

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Rawlins Community College**

Loughborough

LEA area: Leicestershire

Unique reference number: 120301

Headteacher: Mr David Brindley

Lead inspector: Brian Oppenheim

Dates of inspection: 12 – 15 January 2004

Inspection number: 260196

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils:	14 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1361
School address:	Loughborough Road Quorn Loughborough Leicestershire
Postcode:	LE12 8DY
Telephone number:	01509 622800
Fax number:	01509 416668
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Horace Buxton
Date of previous inspection:	16 November 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Rawlins Community College is a Leicestershire Upper School and a Church of England Voluntary Controlled School. The college is bigger than other secondary schools with 1361 students aged 14 – 19 including 421 in the sixth form. This makes both the main school and the sixth form very large compared with others of average size. Students come from a wide area including many of the surrounding villages and parts of Loughborough. Most students come from white heritage backgrounds and less than one fifth come from a range of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, mainly Indian and Asian. There are no students at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is lower than the average for England and has fallen in recent years. There are five students under local authority care. A little over 20 per cent of students have special educational needs, which is broadly in line with other schools. The proportion of these students who have a statement of particular need, 3.8 per cent, is higher than average. There is a sixth form special needs unit that caters for 23 students with special educational needs. The proportion of students who join and leave the school mid-way through the year is similar to that found in many schools.

The college lost its Arts College status last year and with it the additional funding. The college intends to reapply as soon as possible. The college is involved in a large number of community projects. The national test results of students when they join the school at the start of Year 10 are above average.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2686	Brian Oppenheim	Lead inspector	Citizenship, Business education
9865	Sue Howley	Lay inspector	
32876	Anne Porter	Team inspector	English
31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	Mathematics, P16 Mathematics
32777	Jim McVeigh	Team inspector	Science
15127	Bill Goodall	Team inspector	Art
27238	Alan Lazell	Team inspector	Design and technology, P16 DT
2712	Derek Hawley	Team inspector	Geography, History
6364	Geoff Strack	Team inspector	Information and communication technology, P16 ICT
19613	Sue Thomas-Pounce	Team inspector	Music, P16 Music
10157	Matthew Portal	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages, P16 French
32077	Jim Edwards	Team inspector	Physical education
10761	Pat Willan	Team inspector	Religious education, P16 Sociology
2731	Penny Holden	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language P16 Performing Arts
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	P16 English, English Literature
3695	Mike Lovett	Team inspector	P16 Statistics
23402	Birendra Singh	Team inspector	P16 Biology, Physics
26268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	P16 Business Education
10209	Vince Gormally	Team inspector	P16 Art
3242	Mike Newman	Team inspector	P16 Psychology

The inspection contractor was:

icp

360 Lee Valley Technopark  
Ashley Road  
London  
N17 9LN

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Rawlins Community College is **satisfactory with some effective features**. It is raising successfully the standards students achieve by improving the quality of teaching and learning. The college is well led by the principal but management is not sharp enough. As a result, there are weaknesses in the curriculum of some students and in the way college-wide policies are put into practice. This means that students' experiences are not always consistent and explains why progress and achievement during Years 10 and 11 are only satisfactory. However, many students benefit from the strong links the college has with other schools, the community and local further education colleges. Special educational needs students achieve very well because provision for them is of a high quality. Taking everything together, including the effective plan to reverse the budget deficit, the college provides satisfactory value for money.

The college's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- In the last three years examination performance has improved substantially. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average and by the end of the sixth form they are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are good because the college is now more effective.
- The use of assessment to inform teaching is unsatisfactory but there are good examples in some subjects.
- The quality of support given to those with special educational needs, and strong links with other schools and colleges mean that these students' needs and aspirations are met well.
- There are inconsistencies in the way college guidelines and systems work because not all are implemented effectively.
- Management is not sharp enough particularly in relation to ensuring that all students choose an appropriate curriculum.
- Attendance has improved but is still not high enough.
- The college does not meet the legal requirements to teach the full citizenship programme and religious education in the sixth form.

