

INSPECTION REPORT

MILDENHALL COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Mildenhall

LEA area: Suffolk

Unique reference number: 124809

Headteacher: T C Lewis

Lead inspector: N A Pett

Dates of inspection: 19th - 22nd January 2004

Inspection number: 259336

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of College:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	13 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	981
School address:	Bury Road Mildenhall Bury St Edmunds Suffolk
Postcode:	IP28 7HT
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Fax number:	(01638) 510 814
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Crane
Date of last inspection:	27 th April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a 13-18 co-educational comprehensive college holding specialist status since 2002 for technology. It is located in a rural context but close to a major air force base and with easy access to Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge. There are 773 pupils aged between 13 and 16 and 208 students in the sixth form, giving an overall total of 981, making it similar in size to other secondary schools (11-18) nationally, although the sixth form is larger than average. The College's intake in Year 9 is from middle schools in the town but also from others across a large geographical area. Pupils and students come from the full range of socio-economic background, and although the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, the College is in an area of deprivation with some incomes just above the eligibility line. A small minority of pupils are in care and from the travelling community. Just under ten per cent of the pupils and students come from ethnic minority heritage, and this is increasing with a recent influx from European countries, although the number receiving support for English as an additional language is low. Attainment on entry is below average, particularly because of weaknesses in literacy skills, although the number of pupils identified as having special educational needs, mainly for dyslexia and social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, is below average. The percentage of pupils who hold statements in Years 9 to 11 to address their specific needs is above average. Access to the sixth form is by open entry and the retention rate is increasing. The college has been recognised for its high level of improvement, especially through adding value to its pupils' and students' performance. It was one of only 92 schools in the country to be recognised by the Specialist Schools Trust as having achieved 'Most Added Value' and 'Most Improvement' in 2003 examinations.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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23393	B Dower	Team inspector	English Drama English as an additional language
30648	B Skelton	Team inspector	English (post-16) Theatre studies (post-16)
18886	F Rugeiro	Team inspector	Mathematics
21848	E Singleton	Team inspector	Science
27585	K Hounslow	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry Physics (post-16)
2198	J Wilson	Team inspector	Art
12721	D Riddle	Team inspector	Design and technology
20825	B Ogden	Team inspector	Geography
31191	D Sylph	Team inspector	History
20619	J Hazlewood	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
8052	J McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (post-16)
12624	A Farren	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31660	M Young	Team inspector	Music
30198	R Chick	Team inspector	Physical education
12337	A Slade	Team inspector	Religious education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good and effective College** which has shown consistent improvement and provides a high quality of education for its pupils and students. Public examination results are above average at GCSE and at GCE Advanced Level. The College enables its pupils and students to achieve well and most develop into mature and responsible young people. The quality of teaching is good. It is very well led and effectively managed thus providing a very good quality of education, and giving very good value for money.

The College's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The examination results show that pupils' and students' self-esteem is raised so that they achieve well.
- The very good provision for special educational needs.
- The many curriculum opportunities which provide alternative pathways to address pupils' and students' needs and aspirations.
- The effective procedures for assessment and for monitoring and evaluation.
- The very good partnership with the community and other schools and colleges.
- The need to continue to develop pupils' and students' literacy and independent learning skills.
- The need to apply further the strategies to improve the behaviour of a minority of pupils.
- The statutory curriculum requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for religious education in the sixth form are not met.

Overall there has been good improvement since the last inspection in 1998. It has improved examination results well. Its specialist technology status has led to improving resources and the overall quality of education. The good provision for information and communication technology (ICT) now meets statutory requirements. Although there has been clear progress, the overall improvement in developing the whole college approach for literacy development, and independent learning skills, is only satisfactory. Behaviour strategies have been very well improved and had a positive influence on standards. Procedures to promote attendance are now effective and have initiated good improvement. Unsatisfactory progress has been made in relation to a daily act of collective worship and for religious education (RE) in the sixth form.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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 at the end of Year 9.

Pupils and students do very well and achieve good results in their examinations. The 2003 GCSE examinations results show that against their prior attainment, pupils' results were very high for the average points score. The comparison with similar schools based on free school meals does not take account of the below average prior attainment. It is in adding value to pupils' and students' performance that is a strength of the College, being recognised as one of the most improved within the local education authority this year. Standards on entry in Year 9 are below average overall, reflecting the weakness in literacy skills. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests were below average in English and average in mathematics and science. Standards in Year 9

remain below average in English and average in mathematics and science. There is some variation in other subjects but the key factor is that pupils are beginning to achieve well and this continues into Year 11 where it becomes good overall. Standards in Year 11 are broadly average, but with the potential to reach above average standards. Standards in the sixth form are average overall but the students continue to achieve well. These standards are reflected in examination results which are above average when compared with results nationally. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported.

This is an orderly community. Pupils' and students' **attitudes and behaviour are good overall**, although unsatisfactory behaviour by a minority can disrupt teaching and learning. Attendance has improved but remains below average. A significant proportion of pupils do not have the skills to learn independently. Most pupils and students respond well to the opportunities for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall **quality of education is very good**. Teaching is consistently good with examples of very good teaching in a significant proportion of lessons. This leads to good learning and supports pupils' and students' good achievement. Assessment procedures are most effective. The curriculum provides very effectively for the needs and aspirations of pupils and students. The planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) has been well developed to teach citizenship, making a significant contribution to pupils' awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Extra-curricular activities and opportunities to enrich the curriculum are very good and include many competitive sporting activities, drama and musical performances and links with the business community. Links with the community are very good. The quality of individual care, support and guidance is good, although the management for health and safety has some shortcomings. Most parents and carers contribute effectively to the life of the College, although there is a minority who are not supportive of their children's education. Links with the first and middle schools are very good and well used to support curriculum development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership is very good and management is good overall, with examples of very good practice. The governors are very supportive and have a very clear understanding of the College's strengths and weaknesses. They are effectively involved in planning and operate good approaches to ensure that it gains best value from its spending. The headteacher has a very clear vision and leads effectively. He is very well supported by the senior staff in the leadership group, who provide a very good blend of experience and innovation. The leadership and management of subject leaders and pastoral staff is good with some very good practice. The College development plan provides a strategic approach for future development. There is an effective approach to self-evaluation, which draws well on consistent procedures for monitoring and evaluation with clear targets and support procedures for improvement in the quality of education and the further raising of standards.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents consider that this is a good College and most are very supportive of the work that it does. They are generally pleased with standards of behaviour and recognise that the College works very hard to deal effectively with problems. Pupils and students are very proud of their College and consider that it provides a very good education.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that strategies for developing literacy are consistently applied across the College to raise standards further.

- Ensure the good strategies for behaviour management are consistently applied.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils and students to develop their skill to carry out research and to take more responsibility for their own learning.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- For a daily act of collective worship and for religious education in the sixth form.

THE SIXTH FORM AT MILDENHALL COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

It is larger than average and provides a wide curriculum of academic and vocational courses.

This is an effective sixth form which is well led and is cost-effective. Access to the sixth form is open, and it provides a very good range of academic and vocational courses which meets the needs of its students well. Teaching is good and students learn well and, although standards are average overall, examination results show that many students achieve very well for their prior attainment at GCSE.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Raising the profile has led to an increase in the number of students continuing their education.
- Results in GCE and vocational examinations have improved.
- Very good links with the community provide a wide range of learning opportunities.
- The general studies programme is not always used to best effect.
- Statutory requirements are not met for religious education.

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	Good. Students with a wide range of prior attainment achieve well through effective teaching.
Mathematics	Good. Good teamwork supports and guides students so that they achieve well. The best teaching is very good, but some is not challenging enough.
Biology	Good. There is good teaching and learning which leads to students' good achievement. More opportunities are needed for students to develop their self-study skills.
Chemistry	Good. The students are well-motivated by the good teaching and this provides a good learning environment in which students achieve well.
Physics	Good. Students make good progress and achieve well because they are well taught.
Information and communication technology	Very good. The revised ICT curriculum caters well for the needs of students. They are well taught and achieve very well, although some aspects of resources have limitations.
Geography	Good. Teaching is good leading to rising standards and better achievement. Teachers use good and innovative approaches to support learning.
History	Good. Teaching and learning are consistently good and students achieve well. Attitudes are positive and relationship very good.
Design and technology	Good. Good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well, producing some very good quality practical work.
Music	Very good. Students are well motivated, and they respond very well to the effective teaching which enhances their good achievement.
Theatre studies	Good. Teaching is good and provides a most effective learning experience for the students. They achieve well.
Business	Satisfactory. There is a very good range of courses but the quality of teaching, learning and achievement is only satisfactory.
Health and social care	Good. The good quality teaching enables students to make good progress and achieve well. They have very positive attitudes.

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 College. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are

equivalent to 'very weak'.

Music technology, French, politics, sociology, psychology, general studies, art, media studies and physical education were sampled. The overall provision for these subjects is good but the general studies course is not used to best effect for students' personal development.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students are given very good advice in the selection of their courses and are then well supported to ensure that a significant proportion complete them successfully. There is an effective approach to monitoring students' work and progress through the assessment procedures but also through informal arrangements so that students feel well supported. The support available to students who are experiencing problems is generally very good. The procedures for assessment are well developed and students are aware of how well they are doing and are given advice about how work might be improved. Guidance for further and higher education and for alternative career pathways is very well managed.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership is very good as there is a clear educational vision which is being well translated into action. There is a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses, achieved through a comprehensive approach to self-evaluation. Good teamwork between senior staff and tutors leads to effective management. These staff are very visible and provide good role models to the students, ensuring that there is high quality pastoral and academic support. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is effectively carried out through links with College leadership group and subject leaders. Curriculum decisions are set to provide a curriculum model that addresses both academic and vocational student interest.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The students have very positive views about their College and its sixth form provision. They consider that they are well taught and that their form tutors and subject teachers are readily available to help them when they are in difficulties. A significant number of students enjoy the responsibility that they have for supporting younger pupils. Students consider that there is a wide range of subjects which meet their needs and aspirations. Most consider that they are given responsibility for their life and work, although they recognise their responsibility to the College in the example that they set. Facilities for private study and social areas are good and students appreciate them.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

On entry to the College at the beginning of year 9, pupils are aged 13 and their overall standards are below average, particularly in their language and literacy skills. Pupils achieve well and their standards rise to average overall. **By the end of Year 11, pupils' achievement is good** and is reflected well in the GCSE examination results. Results for 2003 show a continuing trend of improved results and they are the best yet realised, showing that this is one of the most improved schools in the LEA.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good achievement in mathematics and science and satisfactory in English in test results at the end of Year 9.
- Results at GCSE are above average and show that pupils achieve well.
- Weaknesses in language and literacy skills have an adverse effect on standards overall.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.
- Effective monitoring and targeting supports pupils' achievement but the literacy policy is not implemented consistently.

Commentary

1. Although National Curriculum test results in 2003 were below average in English and average in mathematics and science in comparison with all schools nationally, and below average overall, the performance of pupils was above average for their prior attainment. This represents good added value. Results, based on pupils' prior attainment at the age of 11, were below average in English, and well above average in mathematics and science. Comparison with schools in similar contexts, and based on pupils' average points scores at the age of 11, shows results were below average for English, above average for mathematics and well above average for science at the expected level. At the higher levels, results were average for English, and well above average for mathematics and science. In relation to similar schools based on free school meals, and this does not take account of the difference between those with entry at 11 and those at 13, results were well below average in all three subjects, and overall. Girls performed better than boys in English, but with little difference in mathematics. and they performed equally well in science. With different cohorts over the last four years, there is divergence but overall, with the exception of English, boys and girls do as well as others nationally. Test results show a rise over the last four years, even though it is below the national trend line. The overall picture points to good achievement when all measures are analysed.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.1 (31.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	34.8 (34.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.9 (34.3)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 254 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. At GCSE, the overall results were above average in comparison to all schools nationally for the percentage gaining five A*-C grades and A*-G grades. The average points score was also above average. In comparison with similar schools, results were below average but the

average points were average. Results show a continuation of added value as pupils achieve significantly better results than would be expected for their attainment at 14; attainment was high for this measure. The targets set for 2003 results were exceeded. Boys' results were above average and girls' results were well above average. Higher attainers often fulfil their potential. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or having English as an additional language attain well. The average points trend has been broadly in line with the national trend, and results show significant improvement from the last inspection.

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	57 (42)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	88 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	34 (34.7)	33.1 (34.7)

There were 243 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. Standards by the end of Year 9 reflect previous test results. With a wide range of prior attainment and subject experience, and the pupils only having been in the College for just over a term, standards are below average in English, design and technology, history and music. In all other subjects, standards are average. However, because of pupils' good achievement, standards are rising. From inspection evidence, achievement for pupils currently in Year 11 is good and standards are broadly average overall, showing continuing improvement and reflecting previous examination trends. They are still adversely affected by pupils' capability in language and literacy across the curriculum. Standards in English are below average by Year 9 but rise to average by the end of Year 11. Standards in mathematics and in science are average by the end of both Year 9 and 11. Pupils' achievement in English and mathematics is good but in science, it is only satisfactory by the end of Year 11. Pupils who are at risk of being disaffected are provided with a good range of alternative courses, some through links with other colleges, and in these subjects they generally perform well.
4. Whilst the most capable pupils can converse easily and use appropriate vocabulary correctly, a significant minority experience difficulties in writing and reading with understanding. There is some very good practice to help pupils but not all subjects implement the College policy, consistently undermining some pupils' achievement. Many pupils lack confidence when speaking and there is not always sufficient encouragement or opportunity given to reflect on their work and learn through discussion and the exchange of ideas. Not enough opportunities are consistently given to develop their confidence in the use of formal language. There are instances where extended writing is underdeveloped and pupils do not receive adequate guidance on how to order and present their thinking in writing in a logical and fluent manner. Not every subject is addressing pupils' written accuracy through the correcting of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Similarly, although pupils' basic numeracy is average and they have the skills to cope with the demands of other subjects, framework developed to promote and improve numeracy lacks the co-ordination to be more effective.
5. In information and communication technology, standards are average but showing good improvement through the developing opportunities acquired through technology status. For example, many teachers have completed their basic ICT training, and are developing lessons in which ICT supports learning. Standards in religious education are in line with the requirements of the agreed syllabus, although they are below average in relation to the GCSE course. Standards have improved because of the better level of provision, especially in Years 10 and 11. In citizenship, there has been careful planning, leading to pupils' effective progress and good achievement. Standards are above average in art, reflecting the effective quality of provision.

6. Overall, there is little difference between the achievement and attainment of boys and girls. Pupils who are gifted and talented achieve well and attain above average standards. The number of pupils with special educational needs is above average, but very good progress for some pupils removes the need for interventions as they move through the College. All pupils with special educational needs, including Travellers and looked after pupils, make very good progress over time and achieve as well as their peers in all subjects. There is good achievement in Year 9 for pupils with the greatest needs who start with very low reading and spelling ages, becoming very good achievement in Years 10 and 11. In certificate of achievement work in English, their work shows very good writing for different audiences, very well thought out and drafted autobiographies and very good evaluation of work experience and projects. In Youth Award courses, pupils have developed skills of giving a talk, doing an interview, making visits and meeting visitors, and planning and reviewing their work. In 2003, the majority of pupils with special educational needs who entered the College with very low reading ages gained a pass in GCSE English and many achieved well in other subjects at GCSE. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic heritage and who do not have English as their mother tongue are well supported so that they make good progress and achieve well.
7. Achievement in subjects is good and reflects the good level of expectations, the effective use of assessment and the mentoring of pupils. It also reflects the overall good provision and good quality of teaching. The monitoring and evaluation structures are effective and lead to good target setting, which in turn leads to the raising of standards. To raise achievement and standards still further, the College recognises that the monitoring and implementation of the literacy policy is not rigorous enough.

Standards achieved by sixth form students

Entry to the sixth form is open and there is a wide range of prior attainment as shown in GCSE results. Students build on their previous success and achievement is good and standards are broadly average, as is seen in the GCE AS and A2 examination results.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have good achievement.
- Results have improved since the last inspection.
- Effective monitoring supports students well.

Commentary

8. Results in the AS and A2 examinations in 2003 show that the average points score for boys was in line with the national average. Boys performed better than girls. Although different results have varied between different year groups since the last inspection, there has been a general improvement. Analysis of results also shows that there is a continuing picture of added value, and most students perform better than would be expected for their GCSE results.

