of their statutory duties and all statutory requirements are met except for the daily act of collective worship. This is prevented by a lack of suitable large spaces and governors have made appropriate efforts through other arrangements to ensure that students' spiritual development is developed satisfactorily.
55. The college has had serious difficulties in recruiting permanent, qualified teachers, especially in mathematics. This is due in large part to the high cost of housing. The headteacher has been creative in using a wide range of means to find suitable staff and to retain staff through providing them with opportunities for professional development. These include recruiting staff from overseas and training graduates within the college. The college provides good induction for new staff and staff development is well organised to meet the needs of the college and individual staff. Inexperienced and unqualified teachers are provided with good support. The college is also an effective provider of initial teacher training. Nevertheless, staffing difficulties

are a significant barrier to raising achievement, particularly in mathematics and, to a lesser extent, in science. The situation in mathematics has arisen very recently due to a number of staff leaving for their own justifiable reasons. The headteacher has a sound plan to improve and stabilise staffing and management. There has also been significant recent turnover in science, but support from senior staff and the local education authority has been reasonably effective in maintaining standards.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,768,718	Balance from previous year	-104,942
Total expenditure	3,808,380	Balance carried forward to the next	-144,604
Expenditure per pupil	3,232		

56. Financial management is satisfactory. The administration of finances is efficient and governors and senior managers are provided with appropriate reports in order to plan and monitor expenditure. There are sound links between development planning and budget planning. The college has a significant deficit, caused partly by additional costs arising from its recent extensive building programme and partly, in common with other schools, by lower than expected funding in 2003. The governors' finance and property committee has taken a strong lead in managing the repayment of the deficit and a repayment plan has been agreed with the local education authority. As a result, there is now a tight control on spending, but the detailed planning of staffing, curriculum and other expenditure to meet the necessary cuts is not yet complete. The headteacher and business links manager are creative in finding additional sources of income from the community and national projects.

Sixth form

57. The sixth form is well led. The strategy for developing the sixth form is integral to that for the whole college, and includes broadening the curriculum to provide opportunities for a wide range of students. The newly-appointed director of studies has a clear sense of direction and has initiated a drive for improvement. There are appropriate systems to review performance and priorities for improvement. Relationships are good and there is mutual respect between tutors and students. Leadership is firm and fair, with clear lines of responsibility.
58. The sixth form runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and management is satisfactory. Procedures and policies are clear. Most tutors and students adhere to them but there is not as yet total consistency in their application. For example, a minority of students are not punctual to school or lessons and this reduces their achievement. There is an appropriate balance between the income and expenditure of the main school and the sixth form. However, following the recent financial deficit, the amount of teaching time has been reduced in subjects where the number of students is very small. This has been done carefully, using past experience and in consultation with governors, but the outcomes will need to be monitored carefully.

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 **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge that enables them to challenge students and explain techniques well.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to practise extended writing.
- Good support by teaching assistants and other adults helps students with behavioural or learning difficulties to make as much progress as other students.
- Marking and assessment are inconsistent and, as a result, some students do not clearly understand how they can improve.

Commentary

59. Year 9 results in 2003 were average in terms of the number of students who gained the expected level, but just below average overall. The results were an improvement on those of 2002 and students made satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment on entry. GCSE results were average in English and English literature and represent satisfactory progress for those students. Results have risen since the previous inspection in line with the national trend.
60. Current standards in Year 9 are below average. However, students' achievement is satisfactory because their attainment on entry was below average. By the end of Year 9, students can analyse texts in a straightforward way. They use technical terms appropriately, and higher-attaining students are largely accurate in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Middle and lower-attaining students make a lot of mistakes in their writing. Extended writing is underdeveloped for all students. Standards are also below average in Year 11. This is lower than recent GCSE results because students' prior attainment was lower, and represents satisfactory achievement. Students are introduced to an appropriate range of literature and can explain aspects of characterisation and plot. The highest-attaining students write essays that are well structured and of appropriate length, though their style is not sophisticated. The work of a high-attaining student showed good understanding of the themes in 'The Crucible' and an average attainer wrote a straightforward account of the play 'Our Day Out', although it was poorly punctuated. Students with special educational needs write short, simple sentences, usually in response to guided questions. The majority of students express their ideas clearly in discussion, although they use a restricted vocabulary and colloquial expressions.
61. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers know their subject well, give clear explanations and ask searching questions. Lessons are well structured, with a starter activity, a middle section which is often group work and a useful summing up. As a result, lessons generally have a good pace and lead to at least satisfactory learning. Written work, however, is inconsistently marked. Teachers do not regularly indicate the National Curriculum level or GCSE grade which students are attaining, and as a result they do not all know how well they are doing or specifically what to do in order to improve. Teaching assistants and other adults make a good contribution in lower-attaining groups, where there are a large number of students with learning difficulties or behavioural problems. Assistants often work with individuals or very small groups and help them to learn effectively.

62. The department is satisfactorily led and managed. The head and deputy head of department are newly in post this term. They are concerned to develop the teaching team and to build on recent work to improve literacy skills and to raise boys' attainment. The monitoring of teaching and learning are underdeveloped. The department has improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

63. Literacy skills are below average across the college. Some departments promote literacy well. In religious education and history, for example, teachers stress correct spellings and give students good opportunities to write extended pieces for different purposes, such as newspaper articles. In other subjects, teachers introduce key words, but do not always follow this up sufficiently by reinforcing their meanings. This is the case in science lessons, where students often forget the terms by the next lesson. In geography, teachers use technical language well, but do not provide many opportunities for extended writing. There are good arrangements to improve the literacy skills of the lowest-attaining students. In Year 7, fast track sessions provide a lot of support from teachers, teaching assistants and the college librarian and are effective in raising reading and writing levels. Materials from the National Literacy Strategy are used to support individual students in Year 7 and Year 9. The college has also been involved in an Oxford University project led by a governor to identify and support students who are likely to underachieve because of their literacy skills.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- After a period of instability the department is now fully staffed with specialist teachers.
- Achievement is good in the GCSE German course.
- Almost all students have the opportunity to learn two foreign languages.
- Teaching in French does not give sufficient emphasis to the key skill of speaking.
- Many students have negative attitudes to language learning.

Commentary

64. GCSE results in French have declined over the last three years and were well below average in 2003. Students did less well than in their other subjects. Achievement was unsatisfactory, especially for higher-attaining students. A minority of students take GCSE German. Results have improved over the last three years and were average in 2003. Students did as well as in their other subjects and their achievement was satisfactory.
65. For current students, standards in Year 9 are below average in both languages. Students have a sound knowledge of the topics they cover but their knowledge of grammar is insecure. Higher-attaining students can write about past events and use longer sentences. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs write at a level that matches well with their attainment in other subjects. Where teaching is largely in the foreign language and students are actively engaged, they remember new words well and improve their pronunciation. Where teaching is weaker, students become passive and are reluctant to speak in the foreign language. Overall, achievement in both languages is satisfactory.
66. By the end of Year 11 standards are below average overall in both languages. Speaking and listening in German are satisfactory because teaching emphasises these skills, but students' writing contains grammatical errors. In French, the writing of some higher-attaining students includes the features required for higher grades, but the work of most students is too simple. Speaking is a weakness in French. This is partly because speaking is not emphasised sufficiently in the teaching of all year groups but is also the result of staffing instability in recent

years. As a result, some students lack the confidence to participate in speaking. The impact of this is seen in the recent GCSE results where speaking was the weakest skill. Achievement at this age is satisfactory. It is good in German, where teachers have higher expectations.

67. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Half of the lessons seen were good, but there were also a small number of unsatisfactory lessons. In the best lessons, teaching challenges students in the foreign language and, as a result, they become accustomed to the pace and learn to pick out key information. In these lessons, teachers engage all students in speaking activities that enable them to consolidate what they have learned. In the better lessons, teachers adapt their teaching to match the attainment levels of individual students. For students with special educational needs this sustains their motivation by giving them the chance to succeed, whilst higher-attaining students enjoy being challenged. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to give students good guidance in preparing for examinations. They regularly assess students' work and inform them of their National Curriculum levels but do not give them targets for improvement. Where lessons are less successful, teachers do not plan enough active participation and, as a result, students lose interest and are sometimes difficult to manage. In these lessons, higher-attaining students become passive learners, but in lower-attaining groups learning is minimal. Where teaching is unsatisfactory it is because expectations are too low. In writing, there are too many simple exercises with no additional challenge to higher-attaining students. Work is marked and praised for effort but does not challenge students to raise their standards. ICT is used well throughout the department, though some groups do not have enough access to the specialist computer rooms.
68. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college values foreign languages by giving all students the opportunity to study two languages. Now that there is stability of staffing in the department, the subject leader should focus on developing teaching and learning to match the good practice of the best teaching.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are severe staffing difficulties in the department this year.
- Standards have declined in relation to the 2003 examination results.
- Overall, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory and, as a result, students underachieve.
- There is an element of excellent teaching where students are doing better than expected.
- Assessment is used well in Years 10 and 11, enabling teachers to focus well on the needs of the students.

Commentary

69. Year 9 results in 2003 were average. Results have risen in line with the national trend and the 2003 results were the best yet achieved. GCSE results were below average in 2002 and 2003 and students did less well in mathematics than in their other subjects. There was little difference between the performance of boys and girls.
70. For current students, standards are below average in Years 9 and 11. This is slightly lower than the 2003 examination results because of severe recruitment difficulties this year. Many classes are taught by unqualified, temporary or non-specialist teachers. The head of department post is temporarily covered by two teachers, following the promotion of the previous post-holder. Achievement is unsatisfactory at both stages as a result of teaching which is, overall, unsatisfactory.
71. In Year 9, high-attaining students underachieve because teachers do not cope successfully with the wide range of ability within the class. In Year 11, however, high-attaining students

achieve well in the higher GCSE course, having acquired a thorough understanding of complex graph work. Average students in all years achieve satisfactorily when the teaching is satisfactory, for example in extending their accuracy in number work through good use of calculators. They cope well with simple percentages, but have difficulty with the comprehension of problems. In some lessons they underachieve because unsuitable teaching methods are used. Students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily when supported by teaching assistants. Low-attaining GCSE students follow a modular course which matches their needs well, though their numeracy skills remain low by Year 11.

72. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall because approximately one lesson in four is unsatisfactory. In other lessons, teaching is largely satisfactory and occasionally good. The unsatisfactory lessons were taught by temporary or non-specialist teachers. In these, teaching methods are sometimes inappropriate and there is a lack of challenge in the level of work. This results in unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour, which are addressed, but take up much valuable teaching time. In the good lessons, teaching assistants are used well to support students with special educational needs. Learning proceeds at a good pace, maintaining students' interest and concentration. The teaching arrangements for low-attaining students are effective because teachers are able to focus their work well on the needs of the students. There is a small element of excellent teaching in which earlier work is revised very well, effortlessly preparing students for future work. New learning is made very clear, with good use of humour and a very good variety of activities. The marking of students' work varies considerably. The best includes helpful comments and guidance on independent revision. However, some marking is unsatisfactory and fails to sustain regular homework or satisfactory standards of written work.
73. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 the teaching arrangements produce a wider range of attainment in classes than in Years 10 and 11, and some classes have more than one teacher. These add to the difficulties faced by inexperienced teachers, and are too great a problem for the college's management to support effectively. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory because standards have dipped this year.

Mathematics across the curriculum

74. Mathematical skills are taught satisfactorily across the main school, though standards are below average overall. In design and technology, students have good estimating skills and their spatial awareness develops well through three-dimensional work on computers. The use of mathematics in science is underdeveloped in Years 7 to 9 but, in Years 10 and 11, numbers are used well in calculations, and high-attaining students interpret graphical information well. In geography, students make good progress in Year 7 in doing surveys and using four-figure coordinates and use mathematical skills well in their GCSE coursework.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are slowly improving.
- Many students achieve well because teachers engage their interest with varied activities.
- Staffing difficulties result in unsatisfactory achievement for a minority of students.
- Higher-attaining students in mixed ability groups are insufficiently stretched.
- Students respond well when teaching has clear expectations of good behaviour and work-rate.
- Students' performance in examinations is inhibited by poor recall of previous work.

Commentary

75. Examination results improved in 2003. They were average at the end of Year 9, but remained well below average at the end of Year 11. Compared with similar schools, students usually do less well than expected and they do less well in science than in their other subjects.
76. Standards in lessons are below average. For students currently in Year 9, this is lower than the recent test results because these students' attainment was lower on entry to the school. On the other hand, standards in Year 11 are higher than recent GCSE results because a few low-attaining students have recently transferred from science to the work-related programme. Furthermore, many do better in lessons than in examinations because their long-term recall is inhibited by limited understanding of technical terms. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall, but varies from good to unsatisfactory. Students in high-attaining groups usually do well, for example in Year 11 quickly using graphical data to determine the effects of hormone concentration on plant growth. The achievement of most other students is satisfactory but, for a minority, it is unsatisfactory. This most often occurs in mixed ability or lower groups as a result of inadequate planning for the needs of higher-attaining students, or of teachers not explaining clearly what students are expected to do.
77. Teaching and learning are just satisfactory. Roughly one lesson in five was good, but a similar number were unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, students respond positively because teachers insist from the outset that they are attentive, and activities are interesting and varied. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, the teacher used discussion in pairs to capture students' interest, before using their own ideas about the improvement of crop yields in third world countries. However, teachers do not always use extension work effectively and higher-attaining students in mixed ability groups do not then work to their full capacity. In unsatisfactory lessons, students' attitudes and behaviour quickly deteriorate because their interest is not engaged, for example by considering applications of their learning. Work in these lessons is often undemanding as a result of too much copying with little understanding. The quality of marking is inconsistent. About half of the teachers mark thoroughly, writing helpful comments on students' work, but others make only superficial comments that do not show students how to improve.
78. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department efficiently manages a team that includes many inexperienced or temporary teachers. While newly-qualified teachers and those in training do well, temporary teachers have difficulty in motivating some groups and judging an appropriate pace, and need more help to improve their teaching. The department is making very effective use of a local education authority consultant, particularly in identifying areas of weakness to help students improve their performance and in tracking their progress to allow underachievement to be quickly recognised and addressed.
79. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards are similar now, but are beginning to improve. Teaching remains broadly similar with some of it good, but also some unsatisfactory. Resources have improved, particularly ICT equipment, as a result of the school's technology college status.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving as a result of good teaching.
- A lack of curricular time slows progress in Years 8 and 9 and in the examination course.
- Students' attitudes are positive and they enjoy ICT.
- ICT provision across the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is not sufficiently well co-ordinated.