Improvement since the last inspection in November 1998 has been satisfactory. The college is now more effective and gives satisfactory value for money. The most significant improvement has been in examination results where over the past three years or so they have risen year on year. There is a stronger focus on raising students' achievements and as a result standards have improved. In Years 10 and 11 this work has successfully raised boys' achievements without diminishing girls': the gap between boys and girls is now less than it is in other schools. Examination results in the sixth form have improved substantially but girls do much better than boys. The focus on achievement has helped to improve teaching and learning: more lessons are now at least good than at the last inspection and focus on learning objectives. Attendance is monitored and promoted well but is still less than satisfactory. Students' spiritual development is satisfactory and music is now good but religious education remains weak.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average  
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Students' **achievements are satisfactory** overall. In Years 10 and 11, most make steady progress and achieve as well as can be reasonably expected given that they start with higher than average

skills and knowledge. However, students with special educational needs achieve particularly well because the support they receive is very good. GCSE performance and standards are rising at a faster pace than nationally: this is shown in the table above where the 2003 results are above average. A more detailed analysis shows an average set of figures: for example, an average proportion of students gain at least five GCSE passes at the higher grades. This is confirmed by what inspectors saw in lessons where standards are broadly average. But the picture is not universally average. Standards in French are high. In mathematics, art and music standards are above average but they are below expected levels in religious education. What all this means is that standards are now healthier as a result of improvements to teaching and learning: there is still room to improve standards. This also explains why the table above shows that GCSE performance was the same as in similar schools.

A/AS Level results, and those of AVCE courses, are well above average and rose sharply in 2003 from the previous year and students achieve well. This strong rise in standards is confirmed by lessons and shows that in the sixth form the college now has its sights set firmly on raising students' achievements. Standards achieved are particularly strong in French, statistics, performing arts and psychology. Students in the special educational needs unit (Stride) achieve very well and make remarkable progress.

**Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.** Students in Years 10 and 11 have good attitudes to college life and behave well. Sixth form students have very good attitudes and behave very well. Attendance has improved but is still below average. Students' personal development is satisfactory overall but their moral and social maturity is good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good.** Much of the teaching is at least good and this has a strong impact on learning: students are mostly interested in their work, ready to learn and concentrate well. There is some very strong teaching, which is particularly noticeable in the sixth form. Here, teaching is very good and students are very well motivated and work productively whether by themselves or together in groups. However, inconsistencies in assessment and marking mean that students do not always have a really clear understanding of their progress or how to improve their work. As a result, the good teaching seen during the inspection does not have as much impact on how well students achieve as it should and explains why students' achievements are satisfactory rather than good in Years 10 and 11.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is broad enough for students to follow courses that suit their abilities and aspirations. There is very good provision for students who find college difficult to follow alternative provision in partnership with the local further education college. The legal requirements for teaching citizenship and design and technology are not being met in full but the plans to rectify this are sound. The sixth form curriculum is good and students have a wide range of courses that enable them to realise their ambitions successfully. There is a good range of out of college activities provided as part of the college's good community provision. The number of students taking advantage of these activities is relatively small but those that do extend their learning successfully. The college has very good links with the local community and other schools: these are helping to improve the move from high school to the college. Links with parents are satisfactory.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are satisfactory overall.** The principal leads the college well and has established an unmistakable focus on raising standards which is proving increasingly successful. Many senior and middle managers lead their areas effectively and also have their sights set firmly on raising standards. However, aspects of management are not sharp enough. College-wide policies, such as assessment, are not followed through rigorously enough and this means there are inconsistencies, despite some good examples of well thought out measures to boost

achievement. There are weaknesses in the way the curriculum is managed for individual students: again, this results in a lack of consistency with some students getting an uneven experience. This is one of the reasons why students make only satisfactory progress between the start of Year 10 and the end of Year 11. Governance is satisfactory overall and governors now have a firm grip on the college's finances. They are mostly clear about strengths and weaknesses but there are aspects of the curriculum of which they know too little.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