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	92 (79.5)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	20.3 (13.8)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	273.1 (259.8)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 64 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

9. **From inspection evidence, students' achievement is good overall**, with examples of very good and outstanding achievement. Standards show some variation but are never below

average overall and in some subjects, standards are higher. In the standards seen during the inspection, there is a good reflection of examination results at both AS and A2 levels. For example, standards are well above average in art and design, and above average in information and communication technology, theatre studies, music and health and social care. Standards are average in all other subjects. These standards and the good achievement are brought about through the good provision. As with the main College, students' literacy skills vary widely and, for a significant number of students, restrict their attainment. Higher attainers engage in effective discussion and write very well; they can produce cogent arguments and enjoy questioning a premise. Whilst other students may encounter difficulty in expressing their stance, they do have a good grasp of their subject material, and as they gain in confidence, show this quality. The effective monitoring of standards is used well to support students, and they appreciate this help, which they recognise helps them to improve and realise their aspirations.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' and students' **attitudes and behaviour are good overall**, although a minority of pupils' unsatisfactory behaviour can disrupt teaching and learning. Attendance is below average. A significant proportion of pupils do not have the skills to learn independently. Most pupils and students respond well to the opportunities for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Overall, the attitudes, behaviour, attendance and personal development of the pupils and students have improved since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The College is an orderly community.
- Most pupils have good attitudes and standards of behaviour.
- There are good opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- Pupils contribute well to the overall learning ethos and are proud of their achievements.
- A minority of pupils do not respond to the expectations.

Commentary

10. Attitudes throughout Years 9, 10 and 11 are generally good in lessons. Pupils come to the College prepared and willing to learn and in the classroom are attentive and respectful. They are interested in their work; collaborate well when working in groups and show respect for the views and feelings of others, including those who are less capable than themselves and the minority of pupils in the College who are from different ethnic backgrounds. There are some pupils whose academic aspirations are limited because they lack confidence or ambition and the challenge facing the College is to raise their aspirations and self-esteem. However, many pupils are very proud of their College and the opportunities it gives to them. They recognise that they are well supported and are proud of their achievements, both personally and academically. Overall, the attitudes of pupils to their work and to the College as a whole have improved significantly since the time of the last inspection.
11. Pupils with special educational needs have good attitudes to learning and respond positively to well planned lessons. They are positive about receiving support and guidance about what they need to concentrate on. They behave well, even in lessons where teaching relies too much on pupils being passive listeners, and benefit socially from their relationships with adults and older students.
12. Behaviour in lessons and around the College is generally good. The College is an orderly community in which pupils understand the difference between right and wrong. There are strong working relationships between pupils and members of the teaching and ancillary staff and these contribute to the College's positive ethos for learning. Pupils behave with courtesy to each other and to visitors, and the College is free from racism and other forms of harassment. There are infrequent instances of bullying but these are dealt with quickly and

effectively. There is misbehaviour in some lessons involving a minority of pupils, often boys, but the College has strategies in place to deal with this and they are being implemented effectively. Where pupils do transgress, the system of sanctions leads to exclusions, and whilst there has been a significant number, it is well used to ensure expectations are adhered to.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	899	153	3
White – Irish	4	0	0
White – any other White background	32	5	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	1	1
Chinese	3	1	0
Any other ethnic group	5	4	0
No ethnic group recorded	10	0	0

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

13. Attendance has been improving since the last inspection. Comparative figures are only available for secondary schools with pupils aged 11-16. In this context, College figures are unsatisfactory, as overall attendance for the last reporting year remains below the national average. However, almost one third of pupils had very good or better attendance last term, and almost ten per cent of the pupils achieved an excellent 100 per cent record. However, one fifth of the pupils had poor or very poor attendance levels of less than 80 per cent, thus undermining their progress. Good attendance is rewarded and a mark of the success of the strategy has been the need to significantly increase the budget provision to fund ‘attendance reward trips’ to places such as Alton Towers and the merit award system, which includes an element relating to attendance. Punctuality is generally good and sessions begin on time. Because of the large number of pupils who travel to college by bus, there are occasions when, through no fault of their own, a group of pupils may be late as a consequence of transport issues.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) – 2001/2

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.2	School data	1.4
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

14. The College provides pupils with opportunities to develop personally. The overall provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is now good, as is the response to this provision. There is a systematic opportunity for pupils to explore their own beliefs and values in religious education, and good opportunities for reflection on issues in subjects across the curriculum. Overall, there is an increase in the number of subjects making a qualitative contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development since the last inspection. Although requirements for a daily act of collective worship are not met, the quality of year assemblies seen was good and met requirements. The strong moral tone in assembly was taken seriously, and most pupils respond well to the wide range of moral issues, including family responsibility, in citizenship and PSHE lessons. The introduction of Assertive Discipline has had a positive impact on standards of behaviour. There are good opportunities in which pupils support charitable causes well, including international, national and local organisations. A group of pupils visit local residential care homes at Christmas. From this, pupils derive an awareness of need, adding to their moral, social and cultural development.
15. There is a wide range of extra-curricular provision for pupils to work with each other on cultural and sporting activities and to develop their social skills on visits and residential trips. In some subjects, pupils are encouraged to learn for themselves and from each other through research assignments and group work. Such opportunities are limited, however, and there are still a number of pupils who lack intellectual curiosity and see learning solely as the passive absorption of information. They do not have that independent, questioning approach to study which raises standards and aspirations. Pupils are involved in the running of the College through the work of the Council and practical ideas for improvement are taken up and acted upon. They feel their views are heard. Cultural provision is good, with very good contributions from several subjects, including religious education, art and design, music and modern languages. Display work round the College is widespread and makes a sustained contribution to pupils' personal development. The high level of involvement of pupils in various productions and the use of a variety of cultural styles is good practice.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students have good attitudes towards their studies.
- Students make a good contribution to the life of the College.

Commentary

16. There has been an increasing number of students continuing their education in the sixth form. The College is popular with young people at the age of 16 and most speak very positively about the opportunities it offers for their personal development. The attitudes of most sixth formers are good and make a significant contribution to their achievement as they work hard and respect the work of their teachers. The manner in which students willingly take on responsibility contributes very well to the life of the College, and many are good role models to younger pupils. They act as prefects and provide good support for younger pupils in supporting reading sessions, as peer mentors, and through tutor group support. Through the House system, students have a range of leadership roles giving good support in College and House extra-curricular activities. They are proud of their College and are good role models to the younger pupils who, seeing the privileges and responsibilities that come from being in the sixth form, aspire to this stage of their education. Students' attendance is sound and most use their private study time effectively. Through their behaviour and attitudes, most clearly show that they have a well-developed sense of moral and social principles. They relate very well together.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE COLLEGE

The overall **quality of education is very good**. Teaching is consistently good with examples of very good teaching in a significant proportion of lessons. Assessment procedures are most effective. The

curriculum provides very effectively for the needs and aspirations of pupils and students, and extra-curricular activities and opportunities to enrich the curriculum are very good. The quality of individual care, support and guidance is good, although the management for health and safety has some shortcomings. Most parents and carers contribute effectively to the life of the College.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is good overall in Years 9 to 11; it was at least satisfactory in virtually all lessons inspected. Teaching over time encourages the good achievement of most pupils so that they attain standards better than would be expected for their prior attainment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good in about one third of lessons seen and occasionally outstanding.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well taught.
- Monitoring and evaluation is effective.
- Assessment procedures are well used to support planning and pupils' progress.
- Homework is often well used to consolidate learning and also to extend it.
- The teaching of ICT in subjects across the curriculum is improving.
- Not all teachers consistently set work to develop pupils' literacy skills.
- Where teaching is not effective enough it reflects time constraints and shortcomings in behaviour management.

Commentary

17. **The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.** The overall monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is well managed, although there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in and across subjects. Pupils consider that they are generally well taught and that most staff are readily available to help them with any problems. Since the last inspection in 1998, good improvement in standards reflects the overall improvement in teaching and learning. It was acknowledged at the last inspection that the procedures for assessment were being effectively developed and this impetus has been maintained. Procedures are now good with examples of very good use, thus supporting lesson planning and helping pupils to see how they can improve their standards and achieve better. All pupils are assessed well on entry. Those with special educational needs are identified for intervention and for application for funding for support. Individual education plans and student profiles are very helpful and enable all staff to show very good knowledge of pupils' needs. Targets in individual education plans match pupils' needs very well.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 168 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (2.4%)	32 (19%)	75 (44.6%)	49 (29.2%)	7 (4.2%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)

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

18. There are examples of very good teaching in most subjects, but the most consistently good teaching was seen in English, art and design, drama, history, music and physical education. In Year 9, the quality of teaching and learning is good and builds on the work done to ensure continuity in the curriculum with the middle schools in the 'pyramid' which has been set up. Teaching seen was stronger in Year 11 than in Year 10, although the overall quality is good.
19. Where teaching is good or better, pupils learn and achieve well. Teachers make good use of their subject expertise and have the confidence to challenge pupils very well. The high

expectations that they set, for both behaviour and work, ensures that pupils' needs are well met and that they develop their knowledge, understanding and skills well. For example, some lessons in information and communication technology, English, mathematics, science, physical education, music and art and design displayed these qualities throughout and learning and achievement were very effective. The teaching strategies maintain pupils' interest and they concentrate well.

20. For example, in a Year 11 science lesson, the teacher generated the opportunity and atmosphere within which pupils can reflect on simplicity underlying the seemingly complex nature of DNA. Pupils used a card shuffle game to predict the number of possible combinations of the four base molecules available. Excellent attitudes to learning, engendered within an atmosphere of mutual respect and high expectations, amongst the highest attainers enabled them to engage enthusiastically in very well managed discussion enlivened by excellent teacher knowledge. Pupils were truly impressed when they calculated the enormous number of potential arrangements of the four chemical bases that could combine to form such a wide range of proteins found in the body. Clearly thriving on learning about cells and the structure of DNA within the nucleus, pupils consider the underlying simplicity of the molecular combinations that made up first simple amino acids and then larger, more complex proteins. A magical moment arose when a student linked the proteins in food we eat and digest into amino acids to those in DNA and declared 'We really are what we eat!', which the teacher promptly used effectively in further whole class reflection. In physical education, pupils reach high levels of attainment through high quality teaching. Teachers show their passion for and commitment to the subject through teaching which is challenging and exploits a range of learning styles to meet students need. Teachers encourage pupils to take responsibility for their learning. Reciprocal teaching in which pupils work together to advance their own learning adds to the achievement and understanding.
21. Behaviour management is generally good, and based on a combination of humour and effective relationships, which pupils enjoy. This good management of classrooms leads to lessons with a good climate for learning and adds to the overall College ethos. Most teachers also implement the assertive behaviour policy well but, where they do not have adequate control and utilise agreed approaches, lessons are occasionally unsatisfactory. Where planning is not effective enough and the work set does not meet the differing needs of the pupils, then learning and achievement are only satisfactory. For example, the over-use of work sheets and over-direction of lessons does not enable pupils to develop independent learning skills. Pupils do not always understand how to take responsibility for their learning and their research skills are not consistently developed. Whilst their achievement is helped by this teaching approach, it does not contribute sufficiently to their personal development. The increase in resources has facilitated the better use of computers and the overall teaching of ICT is improving, as a discrete subject and in its use across the curriculum. Teachers are beginning to use interactive whiteboards very well, as seen in mathematics and geography. There is good use of homework across all year groups which both consolidates and extends pupils' learning.
22. Teachers generally make very good use of time but learning is hampered when lessons are not long enough and topics cannot be covered in sufficient depth to ensure continuity. The College has recognised this shortcoming and is reviewing its timetable structure. Learning is also adversely affected when teachers do not consistently implement the literacy policy. When pupils do not understand the language and vocabulary well enough, they experience considerable difficulty in raising their standards. The use of the recommended Key Stage 3 Strategies in English, mathematics and science are being implemented and are beginning to impact positively on the raising of standards.
23. Overall, teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs are good. A significant number of pupils have short attention spans. Where they are provided with helpful routines and structured written work, they remain on task and behaviour is managed well. Very good literacy teaching, using a range of strategies, including ICT, engaged pupils very well and improved

their understanding and competence in spelling plural words. Although in Years 10 and 11 a minority of pupils go off site for two days, in some lessons they miss out on taking responsibility for their learning with too little opportunity for pupils to plan their work, and to make and explain their choices. Pupils holding statements to address their specific needs are supported well in class by teaching assistants. Pupils receive regular and very effective support through literacy workshops, lunchtime homework and handwriting clubs, and through paired reading with sixth formers, which aids their very good progress. Insufficient support staff limit behaviour management strategies for returning pupils to classrooms as early as possible. This also reduces opportunities for raising achievement further and for withdrawing pupils.

24. Provision for the minority of pupils with English as an additional language is very well managed by the co-ordinator, who understands the cultural background of these pupils as well as the nature of their language needs. She ensures that teachers are well briefed about these needs and how to meet them.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and leads to students' good achievement.
- Assessment is well used to improve standards.
- There is a need to further improve literacy and language skills.

Commentary

25. The quality of teaching and learning is good and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. As for younger pupils, students consider that they are well taught and that their teachers are readily available to help them with any problems. Most of the characteristics listed above in relation to effective teaching are apposite for the sixth form. The minority of pupils with special educational needs are well supported.
26. In the best lessons, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to pose open questions to stimulate discussion, provide opportunities for independent learning, and to have a balanced approach to teaching preferred by most students. For example, in a general studies lesson, students enjoyed the repartee with their teacher, and gained in their overall study skills. Good use is made of resources, as seen in geography where the teacher was being creative and exploiting the ICT interactive whiteboard particularly effectively. Teachers make good use of homework, which students were seen completing in small groups in which they were discussing assignments very well. However, there are still instances where lessons are over-directed and which do not facilitate independent learning or ensure that students' differing needs are met. Occasionally, students come to rely too heavily on being told what to do.
27. Assessment is very well used for planning and for target setting. Students willingly explain how this is effective in raising their standards and, whilst the targets can be demanding, they appreciate the support. In subjects such as art and design, theatre studies and music, students develop their skills in practical and oral terms, but the key factor which undermines performance across the curriculum is in basic literacy. Higher attainers do well but average and less capable students encounter difficulties with vocabulary and written work. Where the subject content of lessons is not stimulating or intellectually demanding enough, achievement suffers. Occasionally, the pace of lessons is not always well judged to meet students' differing learning needs, and they do not remain on task.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **very good** and ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. It provides a wide range of GCSE courses in Year 11 and AS and A2 examinations in Years 12 and 13 with additional elements of vocational courses across the 14-19 age range. The

There is equal access to the full curriculum for all pupils. There are very good opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Overall, this provision supports the raising of academic and personal standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum has good breadth and is relevant to the needs of the pupils.
- The specialist technology status is being very effectively used.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good; it is good for pupils who are gifted and talented.
- The extra-curricular opportunities provide many experiences in cultural, expressive arts and sporting activities, and these are very well supported.
- There is a comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programme.
- Staffing and resources are good overall.
- The accommodation is good and has been well improved.

Commentary

28. All National Curriculum subjects and religious education are taught in Year 9. Links with middle schools are very well developed and there is good curriculum continuity. Pupils consider that there is a broad range of subjects from which they can choose after Year 9 for GCSE. The curriculum is appropriate as a part of the 14-19 age range and very few pupils expressed the view that they were disaffected by the curriculum. It includes a range of link courses for a minority of pupils. It provides well for pupils' future education. The range of alternative and vocational opportunities is a strength of the provision, being well supported through the technology college status. However, the way in which the timetable is constructed leads to some 40-minute lessons, and these are not always long enough. Following a curriculum review, the provision in the current Year 10 will follow into Year 11, and when this happens, this issue will be mainly resolved.
29. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. They have full access to the curriculum. Some have a modified curriculum with a reduction in subjects, combined with literacy support, two days in college, Youth Award and Certificate of Achievement courses and work placements. These offer open access to apprenticeships and further education. The resources for pupils with special educational needs are good, but there are no electronic spellcheckers or keyboards for students to take to classrooms to improve their presentation and writing.
30. The College has recently given the responsibility for co-ordinating provision for gifted and talented pupils to the special needs co-ordinator. A subject audit has been carried out to identify both pupils and current enrichment activities by subjects. In all subjects, pupils are grouped by attainment and so high attainers are provided with challenge, but provision for gifted and talented pupils in all subjects is not yet consistent. There is good practice in English, mathematics, science and physical education. Pupils who are gifted in modern foreign languages are identified in partnership with middle schools to have taster courses in German taught by staff from the College, as an introduction to studying a second language from Year 9.
31. Provision for the small number of pupils whose first language is not English is good. Some need little support and that only in the form of paired reading with a sixth form student to consolidate their understanding of English. Where intensive support is required, it is well met by learning support assistants in-class, and withdrawal for more intensive tuition. If specialist teaching is required then such expertise is bought-in by the College. The provision is very effective with those pupils who attend regularly and they soon undertake the entire curriculum without additional support, but when attendance is irregular their language needs are not fully met in spite of the College's best endeavours. There is very good guidance and help from the Local Authority's advisory teacher. Resources are adequate and the co-ordinator is developing materials and purchasing texts to ensure that the College has the means to meet future need.