Commentary

80. GNVQ results in 2003 were average and students achieved their expected grades. A small number of students took GCSE early when they were in Year 9 and achieved results that were well above average. Boys outperform girls in the examinations. Results have steadily improved over recent years.
81. Standards by the end of Year 9 are below average. Students have a basic grasp of many pieces of software and good skills in internet research. However, their understanding of the impact of computers in society is well below average. Students enter the college with below average computer skills and their achievement is satisfactory. They are well taught but their progress is hampered because in Years 8 and 9 they only have one lesson per fortnight and too much time is spent revising at the start of each lesson. Boys achieve better than girls because they are more confident, though the college is improving girls' confidence through a well-attended girls' computer club. Students with special educational needs achieve well because they receive good individual help from teachers.
82. Standards in Years 10 and 11 for students who do not take an examination course are below average and their achievement is satisfactory. Their computing skills are developed through their work in some subjects, though for some students this is patchy. An ICT course for these students is planned but has not yet been implemented.
83. In the examination course, current standards in Year 11 are average. As students start the course with below average standards this represents good achievement. Standards in Year 10 are above average because these students' prior attainment was higher. Students use advanced formulae in spreadsheets competently, but sometimes make errors in cell referencing. They design and write simple relational databases. Standards of designing web pages are average: students have a good understanding of HTML code, but many cannot create hyperlinks. Projects are often planned in detail but the plans are not always fulfilled because insufficient time is allocated for the course and work is often rushed towards the end of a project.
84. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations and make work challenging and, as a result, students work hard. Lessons are conducted at a lively pace and classes are well managed; students behave well and are thoroughly engrossed in the work. ICT is taught to mixed ability classes and teachers do not always plan enough extension work for higher-attaining students. While teachers give good oral feedback to students, there are insufficient written comments for them to refer to in future work.
85. Leadership and management were an issue in the last report but are now good, because plans to expand the ICT provision have been successfully implemented. Examination results are carefully analysed and used to raise standards. Good use is made of students' previous test results in planning work, but there are not enough interim tests to track their progress. Improvement since the last report has been very good. Standards have risen, the college now has sufficient computers and delivers the ICT National Curriculum in full.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

86. Students in Years 7 to 9 use computers in many subjects, and this reinforces and extends their ICT skills. In design and technology, they learn how computers are used to control machinery and experience computer-aided design and manufacture. In science, they use probes to measure and record data. Music lessons offer good opportunities to use specialist music software to compose and perform. In many subjects, students word process their work and undertake research on the internet. These opportunities are less frequent in Years 10 and 11. The college's plans to develop computer skills across the curriculum are not yet fully implemented and some students do not receive all these experiences. There are staff training difficulties too which mean that some computer equipment is not fully used in science and art.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and management have led to improvements in teaching and the curriculum.
- Students on the GCSE fast track course achieve very well.
- The proportion of students gaining higher GCSE grades is below average, especially for boys.
- Opportunities for fieldwork are limited to Year 10.
- Teachers are subject specialists and are highly committed.

Commentary

87. GCSE results were average in 2002 but below average in 2003. Students did as well as in their other subjects, but girls did better than boys. Some students followed a fast track course and took GCSE in Year 10. All of them achieved higher A* to C grades.
88. For current students, standards in Year 9 are average. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the college. Students with special educational needs achieve well, especially when provided with extra classroom support. Students of all abilities increase their knowledge and understanding of physical and human geography. They acquire satisfactory skills in map work and can undertake geographical enquiries. Written work is generally satisfactory and their numeracy skills are well developed. Higher-attaining students achieve well and those who start the fast track GCSE course in Year 9 achieve very well.
89. Standards in Year 11 are above average. Students achieve well, including those who have special educational needs or are gifted and talented. Students gain a good understanding of geographical concepts. In urban geography, for example, Year 11 students analyse theoretical models of city structures and identify reasons for different types of land use. Their coursework is good because they plan and structure it effectively and successfully apply the geographical techniques they have learned. Some students use ICT well to analyse and present data.
90. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge; they are enthusiastic and committed and use a range of imaginative methods that engage students' interest. Where teaching is very good, high expectations, pace and challenge enable students to make very good progress. Most students have good attitudes and behave well. However, in one lesson a significant proportion of students underachieved because of their unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour. The department has recently improved its assessment procedures, which are now good. Students' progress is enhanced because they understand what they have to do to reach their target grades.
91. The department is well led. Teachers are very well qualified and good accommodation and resources support learning well. There are good displays of students' work. Fieldwork is only available for students in Year 10, which limits the opportunities for investigative work. Departmental work is monitored well through analysing performance data and observing lessons. Since the last inspection the curriculum has been improved and new approaches to teaching and learning are being developed. Improvement has been satisfactory and the department has good capacity for further improvement.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good, but in a few lessons there is not enough opportunity for students to discuss and explore issues in depth.
- The curriculum is very well matched to students' interests and styles of learning.
- Marking is thorough and assessment data is used well to track students' progress.
- The department is very well led and managed, but the shared teaching of some Year 7 classes disrupts continuity in learning.

Commentary

92. GGSE results improved significantly in 2003, rising to above average in comparison with the below average results of the three previous years. While still below average, the Year 9 National Curriculum assessment results also improved, with more students gaining the higher levels. This trend of improvement is also seen in current standards, which are average in Year 9 and above average in Year 11. All students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.
93. Students have good historical knowledge, understanding and skills. In lessons they have a good understanding of events and changing attitudes, which they link and discuss knowledgeably. Year 9 students, for example, held a lively discussion of the attitudes towards black people in America in the 1920s, comparing them with present day views. They make confident and critical use of historical sources to find evidence, and have a very good grasp of the sequence of events. Written work is of good quality, with extended writing developing well from Year 7 onwards. The work of higher-attaining students is particularly impressive. Their essays are well structured, and become increasingly analytical. Higher attainers' GCSE coursework is well researched, with strengths in evaluating historical sources, identifying causes of events and explaining their findings. The work of other students, while sound, is sometimes weakened by being less detailed and analytical, and sometimes by careless mistakes in language. Overall however, students' literacy skills, along with their skills in numeracy and ICT, are good.
94. Students relish the teachers' challenge and high expectations. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and their clear, authoritative presentations enable students to make rapid progress in understanding complex issues. Clear explanations and effective one-to-one guidance ensure that all students learn well. Probing questioning extends their thinking, and through constant challenge they develop historical skills of a high order. In Year 10, for example, students were required to be very accurate in testing the hypothesis that Germany was in crisis following World War I and, as a result, students of all abilities worked at a demanding level in applying their historical knowledge and skills. Classroom relationships are very good and learning is often fun. Individual thinking and study skills are strongly encouraged. It is only in a few lessons that there is not enough opportunity for students to explore issues in depth. Work is marked regularly and provides very good guidance for improvement. Assessment data is used very well to track students' progress.
95. The clear trend of improvement and students' enthusiasm for history are the result of very good leadership and management. The head of department has a very clear vision and gives a strong lead. Practice is kept under constant review. All history teachers share a strong commitment to the achievement of excellence. Innovative approaches to curricular planning enhance students' enjoyment of history. However timetable arrangements in Year 7 result in some classes being taught by two teachers, and in learning being disrupted by gaps of as much as a fortnight between lessons with the same teacher. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection in improving standards and the quality of teaching and learning.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, and often very good, and enables students to achieve well.
- Religious education makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.
- Leadership and management are good and are leading to improvements.
- Assessment is good but more detailed marking and short-term targets would help to raise achievement even further.
- The breadth of short courses available in Years 10 and 11 is very good.