The college is well regarded by parents and there are not enough places for all those students whose parents want to send their children there. Most parents who attended the meeting with inspectors before the inspection were pleased with the college but felt that communication was not always effective. Students enjoy college but a sizeable minority felt that they did not get enough guidance about moving into the sixth form.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- raise standards and achievement in religious education;
- use assessment consistently to inform teaching and to help students improve their work.
- implement college guidelines and systems methodically so that all students receive a consistent experience.
- sharpen the approach to managing the curriculum, so that all students choose appropriate courses.
- improve attendance further.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure that citizenship is taught fully in Years 10 and 11;
- ensure that religious education is taught in the sixth form;
- hold a daily act of collective worship.



## The Sixth Form

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Rawlins Community College sixth form educates its students effectively.** Purposeful leadership and well-focused management means that teaching and learning are very good: teachers have raised standards very effectively. The broad-based curriculum meets students' needs effectively. The unit for students with special educational needs is excellent. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is good.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Examination results are high.
- The sixth form is effectively led and managed and is focused on raising standards and improving teaching but good assessment in some subjects is not consistent across the sixth form.
- Students' personal development is good and they have positive attitudes to their work.
- The provision for students with special educational needs, including Stride, is very good: students achieve well as a result.
- The enhancement programme is not yet effectively extending students' learning.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Good in English.</b> Standards are in line with national expectations in English language and English literature. In both subjects teaching and learning are good and achievement is satisfactory. <b>Good in French.</b> Teaching and learning are good and achievement is good, overall. The quality of teaching is occasionally very good, producing high motivation in the students, who express considerable enjoyment of the subject.
Mathematics	<b>Good in mathematics.</b> Standards are above average and examination results are good. Good teaching ensures that students achieve well. <b>Very good in statistics.</b> Results are above average and students achieve well. Enthusiastic leadership and good teaching make this a popular subject.
Science	<b>Good in biology and physics.</b> Standards are high in biology and achievement is good. In physics standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. In both subjects teaching and learning are good.
Information and communication technology	<b>Standards in ICT are good</b> and improving as a result of good teaching and management. In too many other subjects, students are disadvantaged by a lack of computers for planned use.
Humanities	<b>Psychology is very good.</b> Standards are well above average and achievement is good. Teaching and learning are very good and students are very positive about the subject. <b>Very good in sociology.</b> Standards are above average and teaching and learning are good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<b>Good in product design and design textiles.</b> Standards of design work are good and examination results are above average. Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve well.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Very good in art.</b> Standards are above average. Teaching throughout the sixth form is very good. Achievement is good but restricted by the short length of teaching periods. <b>Very good in performing arts.</b> Standards are good and students achieve well because very good teaching helps students develop as confident and thoughtful practitioners. <b>Music is very good.</b> Standards are rising and reflect good teaching and organization. There are excellent opportunities for working with music technology.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Business	<b>Good in business studies.</b> Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well.
General education	<b>Satisfactory in general studies.</b> Provision is improving but some good teaching is undermined by weak attendance. As a result students' achievements are satisfactory.

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

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The advice, support and guidance given to students are good. Staff know their students well. The college provides effective support for application to university and post-16 education. Impartial careers advice supports career choices well and the college makes good use of local businesses and universities to develop mentoring. Methods for checking and improving attendance are good: attendance is rising but remains lower than it should. The good quality guidance and support develop students' personal qualities well. As a result students in the sixth form have good attitudes to their work and relationships with others.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

**Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.** New systems and procedures have improved the experience offered to students. These include better tracking of students' attendance and achievements. The college makes good use of external agencies, businesses and local colleges to offer students a broad curriculum and these links are well managed. The provision made for students with learning disabilities, in Stride, is well integrated into the college's sixth form.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and feel they have a wide range of courses to choose from. They say that teachers are always on hand and willing to help and that teaching challenges and demands the most from them. Students reported that they would like more advice about what they choose to study as well as additional careers advice. They would also like more out-of-lesson activities although the take-up of enrichment classes, available in several subjects, is not large.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Students' achievements are satisfactory overall. They make steady progress in Years 10 and 11 and achieve as well as can be reasonably expected. Standards are above the national average overall and rising faster than in other schools, but there is still room for improvement. GCSE results are more or less typical in most subjects but are above average in mathematics, art and music. A/AS Level and AVCE results rose sharply in 2003 to well above the national average and students achieved particularly well. This strong performance is set to continue. Students with special educational needs of all ages achieve especially well because the support they receive is very good.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are rising faster than they are in other schools and are now above the national average: improvements to teaching and learning mean that standards are becoming healthier.
- Sixth form standards are improving rapidly because the college has its sights set firmly on raising students' achievements.
- Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average in French and above average in mathematics, art and music but below average in information and communication technology and physical education; in religious education they are low.
- In the sixth form standards are high in French and psychology and above average in nearly all other subjects.
- The college has improved boys' achievements at GCSE well and although girls do better than boys, the difference is less than in other schools.

#### Commentary

##### Main college

##### *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	52 (47)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	89 (85)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.4 (34.7)	32.3 (34.7)

*There were 465 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

1. The college's performance in the 2003 GCSE examinations is broadly above average and is around the same as that in similar schools. Results are improving and at a faster rate than they are nationally. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades at GCSE is a little below the college's targets but the overall results are above the national average: this shows that the college is becoming increasingly successful in raising standards. A particular feature of these rising standards is the way the college has successfully raised boys' performance while, at the same time, ensuring that girls' standards do not drop behind. Further analysis of the GCSE results shows that there is less difference between boys' and girls' results than in other schools. What all this means is that the college has focused successfully on raising all students' achievements. Given that students start Year 10 with above average Year 9 national tests scores the performance of the college at GCSE represents reasonable achievement.

2. An important feature of the college is that students begin their career at Rawlins at the start of Year 10. Evidence from the inspection shows that this has an impact on their learning as students' progress is not as good as it should be. Teachers have to work hard to overcome the effects of transferring to a new school and the college is reasonably successful in helping students settle quickly and make satisfactory progress, partly through the very good links with high schools and partly because of the good teaching. However, this still leaves some room for improvement and explains why students achieve as well as can be reasonably expected rather than well.

3. Students with special educational needs achieve very well. Whilst they are still in Year 9 special needs teachers visit their previous schools to identify their needs and abilities. This information is used well to decide appropriate targets and to match the experience students receive to their capabilities and needs. Some individuals with special needs make exceptionally good progress because of the very good support they receive.

4. Students' achievements, and the college's performance in GCSE examinations, are confirmed by the evidence from lessons. In most subjects students achieve reasonably well and reach average standards. However, in French students achieve well to reach standards that are well above average. Students achieve similarly well in mathematics, art and music where standards are above average. In religious education students do not achieve well enough and standards are below expected levels. However, the department is beginning to improve and evidence from the inspection shows that teaching is starting to get better. In physical education as a whole achievement is satisfactory but there is some under-achievement in the physical education GCSE course where standards are below average.

5. In information and communication technology standards are below average by the end of Year 11. However, improvements in the way the subject is led and managed have resulted in good teaching and this, in turn, has helped to raise students' achievements. Students now achieve well. Across the school, computers are used well in art, design and technology, media, music and science. However, in other subjects including English and mathematics, there is not enough planned use of computers to enhance students' learning. The library provides good out-of-lesson access to computers.