32. Pupils' personal development is well supported through an effective PSHE and citizenship programme. Pupils in Year 10 undertake work experience and find this beneficial. The curriculum is enriched by a very good and unusually extensive range of extra-curricular activities. The very good provision offers students the opportunity to participate in the arts, sport and cultural activities. The popular programme engages a large majority of the students – over 50 per cent of students engage in at least one activity during the academic year. Very good and innovative use is made of the extended day. A GCSE archaeology course operates over three lunch times. There is a wide range of sport, music and drama activities, visits, field trips and competitive sporting competition. Students who need extra help are well supported through subject-based workshops. Booster clubs operate in a wide range of GCSE courses to support students' academic aspirations. Staff give generously of their time. The activities, which are open to all, are valued by the students and their families. The College secures the safety of its students by offering every participant transport home at the end of the extended day.
33. There are sufficient teachers who have good subject knowledge overall and meet curriculum needs. The work of learning support assistants is very good. The accommodation is good overall and supports curriculum provision well. Improvements since the last inspection have been very beneficial and although some classrooms are small, most curriculum areas benefit from specialist suites and good resource bases. There are several computer rooms to which subjects can access ICT facilities, as well as some computers based in subject areas. A recent programme has seen the provision of interactive whiteboards and projectors, which teachers are beginning to use very well. However, some computer rooms require better ventilation. Overall, resources are good, although there is an inadequate supply of artefacts in religious education and of textbooks in geography.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of provision is very good.
- A wide range of academic and vocational courses aimed to meet the needs of all students.
- Timetable clashes prevent some students having sufficient time for some subjects.
- Statutory requirements for religious education are not met.

Commentary

34. The curriculum has good breadth and balance, and prepares students well for the next stage of their education. The College rightly recognises its responsibility to provide post-16 education for all its students irrespective of their academic capability. The range of courses enables students to proceed on to higher education or into alternative training programmes and careers. Most students are clear about their future pathway. Year 12 students start on a one-year course leading to an AS qualification or an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education. In Year 12, students then choose to study their AS subject in depth to A2 or take further units in their AVCE course. It is possible and sometimes desirable for students to study a mixture of traditional and vocational qualifications. The range of courses available is very good. If necessary, alternative arrangements are made for a small minority of students who may wish to take a subject such as psychology. There are new Oxbridge classes to raise aspirations further, and opportunities ranging from university to gap year in Japan to Diploma at West Suffolk College.
35. The general studies programme, which leads to the GCE examination, is not used effectively enough to provide an opportunity for the overall personal development of students. The syllabus is augmented by sessions in careers and higher education advice. It also contains elements of religious education which are supplemented by day courses but the statutory

requirements for religious education are not met. Students also have the opportunities to undertake the same very good programme of extra-curricular activities and community links which exist for younger pupils, as well as the extensive programme of visits.

36. The College is in a relatively isolated area and by offering such an exceptional range of subjects it fully meets the needs of the community it is living in. Offering such a wide range is not without its problems. For example, some classes are quite small whilst others can be too large. Sometimes, it is not always possible to fulfil the exact needs of each course. For example, this year some students in politics, leisure and tourism, and geography do not get sufficient time to study their chosen subject because of timetable difficulties. Despite any weaknesses, the College is commended for developing such an inclusive sixth form, which prepares its students so well for life when they leave.
37. Comments above relating to staffing and resources are equally applicable to the sixth form. Private study and social accommodation is good with good access to computers and the learning resource centre.

Care, guidance and support

The quality of individual care, support and guidance is good. Links with the first and middle schools are very good. Pupils and students are well known and enjoy very good relationships with staff; they feel that they are well supported and have access to pastoral guidance whenever they have problems. The monitoring of academic progress and provision of appropriate support are good. Arrangements for child protection meet requirements but the management for health and safety has some shortcomings.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction and transfer procedures.
- Staff know pupils and students and monitor their development well.
- Good structures exist to listen to learners and involve them in College decision-making.
- Good advice is provided at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The careers guidance programme is satisfactory but lacks continuity.
- Staff promote safe practice well in lessons but the management and monitoring of health and safety has shortcomings.

Commentary

38. The effective support of pupils begins with the thorough systems which exist for their transfer to the College at the beginning of Year 9, two-thirds of the way through their Key Stage 3 education. The structures which exist in the 'pyramid' established with the middle schools encompass both personal records and curriculum development. This is a strength. The support given to pupils after they have joined the school and throughout Years 9 to 11 is good. This is because there is an effective assessment structure and close monitoring of pupils' progress. In addition, the monitoring of pupils' personal development is effectively carried out by pastoral staff so that when pupils are experiencing difficulty they are well known and can be supported. The system of rewards and sanctions is generally well applied, although not all staff ensure that the assertive discipline procedures are consistently operated. These procedures have been very well developed since the last inspection and have helped to raise the attitudes and behaviour of pupils, leading to a more orderly community. Whilst exclusions are correctly used, the school strives to keep pupils in school and very good use is made of the 'exit room' whereby pupils have supervised time out of lessons in which they have been disrupting learning. This room is well monitored by senior staff to ascertain any patterns so that support for pupils and staff is achieved.
39. Through this effective level of support, the use of targets for work and behaviour has helped to raise academic standards. Pupils and parents speak highly of this support, and the

introduction of target setting days has been very beneficial. Excellent arrangements exist with outside agencies for the inclusion of pupils with a range of backgrounds and special educational needs, including sensory support. Pupils benefit from positive and caring relationships with adults in the College and the current deployment of and continuous access to learning mentors, teaching assistants and sixth formers in the learning support centre. Examination arrangements and innovative approaches to confidence building through drama, music, careers and counselling help to raise pupils' self-esteem.

40. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are good and effectively identify internal truanting and those pupils with patterns of absence. The College uses an electronic registration system and pupils are registered in every lesson, leading to some improvement in attendance levels. A deputy head teacher, supported by a very effective head of year and tutor structure, and very good administrative support, is committed to improving levels of attendance. Parents are contacted on the first day of absence if no explanation has been provided. Rigorous procedures are in place to consider requests for holidays in term time and the decision about whether to authorise such absence takes account of previous attendance patterns. Attendance records are well used in target setting days, and pupils are supported in catching up with their work, after periods of absence, by the pupil support centre.
41. The College Council is well used to promote the opinions of the pupils and students. They are listened to well and the College has already analysed pupil and student opinions through a questionnaire. In discussion, pupil and student representatives spoke positively about their involvement in the College life and how this supports their personal development. Issues relating to the curriculum, timetable and transport have been considered through this system.
42. Careers advice is satisfactory and the careers service staff provide good support. There is a distinct separation between the management of careers provision for pupils up to the age of 16 and those in the sixth form, which does not benefit continuity of provision. Careers resources are adequate and generally current in most areas, and increasing use is made of the Internet as a research tool. The head of careers in the main College has only recently been given this role and has yet to undertake an audit of provision to inform the preparation of a realistic, costed development plan. He has begun to evaluate work in this area and recognises that provision could be improved. A programme has been developed which covers decision-making, target setting, self-evaluation and action planning.
43. Child protection arrangements are well established and meet requirements. There is an appropriate health and safety policy which is supported by the local education authority policy. Generic policies specific to curriculum areas, such as science and physical education, are in place. Safe practice is promoted well in lessons and staff generally provide good role models. Equipment is regularly tested and any defective items are taken out of use until repaired. Emergency evacuations are practised during the normal teaching day but not at other times. However, the overall co-ordination and management of health and safety is unsatisfactory because of a lack of understanding of the role and its requirements. This has been recognised, in part, by the College, which has recently engaged external consultants to support them in this area of their work. The preparation and use of formal risk assessments is underdeveloped, monitoring of the implementation of the relevant policies is not sufficiently thorough and insufficient attention has been paid to arrangements for ensuring appropriate consideration is given to the needs of pupils and staff engaged in extra-curricular activities. Provision for first aid during the College day is good and qualified first aiders are readily accessible. However, no co-ordinated consideration has been given to the availability of first aid during after-College activities and this element of the provision is unsatisfactory.

Sixth form

The overall support and guidance is good. Students are well involved in decision-making. Some of the points listed in the main commentary above are equally applicable to the sixth form, especially in relation to health and safety.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction procedures into post-16 courses are good.
- Staff monitor students and their development well.
- Good structures exist to listen to involve students in College life.
- Good advice is provided for higher education and alternative pathways.

Commentary

44. Students are well known. There is effective use of the data from students' performance in Year 11 and at GCSE to guide them into their subject choices, being well supported through the range of academic and vocational options on offer. Student assessment is well developed and used well by the head of sixth and the team of tutors to monitor progress and set targets. Effective action is taken to congratulate good performance and to 'encourage' students who are not doing as well as they ought.
45. Students are involved in the College Council and also work with pupils in the main College through peer mentoring, paired reading and the 'turning point' group in drama. Those who participate enjoy their roles and it enables pupils to see the benefits of continuing their education post-16. The sixth form leadership team listens to the views of students. For example, in health and social care, a suggestion box has been set up for students to tell the department what is not working; as a result of this, some of the points raised have been acted upon. There is a range of activities to further enrich sixth form provision such as the 'Breaking Barriers' conference, social events and opportunities to work in the community as part of the 'Millennium Volunteers' organisation.
46. The careers programme is well structured. It provides students with impartial advice. Very good support occurs for those students who apply for higher education but there is also an effective programme for alternative pathways and direct career entry. This is well supported through links with the business community, visits and links with other Colleges.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The partnership between College and home is good, although a minority of parents do not respond to the College's efforts to involve them in their children's learning. Links with local schools, colleges and the community are very good. Together, these links play an important part in supporting pupils' learning at College and at home and providing opportunities to enhance and enrich the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The partnership with parents makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning, although a minority of parents do not involve themselves sufficiently in supporting their children.
- The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) committee works hard to support the work of the College.
- Parents are provided with good information about their children's progress and the life and work of the College.
- Links with local schools and the community are very good.

Commentary

47. The majority of parents provide good support for their children's learning and personal development. The College has maintained the good partnership found at the time of the last inspection and has successfully improved some elements, such as securing a small increase in attendance at consultation meetings. There does, however, still remain a minority of parents who do not readily involve themselves with the College.
48. The PTA is run by a small but hardworking committee and successfully raises large sums of money to support the work of the College and provides additional resources and learning opportunities for pupils, in addition to supporting initiatives such as the merit award scheme. The work of the PTA is appreciated by staff and benefits pupils and students well.
49. Parents are pleased with the College and the education which it provides and have very positive views of the provision. Through regular newsletters, and very informative letters about specific activities and events, parents are kept well informed about the life and work of the College. Staff seek to involve parents when there are pastoral or academic concerns. Annual reports provide a good picture of what pupils are doing and how they are progressing, with comments from pupils and from pastoral staff. Parents have the opportunity to attend three consultation meetings each year and these, together with reports and opportunities to attend meetings such as those considering option choices, provide parents with good information about their child's progress and seek to involve them in a partnership to support their child's learning. There is effective communication with parents of students with special educational needs. Pupils and parents are fully involved in setting their targets and in annual reviews. Staff seek to be readily accessible to parents to provide information or discuss concerns. The College normally manages to resolve any concerns of parents informally. However, in the event that a parent should wish to make a formal complaint, there is an effective complaints procedure. There are good arrangements, in conjunction with the Parent Teacher Association, to survey parents regularly and gain their views, which contribute to the College improvement planning process.
50. The College is part of a very constructive 'pyramid' of local schools which share many challenges that they can address through common strategies. Links with these schools and with other educational institutions are very good. The College acts as a focal point for the co-ordination and development of a number of local initiatives such as curriculum developments, the adoption of common assessment procedures, the use of common texts, the sharing of expertise and work with a behaviour consultant. Through the specialist technology college status, funding has been attracted which benefits the 'pyramid' and the wider community. Several staff support work in other schools. The very good links significantly benefit the arrangement for the transfer of pupils to the College and the continuity of their learning.
51. Community links are very good and were strengthened and exemplified by the support that the College secured for its application for specialist status. Links with the community and a wide range of visits and visitors provide very good enhancement and enrichment of the curriculum and support pupils' personal and social development as well as widening their experiences and giving them opportunities to learn about the needs of others. The College has very well-developed links with local businesses and military bases and makes very good use of these businesses and organisations to support and enhance the learning opportunities of its pupils and students. It plays an active role in the life of the local community, and surrounding businesses support work experience opportunities for pupils aged 15, enable the College to provide a work-based curriculum for some pupils, provide mentors and make excellent contributions to special events such as conferences on work and business. All these links contribute to making the College an active, dynamic and stimulating place for pupils to work and develop.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership is very good and management is good overall, with examples of very good practice. The governors are very supportive and have a very clear understanding of the College's strengths and weaknesses. There is a strategic approach for future development. Effective self-evaluation draws well on a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation with clear targets and support procedures for improvement in the quality of education and the further raising of standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a very good educational vision.
- There is effective management by the leadership group with some very good practice amongst subject leaders and pastoral staff.
- The governors are very supportive and have a strategic overview but do not fulfil all of their statutory duties.
- There has been good improvement since the last inspection.
- Administrative staff make a good contribution to the life of the College.
- The College gives very good value for money overall and the sixth form is cost-effective.

Commentary

52. The last inspection report referred to strong leadership and this continues to be a significant strength of the College. The headteacher combines intellectual rigour and integrity with a sensitive, thoughtful and perceptive approach to the leadership of the College and is very well supported by his two deputies and the leadership group. His influence in setting and expecting high standards of performance and behaviour is reflected well in the standards and achievement of most pupils. He provides very clear educational direction for the College and seeks to ensure that it is inclusive and caring, and committed to providing equality of opportunity for all. Together with his senior management group, he provides a very good role model for other staff and pupils.
53. Roles and responsibilities of senior staff have been appropriately redefined in the past year and this has brought greater precision and focus to their work. They have clearly delegated areas of responsibility that they undertake very effectively to ensure the smooth running of the College. The leadership team have a very good understanding of what needs to be done to move the College forward and have good procedures for monitoring and evaluating its performance and taking effective action to secure improvements. Appropriate systems and procedures have been implemented to monitor and evaluate the work of subject departments. For example, senior managers are linked with specific departments to account for their progress in implementing the College's policies and priorities. Performance data is used well to look at trends, identify areas of weakness and set targets for improvement. This data includes test and examination results, in addition to pupils' performance on standardised tests.
54. The leadership and management of other key staff is good overall, with some significant strengths. The way in which heads of department monitor and evaluate the work in their areas of responsibility, including teaching and learning, is generally good, although there is some inconsistency, for example, in science and business studies. Not all departments use data consistently or rigorously enough to set targets for pupils or to plan more effectively to meet the needs of their learners. Pastoral staff are very effective. The leadership and management of special educational needs are very good and there has been good progress since the last inspection. The support to students has increased and meets their range of learning, emotional and behavioural needs in a variety of ways which show knowledgeable and innovative leadership. The co-ordinator is a very good role model and has created effective teams. Administrative staff are efficient and provide good support to senior staff. As a result, the College runs well on a day-to-day basis.
55. The professional relationships between the governors and the headteacher are very good. In conjunction with the senior staff, the governing body makes an effective contribution to shaping the future direction of the College, evident through the long-term planning which underpins the special technology status bid which they successfully made. Governors have a very clear

understanding of their role and of the appropriate boundaries between governance and management. They maintain a strategic overview and bring a wide range of experience and expertise to discussions, being very supportive of the College and proud of its achievements. Governors are committed to providing an ethos of caring and achievement that successfully permeates the College and enables pupils and students to develop personally as well as academically. Through their work in committees and the focused visits undertaken by selected governors, they monitor the College's performance appropriately and have a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The governing body undertakes its responsibilities well in the main. However, they have not ensured that they comply with all of their statutory responsibilities including providing a daily act of collective worship, appropriate RE provision in the sixth form, and monitoring arrangements for health and safety.

56. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Good practice in behaviour management has been significant but more staff are needed to ensure the effectiveness of the current strong links between support and classroom provision. The improved examination results are very creditable. The specialist technology status has led to improving resources and the overall quality of education, and the provision for ICT now meets statutory requirements. Although there has been clear progress, the overall improvement in developing the whole College approach for literacy development, and independent learning skills, is only satisfactory.
57. The College's priorities for the coming year are set out in the improvement plan which supports the specialist technology college status plan. These priorities reflect its ambitions very well and are reviewed regularly, taking account of the views of staff, governors, pupils/students, parents and other stakeholders. They relate to improving aspects of the curriculum, pastoral care and academic attainment, staffing, and land, buildings and resources, and are appropriate to the College's stage of development. Budgeting and financial planning are very good and sharply focused to support educational priorities and areas for development. Annual allocations are devolved to departments and priorities are related to raising standards of attainment. However, adjustments to funding during the course of the year and the uncertainties of the level of future funding present difficulties in long term planning but the College copes very well. Systems of financial control are very good. The last audit report reflected this provision. Only a small amount is held on contingency.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,405,307	Balance from previous year	78,158
Total expenditure	3,374,027	Balance carried forward to the next	88,297
Expenditure per pupil	3,618		

58. Procedures to ensure best value for money are very good. There are costed departmental development plans and very good use is made of available comparative data to analyse the effectiveness of the College and to review the impact of expenditure on pupils and on the standards they attain. The College carefully accounts for the additional funds and grants which it receives and they are used appropriately for the purposes designated. Based on the outcomes in relation to standards and the overall quality of education and effective management, the College gives very good value for money.

Sixth form

59. Overall, leadership is very good and management is developing well.

60. The overall comments made above about College leadership and management are equally applicable. The leadership of the sixth form is under the direction of the assistant headteacher, who is a member of the College leadership team. She works with the assistant head of sixth form and the Key Stage 5 co-ordinator to lead a team of experienced tutors. The sixth form leadership team are good role models to both students and staff and student aspirations have started to rise. There is a clear educational vision and the curriculum now offers a wide range of vocational and traditional courses. Students are effectively monitored for their academic achievement and personal development. Key staff in subject areas are managed by senior staff and reviews are then undertaken by the main College leadership group. Sixth form numbers have increased over the past few years and the profile of the sixth form has been raised in the main College. The shortcoming in continuity for careers education with Year 11 is also visible in the limited time available for links with Connexions.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

The provision in English is **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' arrive with below average standards and by the end of Year 11 generally achieve well.
- There is an improving trend in standards in English Language in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils attain average standards in English Literature and their levels of achievement are good.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- Leadership and management are good.

Commentary

61. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were below the national and similar school averages for boys and girls. This represents satisfactory achievement when account is taken of pupils' below average attainment on entry to the College at the start of that Year. The results are broadly in line with those attained at the time of the last inspection and over recent years. Results were below those in mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the A* to C range in the 2003 GCSE English Language examinations was below average for boys and girls and this reversed the improving trend of recent years. This was because of their poor literacy skills. At A*-G, the results were in line with the average. Girls continue to perform better than boys. Levels of achievement were satisfactory when account is taken of their below average attainment at the start of the course. Results in the English Literature examinations were average and a significant improvement on what was attained in 2002 and at the time of the last inspection. The levels of achievement in this subject were good.
62. Standards by the end of Year 9 are below average and by the end of Year 11 are average. This reflects good achievement over the three-year period, and reflects the national test and examination results. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. Standards in speaking and listening cover a wide spectrum. The most capable pupils have a good vocabulary and use it accurately. They speak with confidence and can explain their opinions in an assured manner. Similarly, they listen well. However, whilst they make sound progress over time, other pupils do not always express their answers clearly, although teachers do provide good opportunities to develop speaking skills. A minority have poor concentration and this inhibits their capability to listen to the explanations and then develop their own oral answers.
63. Pupils are writing in a range of styles for different purposes and with reasonable accuracy. Levels of achievement for boys and girls are satisfactory. There are many, however, who have weak literacy skills and boys in particular have difficulty paragraphing their extended writing and making appropriate use of varied sentence structures. Standards are closer to national averages by the end of Year 11 because of improved literacy skills and the achievement of all groups of pupils, including the small number whose first language is not English, is good. The work of older pupils seen re-establishes the improving trend in standards of recent years. In English Literature, the critical writing on the set texts is of a high standard and boys and girls and pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in this aspect of their work. This is a strength in the work of the department.

64. Pupils make good progress in reading and reach average standards by the end of Year 11. All pupils read an increasingly difficult range of texts with understanding and can read aloud fluently and with expression. The moral and social issues they reflect on in their reading contribute significantly to their moral and social development. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are well developed. There are a small number of boys in Years 9 and 10, however, who do not listen to what others are saying and whose attitudes are unsatisfactory. They are not making sufficient progress.
65. The quality of teaching overall is good and accounts for how well pupils achieve by the end of Year 11. Pupils are now benefiting from stability and continuity in the teaching they receive after a period of staffing difficulties. There is no unsatisfactory teaching, a significant improvement on the last inspection. The subject is taught by specialists who have an enthusiasm for their work. They are able to motivate most pupils and now have in place appropriate strategies to address the underachievement of some of the boys. Very good working relationships underpin the work of the department and effective planning and high expectations ensure that the majority of pupils learn well. There is increasing use of ICT in word-processing and other applications. The challenge facing the department is to ensure that the rigour and challenge of the best teaching becomes the norm in all lessons. However, the 40-minute lesson is insufficient for the teachers to cover all the learning objectives in depth.
66. Subject leadership and management are good. Recent staffing difficulties have been overcome and there is now a team of committed and able teachers who are working closely to raise standards. Morale is high and there is a sense of common purpose. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection in standards and achievement but also in the assessment of pupils' work, which is now done effectively. Pupils are clear about how well they are doing and what they must do to improve and a tracking procedure is in place to monitor their progress over time. Teachers share good practice and are aware of the need to raise the quality of all teaching to that of the best in the department. There is the capacity for further improvement because teachers are self-critical and committed to improving the quality of their teaching and pupils' learning.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

- Progress has been satisfactory in raising standards.
- A policy is now in place which is monitored and reviewed, although inconsistencies still exist in its application.
- Leadership and management are good and have the potential to remedy the shortcomings.

Commentary

67. A key issue from the last inspection was to support subject areas in raising literacy standards through implementing a whole College literacy policy. Overall, progress has been satisfactory. Initially, the overall management and co-ordination was not clear enough. Now, an appropriate policy is in place, and is reviewed on an annual basis. The present co-ordinator has done much to promote a whole College approach to improving pupils' literacy skills by raising the profile of language and literacy and ensuring that members of staff have been trained in various teaching strategies. There has been good guidance and support to subject areas, resulting in much good practice. For example, in information and communication technology, pupils have a good understanding of specialist terms and their use, and they are given opportunities to discuss their work and to talk about it with the whole class. The teachers correct inaccuracies in written English when marking pupils' books. Again, in history, the provision for improving literacy is good because of the systematic teaching of writing skills and the effective use of specialist vocabulary. Pupils in physical education are given opportunities to talk about their work because they are encouraged to evaluate their own and each other's performances.
68. Not all subjects are using a systematic approach to raising pupils' literacy skills through such good practice. Many pupils lack confidence when speaking and there is not always sufficient

encouragement or opportunity given to reflect on their work and learn through discussion and the exchange of ideas. Not enough opportunities are consistently given to develop their confidence in the use of formal language. There are instances where extended writing is underdeveloped and pupils do not receive adequate guidance on how to order and present their thinking in writing in a logical and fluent manner. Not every subject is addressing pupils' written accuracy through the correcting of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

69. The co-ordinator is very aware of the shortcomings and is beginning to have an effective impact, although there is not sufficient time allocated for this work. The policy is well structured, reflecting the national Key Stage 3 Strategy approach, and has the potential to further support the raising of standards.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are effective links with feeder middle schools.
- Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11 is good.
- Good procedures for assessing pupils' work are in place but are not always used consistently to raise the quality of teaching.
- Pupils have few opportunities to make social and cultural links in countries where French and German are spoken.
- The subject is managed well and there is a good vision for future improvement.

Commentary

70. Pupils' attainment on entry is below average. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, teacher assessment results show that standards in French are broadly in line with the national average. This represents good achievement. The upward trend in GCSE has been maintained. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in French in 2003 shows significant improvement on the previous year and was in line with the average. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11 is good. German is offered to higher attaining pupils from Year 9. Teacher assessments again show that standards were average. The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grades A*-C in 2003 was in line with the national average. Pupils are achieving well in German.
71. Inspection evidence shows that most pupils reach expected standards in French and German by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. They demonstrate developing accuracy in spelling and the use of correct verb endings. Many can write short paragraphs in which they refer to present and past events. They can identify key words and phrases from a recorded passage. Spoken language is often hesitant and pronunciation, uncertain. Pupils with special educational needs, the minority from the travelling community or with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress.
72. The quality of teaching and learning in French and German is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The most effective teaching takes place where teachers make good use of French or German when communicating with the class. This provides pupils with a good role model. High expectations of what pupils can achieve and the provision of appropriately challenging activities encourages good standards. Less effective teaching occurs when pupils are not given specific learning objectives and they are inadequately prepared for individual or pair work. Pupils' attitudes are good in all year groups. The use of information and communication technology is underdeveloped and opportunities to make social and cultural links abroad are limited. This results in pupils having little opportunity to develop their use of the foreign language.

73. The area is well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision for future improvement, based on an effective evaluation of needs. Assessment is good and teachers have clear records of pupils' progress. Use of this information, to help teachers plan appropriate learning activities, is not fully embedded in practice. Links with feeder middle schools are effective. In addition to providing continuity with French teaching, these provide opportunities for Year 8 pupils to be taught German by College staff, as part of a programme for gifted and talented learners. Since the last inspection, the area has made good improvement. Increased use of information and communication technology has been planned for within new schemes of work, and is a crucial development in supporting the raising of standards further.

MATHEMATICS

The quality of provision in mathematics is **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is now good and has improved over time.
- The implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy is improving standards and provision.
- The use of IT by teachers is having a positive influence on pupils' learning.
- Teaching and learning is only satisfactory overall.
- Leadership and management through effective teamwork and delegation is good.

Commentary

74. In 2003, National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 were average when compared nationally with all schools and well above average for similar schools. They were better than English and in line with science. They have improved steadily over time, and show that pupils make good achievement from below average standards on entry. In 2003, boys and girls performed equally well, with results for the higher attainers being close to the national average.
75. The 2003 GCSE results at grades A*-C were below average when compared with all schools nationally and average for similar schools. The results have improved steadily since 1999 and are in line with the national trend, but the recent boys' results, which fell by ten per cent, significantly contributed to the overall decline in 2003. Pupils did worse in mathematics than most of their other subjects, including English and science, and girls, atypically, did better than the boys. However, based on the year group's attainment when it completed Year 9, the results represent satisfactory achievement.
76. Overall standards by the end of Year 9 are average. Almost all pupils can perform accurate calculations without using calculators and mentally solve simple problems. The higher-attaining pupils achieve very well in the accelerated learning group solving demanding problems that require understanding and skill to describe and construct loci in two dimensions. Average-attaining pupils achieve well when challenged to extend their use of isometric grid paper to sketch solid objects and calculate their volumes. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well and are effectively supported by a learning assistant. They can, for example, use basic multiplication and then explore, identify and understand number patterns based on multiples.
77. By the end of Year 11, the overall standards are average. Gifted and talented pupils achieve very well when learning independently with very good support. They accurately calculate and apply standard deviations to interpret statistical data and graphs. Average-attaining pupils, when using algebraic functions and substitution into formulae, are challenged well. Pupils with special educational needs are well provided for in a small group, achieve well and learn enthusiastically. They convert between quantities, using calculations and graphs, and discuss related practical applications.

78. Across Years 9 to 11, the achievement overall is good and is similar for boys and girls, for pupils with special educational needs, and for the different ethnic minority groups. The gifted and talented pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well.
79. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory, but with some strengths. They are good in Year 9. There is no unsatisfactory teaching but in a significant proportion of lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11, the teaching is not challenging enough. Teaching is most effective when there are high expectations and regular challenge provided through supported independent learning, used, for example, in most accelerated learning. The good features of teaching which raise achievement are the good planning, structure, and effective starter activities based on the National Numeracy Strategy. Additionally, teachers' skilful use of IT to deliver interactive presentations involves pupils and increases pace of lessons. Where teaching has weaknesses that impede achievement, it is because methods or activities are not well matched to pupils' needs, including responses to bad behaviour. Expectations are low and insufficient demands are made on pupils. The marking of pupils' work in these classes is not regular enough and it does not provide enough guidance on how to improve.
80. Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed head of area has made a very good start in eliminating inconsistency in departmental practices. Good delegation, effective teamwork and link to the senior leadership help promote sharing good practice and bring about improvement. For example, curriculum innovation raises the achievement of the most able pupils through booster and revision classes. There is good supporting of staff in behaviour management and setting targets for pupils helps raise standards by providing feedback on levels achieved. The procedures for departmental reviews and observation of lessons lead to monitoring and evaluation but pupils' work is not systematically included, and some available performance data of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are not analysed. Departmental planning is sound but is sometimes restricted when success criteria do not quantify the improvement of standards being sought. It is recognised that the use of ICT requires further development and resources are being reviewed in line with the technology college status.
81. There has been good improvement since the last inspection including standards, pupils' achievement and assessment. A culture of improvement has been strengthened, and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. However, there is still insufficient promotion and support of the use of language.

Mathematics across the curriculum

- Standards are average.
- Co-ordination is satisfactory.

Commentary

82. Overall, standards are average. In mathematics, teachers plan and use a range of strategies to improve and sustain pupils' skills in calculations through mental, oral and written approaches. The framework developed by the College, taking account of the National Strategy, to promote and improve numeracy across other subjects lacks the co-ordination to be more effective. As a result, some opportunities are missed for subjects to make their specific contributions. There are, nevertheless, some good examples of using mathematics and developing pupils' numeracy, in other subjects: Year 9 pupils in ICT perform mental calculations in building up formulae, and use spreadsheets when analysing business costs; in geography, pupils with special educational needs imaginatively construct composite bar charts which display aspects of Ghana's economic development; in design and technology, numeracy skills are satisfactorily developed through a range of activities which require calculations and measuring accuracy; in Years 10 and 11, pupils made particularly good use of a wide range of numeracy skills in science, including calculations, accurate tabulation of experimental data, using formulae, and producing good graphs and charts; and in physical

education, the numerical calculation of competitive individual and team points motivated pupils to participate in their skills circuit more enthusiastically.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9.
- Teachers expectations of pupils are good.
- Pupils develop good numeracy skills but do not have enough opportunities to use or develop literacy and ICT skills.
- Teaching quality is not closely monitored so that weaker teaching is eradicated and satisfactory teaching is enhanced.

Commentary

83. Pupils enter in Year 9 with standards below the national average and made good progress by the end of the year. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests were in line with national averages and, compared with pupils' prior attainment, results were well above average. Results were better than those in English and similar to those in mathematics. For the first time in five years, standards at GCSE in 2003 dropped just below national average for pupils gaining the higher A-C grades. The proportion of pupils gaining A-G grades was also just below the national average. From inspection evidence, standards by the end of both Years 9 and 11 are at least in line with national averages, generally reflecting previous test and examination results. Girls attain better than boys. Pupils achieve well in Year 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11.
84. All teaching seen in Year 9 was at least good, and the best teaching was very good. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall, ranging from excellent to poor. When teaching is very good, strong subject knowledge brings relevance to learning, taking pupils beyond the textbooks and relating science to everyday experience. Very good teaching strategies, a warm relationship with pupils and good resources promote very good attitudes to learning and lead to interactive discussion, for example, in a Year 9 lesson about smoking and recent media campaigns highlighting the effects of smoking on blood circulation. Excellent attitudes amongst the highest attainers in Year 11 enable them to engage enthusiastically in very well managed discussion enlivened by excellent teacher knowledge. Clearly thriving on learning about cells and the structure of DNA, pupils consider the simplicity of the molecular combinations that make up proteins. A magical moment arises when a student links proteins in food to those in DNA and declares 'We really are what we eat!', which the teacher promptly uses effectively in whole class reflection. Examples of pupils' work indicate good teaching with high expectations. Work in books is generally well presented and is carefully marked to ensure accuracy, but occasionally inaccuracies slip through and, for pupils with limited literacy skills, notes are incomplete or illegible. Teachers use positive comments and targets are set with guidance on how to do better, with appropriate rewards. There is good development of numeracy skills as pupils record data from experiments, calculate and present graph work. Textbooks and teaching strategies have been carefully chosen to promote pupils to take responsibility for their own notes by reading comprehension activities. Good instances occur where homework is well used.
85. When teaching is good, directed questioning keeps pupils on task and focused on the learning objectives for the lesson in a class in which behaviour management is important. Much of the teaching in Years 10 and 11 is focused on behaviour management but when teaching is poor, weaknesses in drawing pupils to attention and in responding to pupils' questions resulted in poor behaviour on the part of a significant number of pupils and limited learning by others in the class.