Commentary

96. All students in Years 10 and 11 take either a full or short course GCSE. Higher-attaining students are given the opportunity to take the full GCSE at the end of Year 10 and then continue with the short course in Year 11. GCSE results in the full course were average in the last two years and, in 2003, students did better than in their other subjects. Students taking GCSE in Year 10 achieved results that were well above average. GCSE short course results were above average in 2002 and 2003.
97. Standards in the current Year 9 are average. Students join the college in Year 7 with below average knowledge of religions and they achieve well, including those with special educational needs or from minority ethnic groups. By Year 9, students know and understand the main beliefs and traditions of Christianity and other world faiths. They understand some of the ways in which religious belief affects people's lives. Most have a sound grasp of religious language and understand how symbols and rituals are used in worship. They develop a degree of empathy and reflection. Some students have weaknesses in literacy, particularly spelling, capital letters and sentence construction, but the department is effective in improving these skills.
98. Standards in Year 11 are above average and 26 students have already gained good grades in the full GCSE course. Students achieve well. Most develop satisfactory and often good independent enquiry and thinking skills. In a lesson exploring individual Jews' response to the Holocaust, for example, students made very good progress in understanding the concepts of freewill, the existence of God and suffering as a result of skilful teaching and positive attitudes.
99. Teaching is good overall and a significant proportion is very good. The most effective teaching is very carefully planned, and uses motivating and engaging tasks. Focused questioning challenges students and requires them to think about issues. Teaching is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and interesting. Classroom management is very good and teachers create an environment in which students want to work. Lessons are consistently well structured in three parts, which results in good concentration and use of time. Students are prepared to discuss and share their opinions. In Year 9, students discussed the concept of 'home', considering the importance of Jerusalem to Christians, Muslims and Jews. In Year 7, a very good starter exercise about special people moved from students' own experiences to the significance of Abraham in Judaism. Homework and computers are used effectively to support learning.
100. Leadership and management are good. There is a very clear vision and appropriate priorities have been identified to develop the subject even further. Progress since the last inspection is very good. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively. Attainment levels are used to inform students of their progress. Students' attainment is assessed effectively at the end of each unit, though greater use of individual targets and more extensive comments in marking would help to raise standards further. The development of a computer database to record assessments would assist the monitoring of teaching and learning.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan lessons well with clear objectives.
- Teaching assistants and technical support staff are used very effectively.
- There are not enough examples of high quality work on display.
- Metals are insufficiently used as constructional materials.

Commentary

101. GCSE results were average in 2002 and 2003. Results in resistant materials and product design were below average, while those in textiles and food technology were above average.
102. Current standards are broadly average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. However, standards are higher in textiles and food technology than in resistant materials and product design. Students' achievement is good in both stages from their relatively low starting points in Year 7. This is a result of well-organised teaching, with lessons characterised by good planning and clear objectives that are linked well to the requirements of the National Curriculum or GCSE. However, there is insufficient practical work using metal in all year groups. This affects the breadth of the curriculum. The learning environment needs improvement and development to include more permanent display of high quality examples to extend and raise expectations, especially in resistant materials and product design.
103. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In most lessons, teachers organise a wide range of well-planned activities that fully engage all students, including those with special educational needs. Oral work in classes is good, with students able to argue, read aloud and make suggestions in a supportive atmosphere. In the better lessons, good pace and a high level of challenge are common features. In a minority of weaker lessons, too little is expected of what students can achieve and occasionally lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. The best teaching takes place in textiles and food technology. Homework needs development, as presently it is undemanding and not used sufficiently to extend the skills of the high attainers. Students respond well to the very effective support from teaching assistants and technical support staff in all areas of the department. Assessment is thorough and well organised and the feedback given to students is informative, well received and acted upon.
104. Leadership and management are good. The last two years have seen staffing difficulties, many of which have been overcome by creative deployment of staff and by good co-operation of the staff team. The department is well organised, with sound assessment, strong teamwork, good lesson planning and well established in-service training. These systems are regularly monitored and are leading to improvement in standards.
105. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have improved and the food technology rooms that were in need of repair are now of a good standard. Technical support is very good but remains insufficient for the number of workshops and studios spaces. Access to ICT and facilities for computer-aided manufacture need to be reviewed: greater access and use would extend students' skills and promote better progress.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

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

106. GCSE results in **drama** were average in 2002 and below average in 2003. One lesson was observed which was good because the activities were planned well and the teacher's questions developed students' thinking. Students gained a clear understanding of the features of a dramatic ghost story by watching a film and analysing why it was successful. Students like drama and appreciate the opportunities to take part in clubs and performances. The college is currently preparing a production of 'Oliver', and students clearly enjoy rehearsals and gain a lot from the experience.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy art and achieve well because they are well managed and there is much good teaching.
- There is not enough planning for individual students with particular needs.
- Students develop two-dimensional skills well, especially painting and drawing.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory: curricular planning is not co-ordinated sufficiently and performance data is not used to set expectations or monitor progress.
- Insufficient use is made of the very good new ICT resources.

Commentary

107. GCSE results were average in 2001 and 2002. Results declined in 2003: they remained broadly average for the proportion gaining A*-C, but students did less well than in their other subjects and there were very few top grades.
108. For current students, standards at the end of Year 9 are average. Achievement is good overall, though it is weaker in three-dimensional work because there is a strong focus on painting and drawing. In some classes, learning of two and three-dimensional skills is well balanced, but there is too much variation between the curricular experiences of students in different classes. In addition, some classes have more than one teacher, which reduces the continuity in students' learning. Students do not have enough opportunities to use computers in their art work.
109. Standards in Year 11 are above average. Achievement is good overall, though there is too much variation between different groups of students. Year 10 students reach above average standards in the imaginative work they do in their sketchbooks. Average and lower-attaining students in Year 11 often achieve well in two-dimensional work but high-attaining students need more encouragement to produce work of A* standard. This is partly because the department does not use assessment data sufficiently to set students expectations of what they can achieve. Students' examination work includes no creative use of ICT.
110. Teaching and learning are good overall; some lessons are very good and others satisfactory. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Class management is strong and, as a result, learning is purposeful and students enjoy the subject. The best lessons are well structured, with good introductions, clear targets and effective one-to-one help. However, there are few review sessions at the end of lessons, which would help students use subject vocabulary and learn to evaluate their own work. The less effective lessons include only a cursory introduction and students get on by themselves, with occasional help. Students work well, but these lessons fail to deepen their understanding about the historical or cultural context of their work. Lessons do not include enough planning for individual students who are talented, have special educational needs or speak English as an additional language.
111. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Several issues in the last inspection have not been improved sufficiently. Curricular planning is not co-ordinated across the department and

there is a lack of depth in three-dimensional work. The department has very good ICT resources, but these are not used effectively as staff have not been trained in their use. Assessment data is not used sufficiently to track students' progress in relation to their targets. Monitoring and evaluation are unsatisfactory and there is not enough planning to address issues such as why the subject is less popular with boys or why there are few top grades at GCSE.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Teachers use their musical skills well to support students' learning.
- Relationships are good and students respond well in lessons.

Commentary

112. GCSE results were above average in 2002 and slightly above average in 2003. However, there were few A* or A grades.
113. For current students, standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. Students enter college with variable musical experiences and achieve well. By Year 9, many play simple melodies fluently on keyboards, and are accurate in their use of pitch and rhythm. They play well together in short ensemble performances. Many students confidently use music technology to devise and refine their ideas for compositions. Occasionally, however, when answering questions they do not use musical terms accurately. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students. More musically able students make very good progress and many show good vocal and instrumental performing skills.
114. There are two GCSE courses. Music is a timetabled GCSE option for Year 10 students which will follow through to Year 11 next year. There is also a fast track course taught outside school hours, which is available to interested students in Years 8, 9 and 10. For the six fast track students taking the examination this year, standards are above average and they are achieving well. Students use music technology well to create and notate their work. Their compositions are well structured and include satisfactory development of the initial ideas. Students' instrumental performing skills are good.
115. Teaching and learning are good, with some very good features. Teachers plan and organise lessons well and set challenging tasks. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, students practised a short melody and added a repeating pattern of notes as an accompaniment. The teacher made good use of his own musical skills to aid students' understanding of the different melodic parts. As a result, students improved their playing and understood the need to rehearse together before recording the final performance. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher's secure knowledge of music technology enabled students to understand the process of devising a composition. As a result, students gained confidence in using the computer software. There is satisfactory provision for developing literacy and numeracy skills and good development of ICT skills.
116. Leadership and management are good, with good teamwork. Much has been done to motivate boys and improve their achievement. Assessment procedures are good and are used effectively to inform students of their progress. Over 80 students receive instrumental lessons and many achieve success in instrumental examinations. There are opportunities for students to perform in and out of school. The initial round of the college's Pop Star competition attracted 300 students. Instrumental ensembles have performed in Bicester Village and in other locations.

117. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards at the end of Year 9, the quality of teaching and the use of ICT have all improved.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management result in clear direction and good teamwork.
- Boys' standards are above average.
- There is a wide range of courses and activities to suit all abilities and interests.
- The monitoring of the dance GCSE course is not sufficiently rigorous.

Commentary

118. GCSE results in 2003 were below average in physical education and dance. In physical education, boys' results were average and better than in their other subjects, but girls' results were below average. However, girls achieved satisfactorily relative to their predicted grades. The low standards in dance were partly due to staffing issues which have now been resolved.
119. For current students, standards by Year 9 are average and they achieve well. Most boys reach above average standards and achieve very well. They have very good skills, strategies and spatial awareness in a number of games, especially football. In gymnastics, they are imaginative and dynamic. Girls' standards are average, but are improving. A minority have good skills in netball and are able to choreograph dances in a range of styles. Students with special educational needs often achieve very well and improve their self-esteem. Students for whom English is an additional language also achieve well because instructions and demonstrations are clear. Students from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as others, especially in dance and football.
120. In Years 10 and 11, all students follow a core course and about one third opt to take a GCSE in physical education. They achieve well on both courses. Standards in the core course are average overall and above average for boys. Students choose from a wide variety of courses in core time, such as GCSE dance, the junior sports leader award and an entry level qualification. These courses give added purpose and motivation, especially for girls. Students learn independently and effectively organise practices and warm-up routines. Dance students achieve satisfactorily in practical work but their theoretical knowledge is below average. Standards on the GCSE physical education course are above average overall and well above average in practical activities.
121. Teaching is good. In boys' lessons, it is very good with excellent features. The outstanding feature in all lessons is students' very good attitudes and behaviour in response to high expectations. Teachers' clear demonstrations and well-structured activities lead to rapid learning as students build their skills and apply them successfully in the final activity. Questions are used well to stimulate thought and enable students to make links between different parts of the course. Literacy skills are developed well, though in a few lessons teachers do not require students to give full answers or use technical language. Students who are unable to take part physically could in some lessons be more involved through coaching or evaluating students' work. In the GCSE course, theoretical aspects are taught well and give students good opportunities to develop their numeracy and ICT skills, though occasionally tasks do not meet the needs of the full ability range. Assessment is used well to set students targets for their performance, though its quality is not consistently good in all lessons.
122. Very good leadership and management have led to rapid improvement since the last inspection. Boys' standards have improved from below to above average. The introduction of a wider range of courses has improved motivation, especially of girls, both in lessons and in the

very good extra-curricular programme. Students enjoy success at local, county and national levels, particularly in football and basketball. Residential trips add to students' personal development. The quality of teaching has improved through close monitoring and there is now very little non-specialist teaching. Management has yet to make a significant impact on the organisation of the dance GCSE course. Very good links with primary schools have increased continuity in learning and raised standards. The changing rooms, toilets and gymnasium are in need of refurbishment and there are no private cubicles in the shower areas.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business was inspected in detail, but the work-related programme was also sampled.

123. The **work-related programme** for students in Years 10 and 11 is very good. There are currently almost 90 students on the programme. Students who are likely to benefit are identified in Year 9 and given good guidance when choosing options. The programme includes many vocational options, including hairdressing and beauty, agriculture, construction and mechanics. Some of these courses are taken off-site. All students gain useful qualifications, including GCSEs and vocational awards. Each student's course is individually designed and their progress is carefully monitored. Many students are well motivated by the work-related programme and have developed significantly improved attitudes to school and work.

Business

Provision in business is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A new applied GCSE course has been effectively introduced in Year 10.
- Assessment on the applied course provides students with constructive guidance.
- There are not enough links with the real world of business.
- Students make good use of computers to do research and prepare their assignments.
- There is too little monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

Commentary

124. GCSE courses are offered in business and in business and communications systems. In addition, a GCSE in applied business was introduced into Year 10 last September. These are popular option choices. GCSE results in business were average in 2002 and 2003 and students did as well as in their other subjects. GCSE results in business and communications systems were above average and students did well against their predicted grades. Overall, boys' results were better than those of the girls.
125. In Year 11, current standards are average and students have a sound knowledge of business practices and organisation. Students are achieving well in relation to their predicted grades. There is no significant difference between the standards reached by girls or boys. They work independently and use computers well in doing research and writing assignments. In a lesson on quality assurance in modern business, students gained a clear understanding of how quality practices have developed and in particular the influence of Japanese systems on British business practice. Students are able to explain the meaning of financial concepts such as cash flow, break even, profit and loss and pricing. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others. On the new applied business course, students have adapted well to the vocational approach and are gaining a good understanding of the major functions in a business.
126. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good practice. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and lessons are planned in a satisfactory manner. However, the use of a three-part structure for lessons, common in many other subjects, is limited. Pace in some

lessons is too leisurely, which slows students' progress. Students make good, independent use of computers in the traditional and applied GCSE courses. Assessment is particularly good in the applied business course and helpful targets are used to help students improve the quality of their work. The use of more diagnostic comments in the other courses would be beneficial to help students raise the standard of their work.

127. The subject is soundly managed within the ICT department. The applied business course has been effectively introduced and resourced in Year 10. There is not enough monitoring and evaluation of teaching or sharing of good practice. More opportunities to visit and meet people from business would be beneficial in widening the curriculum and helping students to relate theory to practice. This subject was not reported in the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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

128. **PSHE** is taught by form tutors in Years 7 to 9 and through enrichment mornings, when the normal timetable is suspended, in Years 10 and 11. Provision is satisfactory overall, with appropriate coverage of careers, sex and relationships and alcohol and drug abuse. The programme is well planned and resourced. There are very good links with community groups and agencies, such as the police and Bicester Art. Since the last inspection, there has been a satisfactory improvement in the programme which now includes citizenship.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been well planned.
- There are effective opportunities to promote students' participation and responsible action.
- Most teaching is by non-specialist staff and there is insufficient training or review of practice.
- There is no formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.
- Some subjects which deliver elements of citizenship have not planned the modules in detail.

Commentary

129. Standards in Year 9 are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. By Year 9, they develop a satisfactory understanding of what it means to be an informed citizen. In Year 7, students learn about government, voting and elections. In Year 8, they gain a good understanding of disability in their study of Britain as a diverse society. In Year 9, they develop skills in enquiry and communication through planning their own community service activity. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others. There is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls.
130. It was not possible during the inspection to observe any lessons for students Years 10 and 11 but some written work was scrutinised. Students do research into global issues such as population growth and renewable energy and develop their own views. They understand that cultures differ in their approach to issues such as capital punishment or homosexuality; they learn to justify their own opinions and listen to those of others. Standards by the end of Year 11 are average overall and students' achievement is satisfactory.
131. Lessons were observed in Years 7, 8 and 9. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and sometimes good. Where teaching is good, teachers have good subject knowledge and plan effective activities that fully involve students. They use resources and questions well to

encourage students to think and engage in constructive discussion. However, most lessons are taught by non-specialist teachers who are unfamiliar with the subject matter. The activities are implemented with less skill and while students are interested in the issues and develop their own views, their learning is not so assured. Procedures for assessing students' attainment in citizenship are being developed. There is a satisfactory system to record students' achievement and to plan targets for improvement.