86. However, the range of opportunities for all pupils to develop speaking and listening skills, and to enhance their reading and writing skills, is limited and the best practice within the department is not shared. Key words are highlighted but overall there are insufficient opportunities for literacy development. There is very little evidence of the pupils using and learning through ICT.
87. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as has been improvement since the last inspection. The department has improved the GCSE grades attained by pupils in the middle and lower sets by devising a wider range of opportunities for pupils to carry out assessed scientific investigations and to refine skills, particularly in coursework. There has recently been an improved range of ICT resources for teaching and learning, although it is recognised that this requires even further attention. Similarly, the attention given to the systematic teaching of specific science skills in Year 9 is only satisfactory. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning does not identify clearly enough how the shortcomings will be eradicated, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The planning for the systematic development of literacy skills through a range of different types of activities has not been sufficiently addressed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results have improved significantly since the introduction of GNVQ.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils achieve well because of their positive attitudes and behaviour.
- There are not enough differentiated resources to challenge the most able pupils.
- Leadership and management are good, and committed to raising standards further.
- Some rooms are uncomfortable work areas because of high temperatures.

Commentary

88. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 indicates that standards are above average. Public examination results at the end of Year 11 have made significant improvement since the last inspection with the introduction of GNVQ. In 2003, the full award intermediate GNVQ results are average, although foundation results are well below average because pupils lacked motivation. The foundation level Part One Award results are above average because of the higher attainment by girls. Girls achieve better than boys in all examinations.
89. Achievement is good overall in Year 9, and standards are average. Pupils make a good start to using formulae on a business spreadsheet and show an understanding of how this aids efficiency. Pupils with mid to low capability benefit from two lessons weekly, and achieve well with the support of their teachers and well planned teaching resources. The most capable pupils achieve satisfactorily with only one lesson weekly, below the nationally recommended time. There is not enough challenge for more capable pupils when learning tasks are not designed to raise their prior achievement. In Years 10 and 11, achievement overall is satisfactory, and standards are average. Year 10 pupils build on their prior skills and knowledge to prepare spreadsheets as used in business. Year 11 pupils produce scaled drawings for an office suite, and use their knowledge well to select appropriate graphics software for different types of drawing. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as do the minority who have English as an additional language. Most pupils in all years have positive attitudes to their work, which helps them to learn.
90. The quality of teaching and learning are good, with examples seen ranging from satisfactory to very good. Non-specialist and inexperienced teachers benefit from teaching resources produced by the two subject leaders, who use their very good knowledge to provide a common

base for all classes. Differentiated resources are being developed for the lowest achieving pupils in Year 9, but not for the higher achievers. The best teaching uses a good range of teaching activities to engage and motivate pupils, and interactive whiteboards are used particularly well to involve pupils actively in the learning process. Completed work is marked frequently and there is good guidance to help pupils improve, although the quality of marking is less consistent in Years 10 and 11. Formative assessment in all lessons is good. Teachers monitor the pupil progress well whilst they work on stepped tasks, and this enables good individual support to be focused where it is most needed. There is positive support for improving literacy, and teachers use word lists and writing frames to help pupils structure their work more effectively and use the correct terminology, and this enhances the learning of lower achievers and those with English as an additional language.

91. Leadership and management are good. There is a new team since the last inspection. The head of department and her deputy have a clear commitment to improvement, and the curriculum and teaching resources are reviewed with experience. Assignments for GNVQ are focused on achievement at pass level, with highly structured tasks, but there is not enough opportunity for pupils to develop higher-level understanding through independent problem solving activities. Formal arrangements for sharing good practice amongst the number of non-specialist teachers are limited because of other subject responsibilities. There are very good opportunities for extra-curricular activities, for example, computer rooms are available to pupils at lunchtime and there are catch up or booster classes. An extra twilight lesson enables a small group of Year 11 pupils to take the Applied GCSE when option choices preclude this during the day. Liaison with middle schools is very good as are the induction arrangements to accustom new pupils to the College.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

92. Standards across the curriculum are broadly average. There has been a significant investment in computer hardware and software since the last inspection, leading to good improvement. The above average number of computers, specialist ICT lessons for all, and good pupil access to the new technologies, all have a positive impact on standards, reflecting the impact of the specialist technology college status. This includes the phased development of interactive whiteboards across subjects. Many teachers have completed their basic ICT training, and are developing lessons to include ICT to support learning. The statutory ICT curriculum is well supported by science and design and technology in Years 10 and 11, where pupils are introduced to data logging and control technology. There is good use of ICT to support learning in English, although it is still underdeveloped in mathematics, science, geography, RE and design and technology in Year 9. The learning environment in half the computer rooms is unsatisfactory because of poor temperature control, and some smaller rooms have a cramped working area. Technical support is outsourced and provides good on-site maintenance.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Overall, provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory.
- Literacy skills are restraining performance for many pupils.
- Greater impetus needs to be given to improve the use of assessment.
- The commitment of the current staff to improve the provision.

Commentary

93. Overall results in teacher assessments and in public examinations have shown some variation since the last inspection, often being below or well below average at the end of Years 9 and 11. Although there has been an upward trend, assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were slightly below average. Results in the short course GCSE examination in 2003 were average but in the full course were well below. This is an improving picture and whilst there is a difference in attainment by gender, it is far less significant than that found nationally.
94. Standards by the end of Year 9 are average. Standards are restricted by weak basic skills, especially literacy, which compromises pupils' answers to written or oral questions, especially when extended writing is required. Standards of presentation are satisfactory overall, but too often pupils do not ensure that their work is kept in an orderly manner; loose papers are in danger of being lost. In Years 10 and 11, the pattern improves, and standards are average and achievement is satisfactory for pupils of all levels of capability. Pupils make comprehensive notes they can use for exam revision and topic coverage is often good. Fieldwork had been a barrier to exam success in the recent past but steps, including changing GCSE specification, have had a positive impact on standards, as witnessed in the 2003 results.
95. The rising standards and achievement reflects an improving pattern in the quality of teaching which is good in Year 9. There is sound planning, good subject knowledge, good pace and levels of expectation in the lessons seen. This leads to pupils' good progress. Learning is only satisfactory since some pupils can lack confidence or struggle with written work. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers do not always make the work to be done clear enough, or the time that they are given to complete the tasks. Pace, challenge and expectations vary and thus pupils do not attain as well as they might. Assessment and the use of assessment data has improved greatly, although there are still shortcomings because the information is not used consistently enough. Marking does not contain supportive or sufficiently evaluative comments to help pupils so that they understand what they need to do to reach the next grade. The concentration, in lessons, to raise pupils' literacy skills is not consistent enough. Arrangements for the wider use of ICT are improving, especially as teachers develop their own resources and utilise computers for fieldwork and online assessments on the College network. However, too few opportunities exist for pupils to develop independent learning to support their achievement further. Nevertheless, pupils' attitudes are good as is their behaviour. The College reports that this reflects the changes in the curriculum and is a factor contributing to generally rising performance. Satisfactory opportunities are taken in the contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimension. For example, the issues relating to the effects of earthquake in Year 10, the Alaskan oilfields in Year 11 or development study with Year 9 are well used but teachers do not always make the points clear enough.
96. There is a good vision for improvement but, as yet, management is satisfactory. Since the last inspection, there has been much change and improvement has been satisfactory. Three different curriculum arrangements have taken geography from being a compulsory subject to one where it is an option. There had been serious staffing issues and shortages which have been detrimental to improving performance and tackling the issues from the last inspection. The present staff all have other subject and additional College responsibilities. Whilst the subject leader has made good strides in developing the subject and raising its profile and pupils' attainment, previous issues have had an adverse impact. Recent moves to extend fieldwork into Year 9 and through visits are good innovations, extending the curriculum and raising the subject profile. Resources are unsatisfactory, although there has been recent investment to meet the demands of the GCSE syllabus now being used. There are no dedicated computer facilities for the subject, although there is access to computer rooms and laptops through the area booking system. The department has recently received an interactive whiteboard in line with specialist College developments, with more set to be fitted in due course. The 40-minute lesson times often prevail against developing pupils' interest and progress. Currently, there is no alternative accreditation to GCSE. The overall monitoring and evaluation procedures of teaching and learning are satisfactory and thus some shortcomings are not adequately dealt with, as with assessment procedures and ensuring the development

of pupils' literacy skills. However, the department now has the ability to move on and raise its profile and pupils' standards.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

- Pupils' achievement in recent GCSE examinations has been unsatisfactory.
- Weaknesses in literacy inhibit pupils' achievement.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject and they make a good effort with their work.
- Consistently good teaching leads to good learning by pupils.
- Good leadership has improved the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning.

Commentary

97. Results in teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well below average. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2003 were also well below average and these results represented a substantial decline compared to those of the previous year. Overall achievement in the 2003 examinations was unsatisfactory, though achievement by those pupils taking the short course GCSE was satisfactory. Factors which contributed to this underachievement included instability in staffing, poor behaviour in particular groups and poor motivation of pupils towards the curriculum then offered.
98. As a result of good teaching, the standard of work seen during the inspection is higher than that indicated by recent examination results. In Year 9, standards are below average, although the achievement of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and the most capable, is satisfactory. Because many pupils have weak literacy skill on entry, their knowledge and understanding are often better than their written work indicates. Written work is below average overall, though pupils of above average capability often produce work of a high standard. The use of historical sources is in line with expectations but pupils' capability to evaluate these sources is below average. By Year 11, standards are average and pupils' achievement overall is satisfactory. Pupils' knowledge, understanding and use of historical sources are average. Evaluation of sources for utility and reliability is less well developed. There are examples of good achievement: for example, by Year 10 pupils of above average capability in their written work, and by pupils of below average capability in a good Year 11 lesson on the Jews in Europe at the start of the 20th century. However, many pupils of average and below average capability again have weaknesses in literacy which hinder their attainment. There is no consistent difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Pupil attitudes to the subject are positive and relationships are good. Many pupils lack confidence, are rather inarticulate and do not often show real enthusiasm for learning. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' social, moral and cultural development.
99. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. The match of teaching staff to the curriculum is now good. Teachers use a good variety of methods which interest and motivate pupils. Teachers have a good command of their subject and they communicate it well, in language which pupils can understand. They manage their classes well and have high expectations, so pupils' behaviour is consistently good. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which ensure that pupils make progress. Sometimes, teachers do not fully explain these objectives at the start of lessons or summarise what has been learned at the end so as to help pupils understand the progress made. Teachers use good strategies to help pupils develop the writing skills which are crucial to success in history. In GCSE classes, they teach the skills which are essential for examinations systematically. Pupils are challenged regularly to think for themselves and to develop their personal skills. Time is well used and pupils are productive, though occasionally the pace of lessons is too fast for some. Teachers assess pupils' work thoroughly and give them good feedback, so pupils know what they need to do to improve. There are, however, some inconsistencies in marking and target setting between

different teachers. Pupils make a good effort with their work and they are conscientious, though concentration sometimes flags towards the end of lessons.

100. Leadership of the department is good. The head of department has been effective in developing the curriculum to make it more interesting and varied, with a local Mildenhall study in Year 9 and a new GCSE course in Year 10. This has improved pupils' motivation. Pupils respond well, for example, to the Jack the Ripper unit in Year 9 and to studying medicine through time in Year 10. There is a clear and successful focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The head of department represents a good model of professional practice to colleagues and to pupils, setting high standards and leading an effective team of teachers. Management of the department is satisfactory. Appropriate plans, policies, schemes of work and systems for monitoring are all in place but these are not yet fully developed and implemented. Further monitoring and evaluation is now needed to ensure consistency across the department and to help raise standards further.
101. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. GCSE results have not yet improved. However, the quality of teaching is more consistent and there have been clear improvements in the teaching of writing skills, in the use of information and communication technology to support learning and in opportunities for pupils to work independently. There is every indication that the good teaching will result in improved examination results.

Religious education

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

- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall.
- The department is well led.
- Criticisms in the last report in regard to lack of curriculum time and the use of non-specialist teachers are still having an adverse effect on GCSE results.

Commentary

102. The standards of pupils at the end of Year 9 are in line with the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus with its expectations that pupils will "*explain what a faith community believes about God*" and, "*how religion can influence behaviour and attitudes.*" In relation to their prior attainment, achievement is good. Standards in Year 11 are below average. In Years 10 and 11, the range and quantity of work is hampered by lack of time. There are only 25 hours for each Year whereas the syllabus recommendations are that there should be 36 hours. This has had an adverse impact on the GCSE results. In 2003, as a result of an admirable step to boost the status of the subject, almost all Year 11 pupils were entered for the GCSE short course. Whilst the percentage gaining the higher A* to C grades was well below the national average, the A* to G grades results were above the national average. Girls performed much better than boys, an aspect which the College needs to address. Pupils who were taught by non-specialist teachers obtained much lower results than those taught by specialists, and achievement is satisfactory overall.
103. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with examples of good and very good teaching. Good teaching was observed when there was a clear sense of direction and the pupils' interest engaged. The well planned lesson gave priority to key religious concepts and pupils responded by listening well, taking their own notes, and asking relevant, searching questions, for example, "what priority should you give to God?". Satisfactory teaching engaged most of the pupils but met with a variety of response whereas good teaching elicited an enthusiastic response and pupils obtained a fresh knowledge and understanding of key religious concepts and vocabulary. A significant minority of lessons are taught by non-specialists. Pupils' work is regularly marked and assessed and pupils are encouraged to set targets for improvement. The attitude shown by pupils is generally positive and particularly enthusiastic in Year 9. The curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own response to significant

religious issues. There are only limited opportunities for curriculum enrichment through extra-curricular activities.

104. The department is well led: the knowledgeable and confident head of department provides a good role model for other teachers in the department. He has a clear vision for but has yet to tackle the problem of the discrepancy of results between boys and girls. He has effective strategies to try and overcome the problem of the high number of teachers, many of them non-specialists. The work of the department is thus somewhat fragmented and this is a major problem for GCSE teaching. Furthermore, the limited curriculum time puts a straitjacket on some valuable educational activities such as the number of occasions when discussions can take place on important issues such as marriage - and this reduces the opportunity for pupils to reach personal judgements on them. This is a pity because the RE teachers have great skill in successfully dealing with sensitive issues. The limited time also inhibits the use of ICT. There was evidence that pupils' literary skills are not generally stretched.
105. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory. There has been an improvement in GCSE results, although this must be put in context with changes in the curriculum. The range and quality of resources have improved, including the use of visitors and the accommodation. Both of these improvements have had a very positive impact. Although liaison with the middle schools has shown a modest improvement, there is now a greater enthusiasm shown by pupils, especially in Year 9. However, two main criticisms remain the rationalisation of staffing and the low amount of curriculum time. The College has plans to address these issues and some steps have already been taken to provide a framework in helping towards a future solution of the problem.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by the end of Year 9 are below average but pupils' achievement is satisfactory.
- Good teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 leads to pupils achieving well.
- The assessment system for pupils on examination courses is very good.
- There is good development of the use of computer-aided design and manufacture in some examination classes.

Commentary

106. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed standards to be above average. However, current work, which is below average, indicates that these assessments were too high. Pupils' designing skills are below average, and at too low a level. For example, they cannot make reasoned choices about which materials they are to use as such decisions are made for them. Pupils make satisfactory use of information and communication technology (ICT) when creating programs to control an on-screen model, but have too few opportunities to use ICT to support their other work. Taking account of pupils' below average levels of prior attainment, and that their practical work is of an average standard, their achievement is satisfactory.
107. The GCSE results for 2003 were close to the average and show a considerable improvement on 2002 results. In both these years, there was a significant difference between the work of boys and girls, but there is no noticeable difference in present work. The standard of current work is average and, taking account of pupils below average attainment when they began these courses, this represents good achievement. Pupils produce some very good practical work, particularly as a result of the use of computer-aided design and manufacturing

equipment. However, not all pupils have opportunities to use such equipment, for example, in food technology. Pupils have well-organised coursework folders, which show appropriate coverage of the stages in designing. However, the links between these stages are generally not well made, as pupils do not indicate their design thinking and why they have made particular decisions. Pupils make satisfactory use of numeracy and literacy skills to support their work. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is not their first language make progress similar to other pupils. Pupils have good attitudes to work and they work well independently when given the opportunity.