132. The school council is effective in helping students to develop the skills of participation and responsible action. There is also a good range of other opportunities. Some students in Year 11 take on responsibilities as prefects, other senior students help in the college library and support younger students with reading. Within the local community, students in Year 7 are involved in decision making about local projects, such as the Market Square. In Year 9, all students undertake a community project, such as working in a local nursery school or arranging a football tournament for local primary school pupils.
133. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The newly appointed co-ordinator has a clear idea of how to develop the subject. In Years 7 to 9, citizenship is taught in PSHE and religious education lessons. In Years 10 and 11, it is taught in the PSHE enrichment mornings and through specific topics in English, history, RE, geography and science. The citizenship curriculum is well planned, though in some subjects the citizenship modules have not yet been written into their plans. The majority of staff who teach citizenship are non-specialists and there has been insufficient training or formal meetings for teachers to review classroom practice. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are at an early stage of development. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory because citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been effectively planned across all year groups.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	10	90.0	92.0	0.0	29.9	23.0	35.7
Information technology	5	80.0	78.2	0.0	20.6	24.0	28.5
Mathematics	5	60.0	74.2	20.0	34.3	22.0	31.3

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	5	100.0	96.1	60.0	48.7	84.0	85.1
Business studies	17	94.1	96.4	17.6	32.8	65.9	76.5
English	10	100.0	98.3	10.0	36.5	72.0	80.1
English literature	9	100.0	98.5	33.3	43.7	77.8	84.3
Design and technology	7	100.0	95.3	42.9	35.5	77.1	76.5
Geography	11	90.9	97.1	36.4	40.5	80.0	80.9
History	7	100.0	97.1	14.3	41.0	68.6	81.2
Information technology	10	100.0	89.1	40.0	22.4	80.0	64.1
Mathematics	11	100.0	93.3	45.5	52.2	81.8	84.7
Psychology	5	100.0	94.3	20.0	38.9	68.0	77.7
Religious studies	6	100.0	96.3	16.7	44.0	73.3	82.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on the English language and literature course, but English literature and German were also sampled.

134. A-level results in **English literature** were above average in 2001 and below average in 2002; there were no entries in 2003. One lesson was observed which was very good. Students learnt a lot about the skills of literary analysis from the teacher's clear, full explanation and searching questions that developed their understanding.
135. Numbers taking A-level **German** have been small and results about average. A Year 12 lesson in German was observed which was good. Standards were below average, but the students' motivation and active participation resulted in good achievement. The teaching focused well on improving basic grammar and led to increased confidence and competence.

English language and literature

Provision in English language and literature is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge that enables them to explain analytical techniques effectively.
- Students do not have enough practice in writing extended essays.
- A-level grades are not used consistently in assessing written work.
- Relationships among students and with teachers are good and lead to a supportive climate for learning.

Commentary

136. A-level results were below average in 2002, but improved in 2003 and were above the 2002 national average. AS-level results in 2003 were below the 2002 average. The retention rate of students who start the AS-level course is good.
137. For current students, standards at the end of Year 13 are below average. Their attainment on entry to the sixth form is also below average and their achievement is satisfactory on both the AS and A2 courses. Students develop a straightforward understanding of the techniques of analysing different kinds of texts. They can explain why a writer has chosen a particular linguistic or literary device, such as the use of dialect or a metaphor. They generally use technical terms appropriately. Their essay writing skills are underdeveloped and middle and lower-attaining students are sometimes held back by mistakes in spelling and grammar.
138. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge and in the better lessons they create a supportive climate for learning. Students learn well from clear and helpful explanations. They grow in confidence and are prepared well for the examinations. There are positive relationships among students and with teachers. In lessons where students do not learn enough, it is sometimes because the material chosen is too difficult and abstract. When this is the case, lower-attaining students do not understand the work and there are too few opportunities for them to be actively engaged. Teachers write helpful comments on work and often suggest ways to improve. They do not, however, consistently use A-level grades to indicate the level at which a student is working and are at times over-generous in their assessment.
139. The subject is satisfactorily led and managed. The head of department is new in post, and has appropriately identified the promotion and improvement of sixth form courses as a development area. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

140. Standards of literacy and spoken English are average overall. In most subjects, students' reading skills are good enough to support their research tasks. They are usually able to express their ideas clearly in discussion. In some subjects, such as theatre studies, students put forward their points confidently and with assurance. In other subjects, including English in some lessons, they lack confidence and are tentative in offering answers. Students' essay writing skills are developed well in geography and sports studies, where they have good opportunities to practise extended writing. In other areas, however, these skills are underdeveloped, for example in physics and English.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well.
- Management is good and has raised standards since the last inspection.
- Students' independent learning skills are satisfactory, but not better because they do not know basic formulae and definitions well enough to use them in new learning.

Commentary

141. The Year 12 course includes the first two modules of pure mathematics and one module of statistics. In Year 13, there is a further module of pure mathematics, one module of mechanics and a second module of statistics.
142. A-level results were average in 2002. In 2003 they were well below average, but students did as well as expected from their GCSE results. Four students completed the course, considerably fewer than the number entered in previous years. Year 12 AS-level results in 2003 were above average.
143. Current standards in Year 13 are above average. Achievement is good given students' average attainment at the start of the course. Students use basic definitions in pure mathematics well. However, their learning of more advanced techniques is slowed because their algebraic expertise is not yet good enough. Students understand partial fractions well and solve difficult examples successfully. In statistics, a lack of knowledge of basic formulae restricts rapid progress through the more elementary work at the start of the second module. Year 12 students have made a good start to their course and are also achieving well.
144. Teaching and learning are good overall. The strength of the teaching is in the very good subject expertise of the teachers. Their work is accurate, with clear explanations that students can easily follow. Students are engaged very well. They have satisfactory independent learning skills and work hard. Lessons are very well planned. Teachers' questions are challenging and encourage students to think for themselves. A particularly good feature of the teaching is the requirement for students to contribute orally, and at length, in response to questions. This deepens their understanding and strengthens their learning.
145. Leadership and management are good, with the two teachers sharing the teaching well between them. Staff are well deployed within the context of a very difficult staffing situation in the department. Students' work is assessed carefully and they are given helpful guidance on how to reach their targets. Improvement since the last inspection is good because standards have improved and have been at their highest in recent years.

Mathematics across the curriculum

146. Standards of numeracy in the sixth form are good and support learning in other subjects well. In psychology, for example, students do graphical work and learn how to apply statistical tests. Students of geography successfully analyse and present data in their coursework. In physical education, students apply their knowledge of algebra when using formulae in physiology.

SCIENCE

Physics was the focus, but biology and chemistry were also sampled.

147. A-level results in **biology** have been below average in recent years, but students usually do about as well as expected from their GCSE results. In a Year 13 lesson observed during the inspection, standards were above average. Teaching was satisfactory. Students gained reasonable understanding of speciation as a result of discussion led by the teacher.
148. The number of students entered for A and AS-level **chemistry** has been low in recent years. Results have usually been below average, though they were well above average at A level in 2000. Students usually do about as well as expected. A Year 12 lesson was observed which was very good. Standards were above average and students achieved very well because a discussion about the effect of sunlight on the skin engaged their interest before they moved on to consider the theory of how radiation affects particles at the molecular level.

Physics

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving as a result of good teaching.
- Students achieve well in their lessons because teachers are helpful and approachable.
- Students build well on a secure foundation of existing knowledge.
- Progress checks are not used well enough to help students improve.
- Students have too few opportunities to develop answers at length.

Commentary

149. In recent years the number of A-level entries has been very low. Results have been below average but students have usually done about as well as expected in relation to their GCSE results. At AS level, there were no entries in 2003, but two students gained E grades in 2002.
150. Current standards in physics are average, though a little higher in Year 13 than in Year 12. This is higher than recent examination results because students are well motivated and started their sixth form courses with better GCSE results than in some previous years. Students understand, for example, how the behaviour of materials is related to particle structure and most are confident in using their previous learning to devise working definitions of electric current and potential difference. Students achieve well in lessons, but do not perform as well in module tests. Overall, their achievement is satisfactory.
151. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to encourage students to think through problems for themselves, often posing further questions instead of providing the easy solution of a direct answer. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to explore the applications of theoretical knowledge or encourage longer answers. This was the case in a Year 12 lesson, when students were not pressed to explain variations in the

resistance of a wire carrying a current. Teachers use questioning effectively to assess students' understanding and thus build new learning on a firm foundation of existing knowledge. A key reason for students' good learning is that they find teachers helpful and approachable. They like the regular progress checks that help them to compare their current performance with their target grades, but teachers' comments are often too general to help them improve the weaker aspects of their work.