108. Teaching and learning in Year 9 are satisfactory overall because work is not always planned at appropriate levels or to ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop their understanding of product design. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are good. Well-structured courses, resulting from teachers' good knowledge of the subject and examination syllabi, lead to good coverage of coursework requirements. The very good assessment system gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. However, insufficient time is spent on teaching design skills in graphic products and electronic products in Year 10. There is generally insufficient stress on the need for pupils to show their design decisions.
109. Leadership and management are both good. The department has been well led through positive changes resulting in technology college status. There is a good team spirit in the department. The curriculum for 15- and 16-year-olds is good, offering a range of examination options, including provision for lower attaining pupils. However, there has been insufficient focus on raising the attainment of 14-year-old pupils. Changes since the last inspection, particularly in the provision of information and communication technology resources for 15- and 16-year-olds, have had a positive impact on pupils' attainment. The refurbishment of two resistant materials rooms has led to significant improvement to these teaching and learning environments.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

The quality of provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been good improvement since the last inspection.
- Teaching and learning are good, and this is leading to pupils' good achievement.
- The procedures for assessment are well developed to measure the quality of pupils' learning successfully.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- There are limited opportunities for the use of ICT within the department.

Commentary

110. Teacher assessments in 2003 showed that standards were average, and they remain so by the end of Year 9. In 2003, GCSE results were broadly average; however, the department has analysed the cohort and these results, and taken action to address shortcomings, resulting in improving standards, so that by the end of Year 11, standards are now above average.
111. Year 9 pupils have a sound working knowledge of the key elements of art and design. They develop skills in a variety of two- and three-dimensional activities, extending beyond drawing and painting to include printmaking and paper sculpture. Although pupils are encouraged to use ICT for research, there are limited opportunities to use it in the art studios. Pupils understand and use appropriate vocabulary. They have a developing insight into the lives of some artists and can apply this knowledge to their own work.

112. By Year 11, pupils have extended their skills, knowledge and understanding, and are encouraged to diversify in increasingly personal responses to set assignments. Consequently, some pupils have moved into photography, textile design and construction. The quality of the work becomes more creative and evaluations become increasingly more personal and reflective. One pupil, working on the theme Surfaces through landscapes, has taken photographs of sunsets and incorporated textured surfaces into her work through weaving; another has researched surfaces under the skin and is exploring feelings.
113. Pupils join the College with a range of capability, but in general they have limited drawing skills and some crude use of colour. By the end of Year 9, achievement is good. By the end of Year 11, pupils respond positively and achievement is very good, due to the consistently high standard of teaching and the consistency of approach within the department. Boys and girls do not achieve and attain equally well. To help address this, the department has introduced endorsed courses in Year 10 in two-dimensional work, photography, textiles and graphics.
114. The overall quality of teaching is good, being very good or better in four out of six lessons. All teachers have good subject knowledge, and, in the best lessons, ensure that assignments are presented with challenge and enthusiasm. Tasks are differentiated. Skilful classroom management and appropriate use of time ensure that initial pupil commitment is sustained throughout the lesson. Searching plenary sessions elicit what has been learnt and understood through involvement of the pupils. Knowledge and understanding of pupils' capabilities is a strength of the department. Pupils have targets and they know what they have to do to improve. Homework is set regularly and supports the work in class. Assignments are designed to appeal equally to boys and girls. Their content is imaginative; for example, the three-dimensional seed pods. Where teaching is less successful, limited strategies are in place for the management of inappropriate behaviour.
115. Pupils like art and design and generally make good progress as they concentrate and persevere with their work. Most are well behaved and courteous. When taught well, they quickly gain and retain skills and knowledge in their desire to improve. They take a pride in what they achieve and gain confidence through their own improvement. Pupils can express their ideas well and older pupils in particular show considerable initiative. Deadlines for the completion of work are generally adhered to. Pupils have the opportunity to stay to art club and the department remains open most lunchtimes for pupils wishing to continue with their work.
116. Leadership and management are very good overall. The head of department is well respected and some of the department's ideas and work feature in a GCSE textbook. She has analysed the 2003 GCSE results, taking into account the pupil cohort, and introduced the endorsed courses. The outcome is a curriculum, which is broad and balanced, and planned to develop skills and encourage creativity. The well-hung displays of rich and imaginative work within the department and around the College inspire pupils and serve to celebrate the successes of the department. There has been good progress since the last inspection and the department has the capacity to improve still further.

Drama

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well and make very good progress.
- Pupils respond with commitment and enthusiasm to the stimulating and challenging teaching.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- There are only limited opportunities for pupils to study technical aspects such as lighting skills.

Commentary

117. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the A* to C range in the 2003 GCSE examinations was in line with the national average for boys and girls. This represents very good achievement because the subject is not taught in Year 9 and pupils come to the College with below average communication skills. It also represents good improvement since the time of the last inspection. The boys' results were a significant improvement on those of 2002.
118. Many pupils choose to study the subject to GCSE level. This enables them to learn from each other through lively discussions and to engage in group activities which cater for a wide range of competencies. The work seen during the inspection is of average standard, although levels of achievement are very good. Pupils work well collaboratively and communicate ideas and emotions using a range of drama techniques. They have good evaluative skills. The work makes a significant contribution to their personal development and the issues they explore through performance contribute to their moral and social awareness.
119. Standards by Year 11 are average but pupils achieve very well because of the very good teaching which is both stimulating and challenging. Teachers are subject specialists who put across their own enthusiasm for the subject. They have established very good working relationships in the classroom and ensure that pupils of all competencies are actively involved in preparing for and contributing to performances. Expectations are high. There is good provision for pupils' cultural awareness because of the diverse range of texts used in teaching. There is also a wide range of activities available to pupils outside of taught time to broaden their understanding and enjoyment of drama, which are well supported.
120. The leadership and management are very good. Significant improvements have been made to the curriculum in recent years to meet pupils' different needs. The staff have been particularly successful, for example, in getting boys to perform well and attain high standards. There is a strong sense of common purpose pervading all aspects of the department's work because of effective teamwork. Rigorous systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating pupils' work and taking appropriate action. There is the capacity to improve further on provision because teachers are self-critical and committed to ongoing professional development.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising.
- Teaching is good and, as a result, pupils' achievement is good.
- Musical links with middle schools are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Despite some increases, resources, including computers, are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

121. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed that standards were above average. Prior to 2003, results at GCSE were consistently above average. In 2003, standards fell, due to a sudden reduction in the number of lessons timetabled each week. This made it very difficult to cover the syllabus requirements thoroughly. From inspection evidence, standards by the end of Year 9 are below average overall, although average for the more competent pupils. Standards by the end of Year 11 are now average. Teachers know their pupils extremely well; pupils' achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 9 and good for those in Year 11. There is no longer a difference between the achievement of boys and girls, and all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs, and the minority with English as an additional language, achieve in line with their peers.
122. The quality of teaching is good and an excellent lesson was observed. Pupils have positive attitudes towards music and are expected to do their best. They are individually challenged through very detailed planning, which links and develops musical skills and knowledge systematically. However, many pupils still struggle to compose melodic phrases and develop them into longer structured pieces, especially in Year 11. Lack of confidence by some pupils and their low literacy levels are barriers. However, the department has prepared an impressive range of different materials to address both this issue and to support less competent pupils with their written work. Very good class management means that pupils relate well to each other. Working relationships are strong; all pupils are involved and achievements are celebrated and valued. At times, less competent pupils rely too much on their teachers to provide answers for them. Regular written evaluations, which are marked in great detail, mean that pupils review and reflect on their work. Resources are unsatisfactory. There are insufficient computers, stereo systems, midi keyboards and tuned percussion and because of the increase in numbers, pupils often have limited access to equipment during lessons.
123. Leadership and management are very good. Teamwork is strong; there is a consistency of approach combined with a clear sense of direction and purpose. Teachers give freely of their time and support each other. Through the various extra-curricular ensembles, pupils enjoy the social opportunities of making music together in the College and local community. Assessment of pupils work is very thorough and is linked to regular meetings held with middle school teachers. This information helps teachers plan carefully. The department provides a good environment for pupils and improvement since the last inspection has been very good, because of the improved self-evaluation and monitoring done to ensure teaching is planned to meet the needs of all pupils.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good with some very good features**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective teaching promotes very good learning and achievement for most pupils.
- Good assessment procedures develop pupils' self-assessment and target setting.
- Good leadership and management.
- A lack of development in ICT to support student achievement and success.

Commentary

124. Teacher assessment of Year 9 pupils in 2003 indicates that they were attaining average standards. Boys and girls were attaining similarly. Evidence from the inspection supports this. During Year 9, pupils apply skills with technical accuracy, vigour, precision, control and tactical awareness. This was apparent in trampolining and rugby lessons. The accurate application of skill is transferred into Years 10 and 11, where standards in statutory physical education lessons are in line with national expectations. In GCSE lessons, practical performance is

better than pupils' theoretical knowledge and their capability in their written work. This was evident in the 2003 GCSE results, where 45 per cent of pupils gained A* -C grades. This is below the national average but in line with predicted grades. The very good achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 indicate that GCSE results in 2004 and 2005 have the potential to improve and to be in line with the national average. A small number of pupils go on to achieve similar success on the A-level sports studies course. Pupils gain a good knowledge and understanding of how different types of exercise can contribute to their fitness and health.

125. The curriculum provided is enhanced by very good accommodation, giving pupils the opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a variety of sports. Pupil achievement, in relation to broadly average standards on entry, is very good. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs and of all other minority groups is good. Gifted and talented pupils are given every opportunity to develop their advanced skills and tactical acumen. The department has established a very good and inclusive climate for learning, with significant importance on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils are encouraged to analyse and discuss each other's performance, developing their use of technical language. Mental calculation on a fitness circuit develops their numerical competencies.
126. The overall quality of teaching is good with examples of outstanding practice, promoting pupils' very good progress and success. Very good subject knowledge, very high expectation and challenge and very good relationships underpin all teaching. Pupils are encouraged, through appropriately challenging tasks, to reach high levels of attainment. This produces lessons in which pupils participate very well, enjoy the experiences and attain and achieve well. The department uses teaching and learning styles appropriate to pupils' level of attainment.
127. Assessment procedures are good. Teacher and pupil self-assessment are used for setting individual learning goals in order to improve pupils' understanding of their learning. However, the marking of written work for the GCSE course does not always guide pupils sufficiently on how to improve. The curriculum meets statutory requirement and is matched to the needs of the pupils. Curriculum time for core physical education is only two thirds of the national recommendation of two hours, limiting the opportunity to develop gymnastics and dance, restraining pupils' creative development and raising standards further. Use of ICT is insufficiently developed in teaching and learning, and to monitor student progress and raise achievement even further. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils have opportunities to participate in clubs and team games through inter and intra sporting fixtures. A number of pupils gain representative honours at local and national levels.
128. Leadership and management of the newly appointed head of the department are good, ensuring a clear educational vision. The department is a very strong and committed team who are good role models and give very generously of their time. They have a strong sense of purpose and high aspirations for the development of their pupils. The department has maintained the good standards of the last report and has demonstrated its capacity to improve through self-evaluation and review and high expectations.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

129. GCSE health and social care has been introduced in Year 10 this academic year to provide further breadth to the curriculum and develop progression for sixth form study. Thus, pupils had only been taking the course for just over a term at the time of the inspection. Standards are in line with national expectations. Pupils take a pride in their work and their assignment work shows careful thought with good planning and research. Through good teaching and learning, they are making good progress and are developing their knowledge of the range and nature of care settings. All pupils use computers well for both research and presentation of work and ICT is used to support the weak literacy skills of some pupils. In addition, in one Year 10 lesson, a literacy starter activity was used to develop writing skills before the pupils began work on their assignments. Leadership and management are good. This is shown by the

introduction of the GCSE course and through effective self-evaluation and monitoring. As a new course, no comment can be made on improvement save for that of curriculum opportunity, which is good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The provision in personal, social and health education and citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is an effective planned programme.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Leadership and management are good.

Commentary

130. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement in ensuring that the programme of personal, social and health education has been very well supported by the introduction of a taught citizenship course. It meets statutory requirements well. The course covers elements of personal health such as drug and alcohol abuse and smoking, as well as modules on sex education. In the citizenship modules, there is good coverage of human rights, legal aspects and moral and ethical decision-making. Overall, this work makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils.
131. Standards are broadly average. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to discuss the topics being covered, either through whole class sessions or in group and pair work. They can express themselves adequately overall as some experience problems in language and literacy. Higher attainers converse easily, being fluent and using vocabulary easily, whilst others are far more reticent. These factors are also apparent in their written work. However, they are becoming conversant with their right and responsibilities.
132. Teaching and learning are good overall, although one unsatisfactory lesson was seen. Teachers make good use of the planned programmes and also make good use of resources. In the best lessons, there is very good interaction between teacher and pupils, and in some lessons the pupils play a very distinctive role. A good balance is often struck between research and dedicated teaching which ensures that learning is good. Where teachers are not making adequate use of materials and do not plan well enough, then pupils can lose their concentration and do not complete their work well enough.
133. Leadership and management are good. This is reflected in the progress that has been made in implementing the programme. Assessment is being developed well to enable pupils to understand their progress and for the courses to be reviewed and augmented as required. The monitoring of teaching and learning is good.

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**, for which national comparisons are available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	15.4	42.7	71.4	90.0	28.6	39.0
Business studies	12	25.0	31.7	75.0	89.1	30	35.4
English literature	6	50.0	37.9	100	94.4	43.3	38.9
French	5	0	35.2	40.0	85.4	10.0	34.9
General studies	34	0	25.7	66.6	78.6	13.5	30.0
Geography	3	0	36.4	42.9	88.3	13.3	36.3
German	6	0	34.7	100	87.6	25	35.6
History	18	0	37.2	100	91.8	28.6	37.8
Information and communication technology	24	0	20.6	50.0	78.2	13.8	28.5
Mathematics	13	30.3	34.3	76.9	74.2	32.3	31.3
Other social studies	7	0	32.5	85.7	83.2	25.7	33.6
Physics	5	0	36.2	100	82.0	22.0	34.3
Sociology	5	0	33.6	44.4	83.7	13.3	33.8
Biology	3	0	33.5	100	89.0	30.0	33.0

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	5	60.0	48.7	100	96.1	92.0	85.1
Business studies	8	0	32.8	100	96.4	57.5	76.5
Chemistry	5	40.0	45.9	100	94.0	80.0	81.1
English literature	23	34.8	43.7	100	98.5	52.6	84.3
Design and technology	8	12.5	35.5	100	95.3	65	76.5
General studies	54	16.7	29.1	94.4	90.1	63.7	69.3
Geography	14	21.4	40.5	100	97.1	71.4	80.9
History	29	24.1	41.0	100	97.1	74.5	81.2
Information and communication technology	6	16.7	22.4	100	89.1	60.0	64.1
Mathematics	12	25.0	52.2	91.7	93.3	68.3	84.7

Music	6	0	41.8	100	97.7	70	82.2
Physics	5	80.0	42.8	100	92.8	104	78.6
Sociology	6	0	39.6	100	95.4	66.7	79.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The main focus of the inspection was English. French was sampled and provision is satisfactory. In recent years, results at both AS and A2 Levels have been below national averages in French. There are currently three students taking the AS course and their standards and achievement are satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with students being given appropriate opportunities to develop their skills. Students are motivated and receive good feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students have few opportunities to make social and cultural links with French speakers of their own age.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good and students learn well, including those with low attainment at GCSE.
- Assessment of students' work is very good and outcomes are used well to plan their courses and set them academic targets.
- Many lessons do not allow enough time for learning to develop sufficiently.

Commentary

134. In 2002, results at AS level, in terms of average points scored, were above the national average. In 2003, the average points score dropped slightly but the proportion gaining grades A/B was higher. Results in 2002 at A2 were average overall and male students' results were well above the national level. In 2003, all students passed and a quarter gained grades A or B. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades A or B has declined from the high point of 2001.
135. Attainment on entry is broadly average. The department teaches very effectively so that all students pass at AS and A2 levels including a significant number with low grades at GCSE. Students make good progress and achieve well. The subject attracts more female students than males but they achieve better than female students. Inspection evidence confirms that students are well taught and work hard to achieve their grades.
136. Written assignments show that the current students' work is of average standard with some excellent critical writing on Shakespeare and on American literature by the most capable. Middle attaining students' work is well planned because of good teaching but they do not develop ideas sufficiently, and summarise or assert rather than analyse or evaluate. Lower attaining students have weaker command of syntax, overloading sentences and losing accuracy or direction. Their reading and comprehension skills are below average, but their interpretation and discussion skills are better and in line with standards expected for their age and capability. Year 13 students discussing attitudes to war could refer to a good range of texts, although in Year 12 there was insufficient evidence of personal research and independent learning to complement the notes provided by teachers. Students make good personal progress and grow in maturity over the two years in the sixth form.
137. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good overall. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Schemes of work are very well planned, with close regard to assessment objectives

so students are well prepared for coursework and examination tasks. Teachers use the time well and the majority of lessons are brisk, although a high proportion of short single periods mean that tasks and knowledge are not always developed as well as they might be. Good lessons are characterised by an interesting variety of activities. Teachers use questions very well to stimulate a high level of discussion and to encourage imaginative responses from students, for example, in a Year 13 lesson on Romantic poetry. The assessment of students' work is very accurate and is well used to develop schemes of work, to focus teaching and to set targets for students. Marking is not sufficiently rigorous in correcting errors. The subject does not yet have the resources to make effective use of ICT, although some of the teachers have received training.

138. Subject leadership is satisfactory. In addition to courses at AS and A2, the department offers a GCSE English Literature course for students retaking the examination in November and also contributes to the Key Skills Communications course. Management is very good. AS and A2 courses are very well planned to meet syllabus specifications. Assessment of learning is used well to improve the planning and teaching of the courses. The achievement of students is closely monitored and students benefit from knowing their personal targets. Teachers are well deployed in teams sharing the teaching of the subject. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. As the sixth form has expanded, English has offered good provision to students who have achieved well in relation to their wide range of prior attainment.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

139. Standards of literacy and oracy are below average overall. On entry to the College, standards show significant weakness and, whilst progress is made over Years 9 to 11, there remains a wide range of skills. This was a key issue at the time of the last inspection and remains a barrier to improving standards for a significant proportion of students. Students express the opinion that after GCSE the most challenging aspects of sixth form study were the demands made upon their language skills. Speaking and listening skills are better than reading and writing skills. This is apparent in expressive arts subjects, like theatre studies, where marks for written coursework are not as high as they are for performance elements. These subjects give students confidence to express themselves orally. The College recognises that even students who have done well at GCSE need to learn more advanced research and note-taking skills. In health and social care, for example, students were observed taking dictation as a way of practising note-taking skills. Essay-writing, including the use of writing frames, is taught as part of the general studies course. Students generally recognise the need to use standard English in formal academic work. The most capable students write appropriately, and many to a high level, and some of the English coursework seen is very impressive.
140. The majority of teachers provide good role models in their use of language. Many subjects systematically teach the meaning of key words and concepts and check to see that students are using them precisely, but the picture is not consistent across the whole College. Good discussions were observed in Year 13 history lessons but discussions in music and geography lacked depth. Closed questions requiring short answers are too frequently used and students are insufficiently challenged to follow up their answers with more detail or a justification. Whilst monitoring has improved, it is not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the good practice which exists in some subject areas is more widely shared as part of a consistent policy.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well.
- Teaching is good and induction, guidance and support are valued by students.

- Good use of assessment and target-setting contributes to raising standards.
- Insufficient analysis of students' performance data restricts further targeting of support.

Commentary

141. AS and A-level results in 2002 were well below the national average, based on average point scores, but show that based on grades A-E, the A-level pass rate is in line with the national average. The 2003 results were broadly similar, and the trend over time is below the national trend. In previous years, male students have done better than female students. Students did less well than in their other subjects, but their progress from GCSE was better than that projected, representing good achievement.
142. For current students, standards at the end of Year 13 are average, with standards in A-level mathematics and further mathematics in Year 12 being above average. Overall, students achieve well: they competently manipulate algebra and use it well in mechanics, statistics and other areas of pure mathematics; they can discuss when to apply the appropriate model for finding probabilities for compound events or the most efficient algorithm in finding optimum solutions; and they understand the importance of constructing models, with increasing degrees of sophistication, to establish a rigorous approach to exploring friction in mechanics. Students welcome and expect challenges, and identify 'hypothesis testing' in statistical sampling and grasping the underlying concepts involved in mechanics as particularly challenging. They enjoy working together to overcome difficulties and apply their mathematical knowledge appropriately. Most are articulate in discussions and use ICT to support their learning, especially in graphical work.
143. Teaching is good overall. In the best lessons, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to conduct interactive presentations fully involving the students, pose open questions to stimulate discussion and articulation, provide opportunities for independent learning, and progressively reinforce abstraction and rigour to produce challenge – a balanced approach to teaching preferred by most students. As a result, achievement was at least good in such lessons, for example, when reviewing trigonometry. The high quality of attitudes and relationships, and very detailed marking of students' work, also help promote good learning and how to improve. Where teaching is less effective and restricts achievement, it is because teachers over-direct lessons and use too many closed questions. The lessons lack sufficient challenge or promotion of independent learning which then deters students thinking out the answers for themselves and does not help to build confidence.
144. Leadership and management are good. Students greatly value the effective induction programme, detailed marking and useful feedback, ready access to teachers, after-College revision classes, and the process involved in setting their target grades. They have a good choice of courses and feel valued by their teachers. Flexible arrangements effectively incorporate Year 11 students who have already passed GCSE into an independent learning environment within A-level classes. The schemes of work have recently been reviewed and integrate the use of ICT, and further mathematics is helping to raise the image of the subject, although numbers are still low. The overall improvement since the last inspection is good. However, the department does not yet analyse the performance of different groups or the reasons why expectations are not met or exceeded. Also, the targeting of improvement at the higher grades does not yet take place.

Mathematics across the curriculum

145. The support and use of mathematics and numeracy in other subjects is satisfactory. For example, in physics, students use vectors to represent stress and strain in load-bearing beams; in geography, there are few opportunities to develop numeracy, but in fieldwork, data is handled and interpreted well; and in ICT, there is good logical thinking involved in constructing

databases. Numeracy is also taught well as a part of the Level 2 Key Skills course in Year 12, which is attended by students who do not follow AS or A-level mathematics. For example, students work well in groups to design and conduct a questionnaire survey. Their planning reflects independent learning, a focus on the good use of language to formulate questions, and the use of ICT to help present and analyse the results.

SCIENCE

All three sciences were inspected.

Biology

The quality of provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain and achieve well for their prior attainment.
- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Opportunities for students to develop their self-study skills are too limited.

Commentary

146. Results at GCE A2 have been close to the national average in recent years. Last year, an exceptionally large number of students opted to study AS biology. Due to staffing difficulties, it was not possible to split this large group into two groups, and this led to students' underachievement. Effective strategies have been put in place to remedy this weakness. With the exception of last year, the number of students choosing to study biology has been fairly constant with no particular trends.
147. The standard of work of current students is average. Students' notes are not of the highest quality, a reflection of too much reliance on worksheets by the teachers resulting in too little writing by the students. Although the quality of teaching is good overall, it is too directed. Teachers do not always give students sufficient opportunities to develop their self-study skills. It is, however, very important to note that despite these criticisms students generally achieve A2 results better than might be expected based on their GCSE results. A major feature contributing to the good teaching is the careful planning that takes place. Year 13 students can cope with the difficult concept of the chi-squared test because of the teacher's clear explanations and the carefully selected examples. Similarly, Year 12 students learnt satisfactorily about the conditions for microbial growth because the teacher used a challenging questioning technique, which was followed up with some very specific notes.
148. The recently appointed head of biology has sound leadership and management skills. Self-evaluation is good and clearly explains the causes and solutions taken to alleviate the problems which occurred in Year 12 last year. Effective use is now made of national systems to provide evidence of performance and students are now entered for the first module test at the earliest opportunity to recognise potential underachievement. There are good links with the wider community including field trips. Good use is being made of the newly acquired laptops to enhance learning. Since the last inspection, standards have been maintained. Opportunities for students to develop their ICT skills have increased.

Chemistry

The quality of provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leading to good learning and achievement by well-motivated students.
- Well-managed department with two very experienced teachers working well together.
- Make more use of data logging sensors.

Commentary

149. Although there is some variation from year to year, overall results at both A and AS Level are broadly average with no particular trends. Any variation in results can be explained in terms of the differences in the calibre of students from year to year. Students obtain better results than might be expected based on their performance at GCSE. The number of students opting to study chemistry has remained fairly static, testimony to the confidence students have in their teachers when they can choose from an increasing number of courses. The retention rate from AS to A2 is good. The reasons why the students choose not to continue with chemistry are varied and follow no particular pattern.
150. Standards are average. Students have adequate levels of mathematics, enabling them to cope satisfactorily with the calculations required for chemistry. For example, Year 12 students had no difficulty in working out enthalpy changes using specific heat capacity values. Similarly, Year 13 students cope well with rate and equilibrium calculations. Students learn well because the teachers have realistic expectations for them. For example, Year 12 students learnt well how to use the International System for naming organic chemicals. An important feature of this lesson was the way this very experienced teacher made good use of common student errors. He showed how easy it is to draw what is thought to be a structural isomer when in fact it is not. As part of the course requirements students must carry out a detailed investigation. The quality and range of the investigations enables students to develop well their practical skills. Gifted and talented students are provided with extension work. Although there are sufficient sensors and computers, they are not compatible with each other, and students are not able to develop their ICT skills. Consequently, there are few opportunities for students to data log their experiments using sensors.
151. Students show high levels of interest. They have excellent relationships with each other and their teachers, leading to a very purposeful working atmosphere. They take pride in their written work and have accurate records from which to revise.
152. The head of department has good leadership and management skills. She is working closely with her colleague to ensure that the courses are well planned. Recently, the department has entered Year 12 students for their first module test at the earliest opportunity, and this good practice allows students to gain maximum advantage from the modular approach. The department has good links with the local chemical industry so that students can experience the applications of chemistry. The department is well supported by an efficient technician team. As at the time of the last inspection, students continue to have good laboratory and self-study skills. Standards have been maintained.

Physics

The quality of provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leading to good learning and achievement by the students.
- The work of students is not monitored closely enough.
- There are not enough compatible computer resources.

Commentary

153. The overall results at both A and AS Level are about the national average with no particular trends in recent years. Any variation in results can be explained in terms of the differences in the calibre of students. Few students opted to study physics until quite recently when numbers increased. Most of the Year 12 students taking AS level continue with the course to A2 in Year 13.
154. The standard of work seen is average. The department has a broadly open policy so that students taking the courses enter with a wide range of capability. It is important to note that because of the good teaching the students achieve higher grades than might be expected based on their GCSE results, reflecting the good teaching. Underpinning the good teaching is the excellent subject knowledge of the teachers. They transmit their enthusiasm for the subject to their students. Teachers use effective questioning techniques, which make the students think about and discuss the topic very carefully. There was evidence of this in Year 12 students' lesson on vectors. Presently, the department makes no special provision for the gifted and talented students other than to provide them with extension work.
155. Because of the wide range of capability, teachers have to strive to get the right balance between teacher intervention and allowing students to develop their self-study skills. Presently, this balance is not right. Laboratory skills are in line with expectations. Year 12 students demonstrated their practical skills when investigating the sensitivity of photodiodes and transistors. Having obtained a set of results these students went on to show that generally their graph drawing skills were adequate. When investigating electromagnetism, Year 13 showed that they can follow instructions accurately and then draw satisfactory conclusions from their experiments, but some students have only just adequate mathematical skills. Since several students have errors in their written work which have not been corrected, teachers need to ensure that they check their work more carefully.
156. The head of department has sound leadership and management skills. She works closely with her colleague so that the courses are well planned. A positive feature is that the department has always taken full advantage of the modular approach by entering students for module tests at the earliest opportunity. However, the monitoring of students' work is only satisfactory. Several links with industry have been made. Particularly successful was the help given to students when preparing for their materials investigation. Since the last inspection, and following the introduction of the technology college status, considerable progress has made in the provision for ICT. The department has access to many laptop computers. Despite the difficulties which occur when logging on, the department makes good use of computer software to enhance learning. Resources are satisfactory but there is a shortfall in the number of sensors available so that students can link these computers to their experiments to obtain data. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory; standards have been maintained and more students are opting for physics, with an increase in female student numbers.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

- Teaching is very good.
- The revised curriculum caters well for the needs of students.
- The leadership and management are very good.
- There are some limitations for access to resources and for accommodation.

Commentary

157. In the GCE A2 examination in 2002, male students' attainment was close to the national average for the higher AB grades and for overall A to E grades. There were no higher AB grades attained by female students but all candidates scored at least a pass grade. Results were similar in 2003. National comparisons for 2003 are also likely to be similar when

comparative figures become available. Results at AS level have been below average in recent years. The initial "Part Awards" from the vocational course are encouraging and the performance of female students is improving with the introduction of the course.

158. Significant changes have been made in the curriculum which provide good continuity from Year 11 in preparing students for the advanced vocational course (AVCE) which is now becoming well established in Years 12 and 13. This well-judged curriculum change is already having a significant favourable impact upon standards. Standards in both single and double option courses, and in the coursework which has already been completed in Year 12, ranged from satisfactory to very good and are good overall. The choice of options broadens the appeal of the subject and makes advanced level available to a wider range of students. In both AVCE options in Year 13, standards overall are well above average; students have made very good progress throughout the course. They have a very positive attitude, are now working with confidence and there is no apparent difference in performance in terms of gender. More female students are taking the subject and achieving well. Individuals receive good support from teachers to ensure that all abilities are well catered for.
159. The growing success of these new courses is the result of teaching which is very good overall, as is the management of the department, which has ensured that curriculum changes have been implemented effectively. Courses are well planned and most teachers have an appropriate business background, which is used well to inform their work in the vocational courses. Coursework is completed diligently by students and assessment criteria are covered very well because candidates understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. The ability to work on some aspects of coursework at home is limited by restrictions on the College network. Assessment is a strong feature of the department. Students have the opportunity to follow a Key Skills ICT course up to Level 3 if they wish. The main ICT teaching room is very busy as it is also used by the sixth form in general throughout the day. The large numbers of additional students working on computers and moving in and out of the room is distracting and inhibits the range of teaching strategies which can be used. This working environment is also adversely affected by the inoperative air-conditioning system. Provision for ICT as a discrete subject has improved significantly since the current department was set up just over two years ago.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

160. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. There are appropriate planned opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance learning in most subjects. In addition, the autonomous use of ICT by students has a significant impact upon learning in many subjects. Students have access to computers and the Internet for research during the College day when this is needed.
161. The use of computers to enhance teaching and learning is good in design and technology where a range of software is used well. It is also good in geography which uses an on line assessment system. Very good use is made of ICT in psychology, involving regular video conferencing with a subject specialist, which is proving to be a most valuable resource. The use of sensors for monitoring and measuring changes during practical activities in science is very restricted because of obsolete equipment which has not been replaced, although the overall use of ICT in science is satisfactory. The use of ICT in the music department is unsatisfactory, as both hardware resources and specialist software are inadequate.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The rise in attainment during the last two years.
- The good quality of teaching.
- The effective curriculum developments in terms of specification/innovation/fieldwork.
- Confidence and literacy capabilities of students hampers performance.

Commentary

162. Geography is provided to both AS and A-level with recent standards significantly improving so that they are approaching the national average. During the past two years, all candidates passed at A level with 75 per cent achieving higher grades in 2003. AS results are now just above average. Taking account of students' GCSE grades, this represents good achievement. Standards are average overall, and reflect a rise in attainment and promise well for the future. Independent note-taking is developing well, though presentation is often poor and work somewhat disorganised in that seen. Students are learning to use the variety of resources well, including online assessment via home-produced ICT facilities and tests.
163. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Some of the teaching is very good, being creative and exploiting the ICT interactive whiteboard particularly effectively. In good revision lessons, teachers were seen imaginatively taking recall, understanding and skill forward prior to external assessment. Internal online assessment is an innovative development deepening understanding and widening experience with topics which raise attainment and achievement to complement the good teaching. The commitment of A2 students is greater than that of AS overall, but there are some very keen students working and anxious to do well who will study geography at university.
164. Leadership and management are good. Much has been achieved in two years by the new Head of Department raising attainment and in new developments. It is here that the department is strongest and most innovative, reflected in rising results. Modules are carefully considered to meet the differing needs of students. The serious staffing issues and resource shortages which adversely affected performance have been broadly overcome. Independent learning and enquiry skills mentioned in the last inspection report are more refined now. Raising the confidence of students in their own capability, and continuing to tackle the literacy issues, which can hamper performance, remain necessary. Since the last inspection, there has been significant improvement in the examination results, especially at A2, and innovative teaching and methods of learning are making the subject more appealing to students.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

- Students' achievement in recent examinations is good.
- Good teaching results in good learning and good achievement by students.
- Assessment of students' work is very good so that they understand clearly how to improve.
- Student attitudes to the subject are positive and relationships are very good.
- There are insufficient books to support students' independent reading, research and revision.