152. The department is well managed with the two teachers working well as a team. Leadership is satisfactory, but the planning of future developments is limited. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The previous report did not specifically mention standards in physics, but criticisms of students' motivation and lack of opportunity for them to take responsibility for their own learning have been addressed. Students are now generally well motivated and appreciate extended projects such as research on the energy of particles.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Three ICT courses are offered: GCE A level, AVCE (a vocational A-level course) and Intermediate GNVQ. All courses were inspected.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students appreciate the good personal support they receive.
- Students' day-to-day work is not assessed thoroughly enough.
- A wide range of courses are offered that meet students' needs.
- A few of the lessons are rather dull.

Commentary

153. A-level results in 2002 were well above average. In 2003 they dipped to below average, though students achieved as expected in relation to their GCSE results. Intermediate GNVQ results in 2003 were well above average and students made better progress than expected.
154. For current students on advanced courses, standards are below average, though their achievement in relation to their GCSE results is satisfactory. Students have a good grasp of the advanced features of many software packages. For example, they plan and create sophisticated PowerPoint presentations that include hyperlinks. They write spreadsheets using lookup tables, drop-down lists and the IF function. They accurately insert automated buttons to move between pages on their spreadsheets. However, students' recall of some basic spreadsheet features, such as absolute cell referencing, is not always sound. They are not always able to make a well-informed choice of the best software to solve a given problem and do not have a secure knowledge of how to merge documents from different software packages. They complete comprehensive evaluations of their work but often do not list ways in which projects could be extended. Standards on the GNVQ course are above average and students' achievement is good. Students have a thorough understanding of computer hardware and software and a good knowledge of how computers are used in society.
155. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the advanced courses and good in the GNVQ course. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and this improves students' motivation. Students enjoy their learning and work hard. They learn through practical work but sometimes this is over directed by the teacher and opportunities to learn independently are missed. The best lessons are planned imaginatively and inspire students' interest, but a minority of lessons are unimaginative and result in a slow pace of learning. Students appreciate the good oral feedback they receive but their day-to-day work is not marked nor carries written comments which can be referred to during revision.

156. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college provides a good range of courses that meet the needs of students of differing capability and aspirations. The vocational courses have been introduced recently in response to students' preferences. Good use is made of data to predict students' grades but interim testing to assess students' progress is not regular enough. ICT courses were introduced after the last inspection and since then improvement has been good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

157. Students use computers well in many subjects for word processing and communication. They use e-mail and undertake extensive research on the internet. They make some use of PowerPoint in presenting their work to the rest of the class, but have few opportunities to use spreadsheets or databases. In art, students do not use computers sufficiently in their creative work. Students have adequate access to computers for private study and the college is currently extending these resources. Basic ICT skills have improved since the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

Geography and psychology were the focus, but religious studies, history and law were also sampled.

158. A-level results in **religious studies** were below average in 2002 but students made better progress than expected from their GCSE results. In 2003, results were average. A Year 13 lesson was observed which was good. Students discussed the language used to describe God, using simile and metaphor. The teachers' explanations were clear and the lesson had a good structure, with activities that made students think and consolidated their understanding.
159. A-level results in **history** were average in 2003, which was an improvement on the previous two years. Students did as well as expected from their GCSE results. A Year 12 lesson was seen in which teaching was good. A clear presentation gave students a good understanding of the factors that led to women gaining the right to vote.
160. A-level **law** was examined for the first time in 2003 and results were well below average. One lesson was observed, in which teaching was satisfactory. Explanations were clear and students contributed effectively to a discussion of law and morals.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is good and strong teamwork is helping to raise standards.
- The most recent A-level results were below average and below those of previous years.
- Current students achieve well and their coursework assignments are of a high standard.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and give good guidance in writing essays.
- Relationships are very good and students have very good attitudes to learning.

Commentary

161. A-level results have been average in most recent years. In 2002, students achieved better results than expected from their GCSE results. In 2003, results were below average because many students had difficulty in writing essays and analysing data. However, students achieved as expected from their GCSE results. AS-level results in 2003 were average. Overall, girls achieve better results than boys.

162. For current students, standards are above average and their achievement is good, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of all aspects of physical and human geography. Year 13 students, for example, can explain and evaluate the main causes of population change. They use technical language and case studies well to illustrate their views. In their coursework assignments, which are of a high standard, they successfully apply a wide range of techniques to collect, analyse and present data. Many students use ICT well in their work.
163. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and use a variety of methods and resources to plan lessons that students find interesting. They give good quality explanations and ask questions that challenge students to make links and develop their understanding. They give good guidance in essay writing. Year 12 students, for example, were given good support in preparing an assignment on coastal defence strategies, including an outline plan, suggestions for the effective use of maps and diagrams and web-sites for individual research. Students' work is assessed carefully and from good feedback they know what they need to improve. Relationships are very good and students have very good attitudes to learning. They are attentive and work well, both independently and collaboratively.
164. Leadership and management are good, with strong teamwork. The curriculum is good and is enhanced by residential fieldwork in Year 12. Teachers' expertise is very well matched to the curriculum. Subject planning is good and departmental work is effectively monitored. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. With its good leadership and committed staff the department has good capacity for further improvement.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good overall but a minority of lessons are not sufficiently well structured.
- Assessment data is used well to track students' progress though some marking does not give enough guidance for improvement.
- Very good subject expertise ensures that syllabus specifications are met well.

Commentary

165. Psychology is offered at AS and A2 levels, but relatively few students choose to continue to A2. A-level results were below average in 2001 and 2002, though students achieved as well as expected from their GCSE results. Results improved in 2003. All students entered for the AS-level examination achieved a grade, and the single student entered for A2 level gained a grade B. Current standards, especially in Year 12, are close to average. Students achieve well in comparison with their attainment at GCSE. There is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls.
166. Students have a sound knowledge and understanding of psychological concepts, theories, and research. Year 12 students have a good understanding, for example, of the interrelated factors that cause stress. Most students use terminology accurately in discussion and writing. They write extended, well-structured essays and have the numeracy skills they need to analyse and present data. Students understand the nature of psychological experiments and the ethical considerations that influence research. Their ability to evaluate the validity of experiments, however, is weaker, as is the level of detail in their explanations. Some students' written work lacks the sophistication and maturity that are expected, especially at A2 level.
167. Teaching and learning are good. The teacher has very good subject expertise and clear explanations help students to understand complex ideas. Classroom relationships are very

good and students respond well to the seminar style of teaching. Brisk, purposeful and sometimes imaginative approaches result in students being thoroughly involved, as in a Year 12 lesson where they were engrossed in doing their own research into aspects that they had not previously understood. The teacher's questioning tests students' understanding and encourages them to develop their ideas. They are well supported by individual and small group guidance. Much of the teaching is well structured and enables students to learn confidently, but in one lesson students worked at an undemanding level and achieved little. Results from assessed work are used well to track students' progress and set targets. Work is marked regularly but the marking does not always give enough specific guidance for improvement.

168. The subject is well led and managed. The very good subject expertise of the psychology teacher results in good planning to meet the requirements of the syllabus and the interests of students. Her vision and good links with senior management result in regular reviews and planning for continued development. Psychology was not inspected in the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The college offers A-level courses in electronics and textiles. These courses were sampled.