Commentary

165. A2 results in 2002 were below average but AS results were average. The proportion of students reaching the highest grades was well below average. Female students performed better than males. Achievement in these examinations compared to prior attainment, however, was good. Results in 2003 were good, and at both A2 and AS more students reached the highest grades; achievement was good.

166. From inspection evidence, standards are in line with national standards overall. Achievement is good for students of all capabilities. Their knowledge, understanding and use of historical interpretations are average. In Year 12, students' analytical writing is above average: they make rapid progress in this area of work early in their course. Source work skills are not as well developed for students of average and below average capability. There is no consistent difference in achievement between male students and female students.
167. Both teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good command of the material and they communicate it effectively so as to interest and motivate students. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which ensure that good progress is made. Students are challenged very regularly to think for themselves and to develop their full range of skills, including the personal skills of discussion, research, the use information and communication technology and making presentations. The skills essential for examination success are taught systematically. For example, in a very good Year 13 lesson, students studied the examination assessment criteria for a question on the Nazi state and then identified the strengths and weaknesses of an answer produced by a member of the group. Students take their work seriously and they work hard. They work well both independently and collaboratively. Teachers assess students' work very thoroughly and accurately, and give very good feedback to individuals. Assessment is used to inform planning and teaching. As a result, students have a clear understanding of their performance and what they need to do in order to improve. There are a few student concerns about some specific aspects of teaching: for example, about time for revision, support for note-taking and reliance on work prepared by other students in presentations.
168. Student attitudes are positive, often very positive. Relationships between staff and students are very good. The subject is popular and retention rates are good. The curriculum offered is broad and balanced, including an interesting coursework unit on the changing role of women from 1800. There is a good match of staff to the curriculum. Teachers use good resources in class but students' independent study is limited by insufficient books which they can keep for reading, reference and revision.
169. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has provided good leadership in developing both the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning. He leads an effective team which has been successful in raising standards and he provides a very good model of professional practice himself. There are secure systems for monitoring student performance and progress. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards in examinations have improved, particularly the proportion of students achieving the higher grades. The quality of teaching and learning has improved.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning lead to good coverage of the course requirements.
- There is good use of computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment.
- Students do not explore a sufficient range of ways of generating design ideas and give insufficient stress to the links between stages in the design process.

Commentary

170. In the 2003 AS level examination, all students attained pass grades. Current AS level work is average. Taking account of the students' prior attainment, this represents satisfactory achievement. Students have a satisfactory understanding of materials' properties that must be

considered when designing. There is some very good quality practical work being produced with the use of computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment. Folder work is generally disorganised and students do not always explore the full range of possibilities when designing.

171. In the 2003 A2 examination, results were average. Results have been consistent over the past few years. Students use scale modelling well to clarify their ideas. Current work is average, although students' achievement is good. Students work with a range of materials but some narrow their design possibilities too quickly. Some of their research work is undirected with a lack of clarity in the links between the stages in the design process.
172. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching and learning are both good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and good relationships help to establish a positive atmosphere for learning. This leads to students having good attitudes to their work and taking responsibility for elements of their own learning. Students are given good support on an individual basis. Lesson planning offers students the opportunities to experience a good range of practical techniques. Where lesson introductions are teacher-led, students have too few opportunities to discuss ideas with each other.
173. Leadership of the courses is good. The two teachers, who share the teaching, work closely together and so ensure good coverage of course requirements. Day-to-day management is satisfactory, but timetabling constraints mean that Year 12 students have some of their teaching time with a non-specialist teacher. The curriculum is satisfactory, but there are no courses being offered to meet the needs of lower attaining students.
174. Standards are similar to those at the time of the last inspection, but provision is now good, benefiting from technology college status. For example, this has enabled the College to provide resources for computer-aided design and manufacture, which are having a positive effect on the way students in Year 12 design and make items.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was in theatre studies and music. Music technology, media studies and art were sampled. Music technology is a new course started in September 2003, so there are no examination results. The overall provision is satisfactory. Teachers are knowledgeable and ensure that students learn to evaluate and describe music giving clear explanations. Despite an initial investment in technology, there is insufficient computer and sequencing equipment for all students to use at one time. The provision in media studies is good. Students are developing their skills well and attain average results. The provision in art is good, showing good continuity from Year 11. Students achieve very well and the standards are well above average. Some of the work is of a very high standard and effectively used in displays around the school.

Theatre studies

The quality of provision in theatre studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good subject knowledge is combined with a good range of teaching skills.
- Activities are varied and challenging so students achieve well.
- Small group sizes limit the range of experiences enjoyed by students.

Commentary

175. This is a relatively new course. In 2003, results at AS level were below the national average. All four students passed but none obtained the higher grades A or B. Three stayed on to take the full GCE A-level (A2) course, which will be examined in 2004.

176. Standards are above average at AS level and average at A2 level in Year 13. The standard seen in practical lessons was above average in Year 13 and well above average in Year 12. The standard of written work is in most cases lower than the standard of discussion or practical work, reflecting the weakness in literacy skills. Achievement is very good in Year 12 and good in Year 13. The Year 13 students were seen interpreting intense and brutal scenes from a well-chosen play about atrocities in Pinochet's Chile with admirable maturity and sensitivity. The Year 12 group was larger, of better prior attainment at GCSE, and achieving very well in its interpretation of "*A Taste of Honey*." One term on from GCSE, the quality of students' work had matured significantly. The concepts with which they were working, the originality of their work and their command of drama skills had improved considerably. Students in both years confirmed that their work was challenging and had made a valuable contribution to both their academic and their personal development.
177. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good, with a significant amount of very good teaching. The teacher's enthusiasm and command of the subject are strengths. The good subject knowledge is combined with a good range of teaching skills in activities in which students can achieve well. The quality of learning is good and sometimes very good. Students make significant gains in knowledge of theatre history and drama theory. They learn to interpret texts in their social and historical context and explore the techniques to present them to an audience. Skilful teaching of the Year 13 students engaged them in activities where a small group could achieve well. However, such small classes mean that they do not benefit from the social experience that the Year 12 students enjoyed of working with different students in different partnerships, for example, a "tag" warm-up exercise where they had to swap roles. Students are required to take an important share of the decision-making and the organisation of their own work. They respond maturely and positively and the teacher judged very well when it was right to stand back and let them take responsibility for their own learning. The self-discipline and the need for honest self-evaluation are an important part of students' personal development. Their contribution to the Year 9 Drama Club and their help in Year 10 drama lessons offers students further opportunities for personal responsibility. The subject does not yet make effective use of ICT, for example, in the use of digital and video photography or in lighting and sound control systems.
178. Theatre studies is taught by one teacher and is in only its second year as a separate subject. It was previously combined with dance and music as part of a Performance Studies syllabus. There is very good leadership in the vision and the ambition that the teacher has for the subject and it has made good progress in its first two years.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and students' achievement are good.
- Teaching is good; teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- Students are well motivated and show commitment to the course and other music activities.
- Resources, especially computer and electronic equipment, are limited and are insufficient for the larger numbers now studying the subject.

Commentary

179. Results at A2 and AS level in 2003 were below average, with male and female students attaining similarly. Over half of the AS cohort have continued to A2 level. Current standards of work seen from these students are above average, and average for those in Year 12. This means that achievement for all students is now good, reflecting the consistently good teaching. Standards have improved since the last inspection and areas identified as weaknesses have been addressed. Students use musical language competently and support each other in

musical dialogue and performance. They are confident to express opinions; however, some lack precise musical detail.

180. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and expose students to a broad and varied musical repertoire. Planning is thorough and sensitive to individuals' needs, yet demanding enough to ensure that they think for themselves and come up with their own solutions. As a result, students are well motivated and enthusiastic about the subject. Occasionally, students rely too much on their teachers and lack independence and motivation. The regular opportunities provided for students to perform to a range of different audiences means that their confidence is enhanced and they learn to appraise each other and then apply these findings to their own work. They can discuss musical details, expression and understand differing styles of interpretation in pieces of music. Students' knowledge of four-part harmony is good, but at times lack of melodic fluency means that inner parts are rather angular. There has been a limited investment in computer and other electronic equipment and with the growth of student numbers more is needed. This means that their use and understanding of information and communication technology as a tool for composition is underdeveloped.
181. Leadership and management are very good. Students' progress and their attendance are carefully monitored. There is a shared approach to target setting and students understand their strengths and weaknesses. There is careful monitoring to ensure a consistent approach between staff across the department and to ensure that best practice in teaching is shared.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was sampled. The overall provision is good and students achieve well, attaining average standards. Teaching and learning are good, as is leadership and management.

BUSINESS

The inspection covered provision in business studies GCE AS and A2, AVCE and GNVQ vocational courses.

The quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strength and weaknesses

- Standards have improved since the last inspection but are still below the national average.
- Opportunities for lower attaining students are good.
- Students with higher prior attainment do not always achieve in line with their capabilities.
- There is some unevenness in the quality of teaching.
- The quality of leadership and management is good.

Commentary

182. The A-level examination and AVCE results in 2002 were below the national average, with no students attaining the higher A-B grades. The most recent examination results for 2003 indicate some improvement, although the overall standard remains below the national average. The last three years have, however, seen a steady improvement in the proportion of students attaining the middle C-grade, and all students achieve a pass grade. The results in the AS level examinations were well below the national average in 2002, and the most recent results for 2003 indicate a deterioration in the proportion of students achieving even a pass grade. By contrast, examination results at the GNVQ intermediate level are in line with the national average and a growing proportion of students have achieved the merit grade over the last three years.

183. The present Year 13 students taking the AVCE and A-level courses achieve average standards in their work, with a few examples of good and very good written work. Students have a sound understanding of basic business concepts demonstrating, in a human resource lesson, capability to make effective links between different aspects of human resource recruitment strategy, evaluating the quality of information, selecting appropriate interview techniques and recognising the role of motivation theory, as well as capacity to work independently. Their marketing assignments demonstrate sound skills in collection and interpretation of primary and secondary research, and good skills of analysis and evaluation using a range of appropriate techniques such as SWOT analysis, expected product life cycles, market mix and the Boston grid. Although new to business studies, Year 12 students are developing a sound understanding of business organisation. They have completed the marketing unit, and the related written course work assignment, some of which is of an especially good standard. Students use a range of analytic methods to develop a marketing strategy for a new product including some good investigative market research and sound evaluation of external and internal factors. Overall, the level of student attainment in written course work is higher than the level of achievement observed in lessons. Evidence indicates that students with low prior attainment at GCSE are achieving well, and that this is especially marked at the GNVQ intermediate level. However, higher attaining students with good GCSE grades are not achieving the high grades of which they are capable because they lack the opportunities to extend their depth of subject knowledge and understanding, and lack challenges which fully stretch their capacity to learn and progress.
184. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, based on a secure understanding of the curriculum, good lesson planning with clear learning objectives, and sound teacher subject knowledge. Teacher and student relationships are good and provide a good basis for learning. The subject content of lessons though sound is rarely sufficiently stimulating or intellectually demanding to stretch and challenge the more able students. The pace of lessons is not always well judged to meet students' differing learning needs; as a result some students fail to remain fully engaged on task, and productivity is too low. Students receive good teacher support but do not always receive sufficient feedback to understand how to raise the standard of their work, leading to some learning and progress in lessons being below expectations.
185. The quality of leadership and management are good. A clear action plan is in place with well-defined priorities for development of the subject. Schemes of work are also well developed. Students receive comprehensive information about the vocational pathways of post-16 study. They receive detailed programmes of work and know what is expected of them. Assessment is used to monitor student progress and inform curricular planning. Student tracking systems are now in place, feedback is planned to raise standards. Staffing levels are satisfactory. Resources while sufficient to meet curriculum needs, are limited in range; there is, for example, an absence of suitable periodicals, journals, business and government publications, so students rely too heavily on the Internet for information. Students have good opportunities for extra-curricular activities, including foreign business trips to New York and Barcelona, visits to local business, taking part in the Young Enterprise regional finals and opportunities to hear visiting speakers to the College. Skills in ICT are well developed but there is too little focus on spelling and literacy skills.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care forms part of the vocational department. Courses are taught in GNVQ foundation and intermediate as well as AVCE courses.

Provision in health and social care is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good examination results in all courses.
- Good quality teaching, which enables students to make good progress.

- The very positive student attitudes to their studies.
- Marking comments do not provide sufficient guidance on how to move to the next level.
- Written tasks are not set regularly enough to consolidate and check students' understanding.

Commentary

186. Standards are above the national average and examination results in 2003 show a pass rate of 100 per cent for both the GNVQ and AVCE courses. In AVCE, the number of students entered was small but current numbers in Year 12 have increased. In the GNVQ course, 40 per cent of students gained merits, with all others gaining a pass grade. There are currently no students in Year 13 studying health and social care.
187. Current standards of work are above average and students achieve well on all courses. Year 12 AVCE students can grasp complex anatomical and philosophical concepts well and they consolidate their understanding by questioning their teachers and by further research. During discussion, they are mature and forceful in expressing their views whilst at the same time listening to and considering the views of others. The oral skills of intermediate GNVQ students are developing well and, in one lesson, they demonstrated, through discussion, a clear understanding of the signs and implications of neglect in a range of settings. Foundation students also achieve well and understand the variety of jobs in care. Students take part in work placements and visits, which provide an opportunity for them to broaden their experience through direct observation of care. For example, AVCE students recently visited a Montessori nursery and, following the visit, they were able to compare knowledgeably the ethos of Montessori with that of Steiner. Students use computers well for both research and presentation of work and ICT is used to support the weak literacy skills of some students. It is in this aspect that students' attainment is hampered.
188. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with some very good features. Teachers have very positive working relationships with their students. As a result, students clearly enjoy their lessons and feel confident to express their views in class discussion. Where teaching is very good it is characterised by the use of probing questions, good ongoing assessment and the use of a range of stimulating teaching methods. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on the autonomic nervous system, the teacher organised the students to teach each other in order to check their understanding and she demonstrated the complexities of the nervous system by using her own physique and other objects around the room. Teachers set high expectations for their students and this, coupled with good levels of support, leads to good progress. Assessment of students' work is only satisfactory because there is a lack of clear guidance given on students' work in their files. The marking of work is regular but there are few helpful comments to enable students to improve further. However, the assessment and moderation of the externally assessed unit assignments for both GNVQ and AVCE are accurate and thorough. In addition, some teachers do not set sufficient written tasks between the large assignments to check student understanding.
189. Leadership and management are good. There is good leadership from an experienced practitioner who has a clear vision for the future direction of the department, including the introduction of GCSE health and social care in Year 10. She is a positive role model for both staff and students and this has led to the current positive attitudes to learning. The departmental improvement plan has identified appropriate targets for development through effective self-evaluation. The curriculum provision meets the needs of a wide range of students and, through their experience of the courses, many are planning to either enter employment in the care sector or further their studies in further or higher education. Monitoring of teaching is good and staff are well supported. However, there are no formal health and social care meetings outside of the broader vocational meetings. Health and social care was not inspected at the time of the last inspection so no judgement can be made on improvement except that the curriculum innovation has been very beneficial for student choices.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

190. The general studies course was sampled. The overall provision is satisfactory. The course is offered to all students on advanced level courses in Years 12 and 13. Students are encouraged to attend as a part of their compulsory curriculum. Some students do not value this opportunity. Results in 2002 at AS level were well below the national average and at A2 level they were below average.

191. From inspection evidence, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good elements. Students make satisfactory progress and their capability to discuss in a mature and informed manner was good. General studies is taught by a range of staff but the units are not well matched to their expertise; for example, the science unit is being taught by a non-specialist.

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 College	3	3
How inclusive the College is		2
How the College's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the College	3	2
Overall standards achieved		4
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	4	5
Attitudes	3	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the College		2
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-College activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the College seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the College's links with parents		3
The quality of the College's links with the community	2	2
The College's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the College		2
The governance of the College	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	3	3

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