169. A-level results in design were above average in 2002 and students did better than expected from their GCSE results. Results in 2003 were average. A Year 13 lesson in **electronics** was observed. Teaching was very good, characterised by very good individual attention and very good practical resources. Students were encouraged to study independently and made good links between their theoretical knowledge and practical skills.
170. A-level results in **textiles** were well above average in 2003. A textiles lesson was observed which was very good. The teaching was well planned and organised, with a variety of activities that challenged students and led to high achievement. Students' work was imaginative, demonstrating a mature personal style and very good practical skills.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design, but media studies and theatre studies were also sampled.

171. A-level results in **media studies** were well below average in 2003, though students did as well as expected from their GCSE results. One lesson was observed, in which teaching was satisfactory. Students gained a satisfactory understanding of theories of film and were able to apply these to films they had seen. Teaching was clear and gave students limited opportunities to be involved and explain their understanding to others.
172. A-level results in **theatre studies** in 2003 were below average. A Year 13 lesson was seen which was very good. The lesson was given in the style of a seminar, preparing students for their examined performance. The students learnt a lot because the teacher explained points well and rigorously challenged them to improve their work.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in recent A-level results has been good.
- Year 12 have started their course well and have good potential.
- Year 13 students achieved weak results in their AS-level examinations.
- A minority of students have unsatisfactory attitudes and do not meet teachers' expectations.
- Students' progress in relation to their potential is not monitored well enough.

- Students do not use ICT sufficiently in their creative work.

Commentary

173. A-level results have been average over the last three years. In 2002 and 2003, students did better than predicted from their GCSE results. AS-level results in 2003 were below average, partly because of staffing difficulties which have now been resolved, and several students have re-sat these examinations.
174. For current students, standards in Year 13 are below average overall and students' achievement is satisfactory. Painting and drawing skills are average, but for some students their personal study of historical aspects of art is of a lower standard. For timetabling reasons, students are taught in two different groups. In one class, which also contains Year 12 students, progress is not as good as it should be because students are not well focused and do not apply themselves well, despite the teacher's best endeavours. Year 13 students in the other class are reaching average standards. Year 12 students have higher prior attainment in art. Their standards are average and they are achieving well, particularly those in the larger single-year class. They have good drawing skills and most have good ideas about how to develop their work.
175. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and give students appropriate individual guidance on their work. As a result, most students have positive attitudes and are able to work independently, though a minority are too reliant on the teacher's guidance. Satisfactory use is made of resources to inform students' research. The department has very good ICT resources, which students use for research but not in their creative work. Assessment data is not used sufficiently to track students' progress or set them clear targets.
176. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There are some good enrichment opportunities, such as an art trip to Amsterdam, but there is insufficient guidance to teachers or evaluation of departmental performance. The college has provided very good ICT resources, but these are largely unused because departmental training has not been arranged.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Within physical education, the college offers an A-level course in sports studies and has this year introduced an NVQ course in football. Both courses were inspected.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of examination courses.
- The A-level course is well taught and, as a result, students achieve well.
- Very good relationships are established in the NVQ football course.
- The assessment of theoretical aspects of the NVQ football course is not sufficiently rigorous.

Commentary

177. In most recent years, A-level results in sports studies have been well above average. The results in 2003, however, were well below average, though students achieved satisfactorily relative to their ability.
178. For current A-level students, standards in Year 13 are above average and they are achieving well. They have a good knowledge of the theory and technical terms and make links between the ideas in different parts of the course. They make good quality notes and base their written work on good independent research. They use the internet well to do research but miss some

opportunities to use ICT to improve the presentation of their work. They apply their mathematical skills well to the formulae used in physiology. Year 12 students have made good progress from GCSE and their practical skills are above average. All students give appropriate practical examples to illustrate their answers.

179. Students following the NVQ football course have good organisational skills in arranging coaching and training sessions. However their theoretical knowledge is less well developed. Their grasp of technical vocabulary is below that which is expected. Despite this they are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results.
180. Teaching and learning on the A-level course are good. The teachers challenge students intellectually and physically. They use their subject expertise to plan tasks that enable students to link practical activities with theoretical knowledge. The development of students' ICT skills is not so well planned. Homework assignments extend the work done in lessons but are not always suitable for the full range of ability, particularly the lower-attaining students. Targets are set rigorously and reviewed regularly and increase students' expectations of what they can achieve. The quality of teaching in the NVQ football course is satisfactory overall. Practical elements are taught well but teaching of the theoretical aspects is not so well matched to students' abilities. This is because assessment of students' previous work is not used sufficiently in planning lessons.
181. Students are very appreciative of the support they get from teachers and enjoy the challenge of the courses. There is strong mutual respect between teachers and students. The boys enjoy the extra-curricular programme, and reach above average standards. However, there are few opportunities for girls. The students often help with clubs and events for younger students, in which they use the skills they have gained to make a positive contribution.
182. Leadership is good and has led to good improvement since the last inspection. The A-level sports studies course has been introduced and this year the NVQ in football has been added. This is a popular option and attracts students from other schools.

BUSINESS

The college offers a GCE A-level course in business in Year 13 and an advanced vocational (AVCE) course in Year 12. The GCE course is being phased out and will be replaced by the AVCE course. Both courses were inspected.

Business

Provision in business is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have settled in well to the applied business course in Year 12.
- In Year 12, students' assignments are assessed helpfully and they are set appropriate targets.
- There is little monitoring and evaluation of teaching or opportunities to share best practice.
- Students learn independently, but their skills in analysing and evaluating data are not well developed.

Commentary

183. A-level results in 2002 were below average, but students did better than expected from their GCSE results. Boys did better than girls. Results in 2003 were well below average though students did as well as expected.
184. In the current Year 13, a small group of five students, standards are above average. This is higher than recent results because students started from a higher base. They are achieving

satisfactorily. Students can work independently and carry out research tasks. In a lesson on the external factors affecting business, for example, students used the internet to find up-to-date information and used this well to determine the major factors that affect the economy and the performance of business. Year 12 students respond well to the independent research that is required in the AVCE course and have completed good assignments using real businesses as case studies. Students have a satisfactory understanding of the financial stakeholders in a business and of the role of marketing. They have positive attitudes, though some are not good at meeting deadlines for assignments. In both years, students' skills in analysing data and drawing conclusions are underdeveloped. This is recognised and is being given appropriate priority in lessons.

185. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject and lessons are planned in a satisfactory manner using appropriate tasks. Resources are up-to-date and students are encouraged to develop their ability to think and learn independently. They make good use of ICT for research and presentation. In some lessons, however, the pace is too leisurely, and this slows students' progress. In the AVCE course, students' work is carefully assessed and they are given helpful targets for improvement. The wider use of diagnostic comments in Year 13 work would be beneficial in helping students raise the standard of their work.
186. The subject is soundly managed within the ICT department. The new AVCE course has been effectively introduced and resourced in Year 12. There is insufficient monitoring of teaching or sharing of good practice. More opportunities to visit and meet people from business would be beneficial in widening the curriculum and helping students to relate theory to practice. Business was not reported in the last inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

187. The college offers Intermediate GNVQ in **health and social care**. This was sampled. The proportion of students gaining the qualification in 2003 was above the national average. One lesson was seen, in which teaching was good. Students achieved well in planning an assignment on promoting health and well-being. They worked independently but received very good individual support.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

188. All sixth form students have a PSHE course that includes health education, careers education, personal finance and religious education. Year 12 students are encouraged to follow an examination course in general studies, though in recent years only a very small number have sat the examination. A-level results in **general studies** were below average in 2003, though students did as well as expected from their GCSE results. It was not possible to observe any lessons during the inspection because examinations were taking place.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	4	4
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	4
Overall standards achieved		4
Pupils' achievement	4	4
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	4	4
Attitudes	4	4
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	4
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		4
The quality of teaching	4	4
How well pupils learn	4	4
The quality of assessment	4	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		4
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		3
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	4	4

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