## Sixth form

### ***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	93.3 (91.5)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	38.6 (28.2)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	282.8 (238.1)	253.1 (254.5)

*There were 134 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

6. Standards achieved in the sixth form, in A/AS Level examinations, and in the AVCE courses, are high. They rose sharply in 2003 and are much higher than in previous years. This is confirmed by lessons: standards are above average and students achieve well making brisk progress in their courses. The best subjects are French and psychology and achievement is strong in statistics, performing arts, music and art: but in nearly all subjects standards are also above average. In general studies achievement is, at best, satisfactory: not all students' value the subject and attendance is patchy. However, the course provides good opportunities for students to develop their examination skills as well as those in language and information and communication technology. Better monitoring and improvements to the course are beginning to raise attendance and thus achievement. Inspection evidence indicates that students currently in Year 13 are set to achieve above average standards in their examinations. This is lower than 2003 but nevertheless represents good achievement in relation to students' earlier attainments and examination results.

7. As in Years 10 and 11, students with special educational needs achieve very well because they get very good support. Similarly, Stride students achieve very well and make substantial progress.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Attitudes to college and learning are good. In the sixth form they are very good. The college is harmonious and relationships are good. Behaviour is good. The college takes a firm line with misbehaviour and a minority of students generate a high level of fixed term exclusions. Attendance continues to be unsatisfactory, although it is better in the sixth form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Most students like being at the college and they enjoy their studies.
- Sixth form students have very good attitudes to their learning and want to do well.
- Relationships are good: students mix well and are confident, friendly and helpful.
- Behaviour is good overall and movement around the college is sensible despite the constraints of space.
- Attendance is satisfactory in the sixth form but unsatisfactory in Year 10 and Year 11 which has a negative impact on achievement.

### **Commentary**

#### **Main college**

8. Students are generally positive about the college and enthusiastic about their learning. They are confident, friendly and helpful. In lessons, attitudes are good and most students get on well with their work. Students think they work hard and so do their parents. They work co-operatively in pairs and groups, support one another well and are attentive. Attitudes of students with special educational needs and Higher Education College placement students are very good. When teaching is less good, some students, especially in Year 10, lose concentration and tend to chatter causing low level disruption to the learning of others.

9. Relationships are good and the college is harmonious. Students feel secure and confident that any issues are dealt with quickly and effectively. Surveys reveal that students and parents are satisfied that, whilst some bullying does occur, it is dealt with appropriately.

10. Students with special educational needs often arrive in the college with poor attitudes to learning. The support they are given in the learning support department makes important differences to how they approach their work and many become keen learners. The ethos in the department and its physical distance from the main building offers shy and vulnerable students a secure and safe environment during lessons and free times. All staff in the department work effectively to encourage special needs students to develop their self esteem so that they contribute to the college community. They also are assisted to form constructive relationships with other students or adults and for some students this is a very challenging goal which the majority achieve. Some students with special educational needs have very challenging behaviour and the department skilfully and patiently modifies this through the consistent application of strategies.

11. The majority of students behave well in lessons and around the college, although, in the student survey many thought that the behaviour of their peers was not good. The college has high expectations and staff deal promptly with any disruption. However, some of the guidance around the rules and codes of behaviour is somewhat complex and this leads to some inconsistency in their application. Staff take a firm line with the minority of students with more challenging attitudes and behaviour who generate a high number of fixed term exclusions, having to spend a disproportionate amount of time with these students.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1020	36	3
White – Irish	3	0	0
White – any other White background	7	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	6	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	18	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	289	89	0

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

12. Most students are keen to take responsibility for their learning and personal development, for example the news sheet planned by the school council. The college provides only a few opportunities for students to develop their sense of responsibility but this is changing: the opportunity for students to email the principal through “Raw Voice”, for example, and to the newly resurrected school council illustrate the college’s commitment to improvement and taking students’ views seriously.

## Attendance

### *Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)*

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.4	School data	2.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

13. Attendance is below the national median for pupils in secondary schools. Although attendance has improved over the last few years it continues to be unsatisfactory. Nearly a third of all students in Years 10 and 11 have below 90 per cent attendance so far this academic year which clearly has a major impact on their achievement. Good use of data and monitoring systems enable staff to work effectively with the Education Welfare Service to target those students with unsatisfactory attendance. Good daily follow-up establishes the whereabouts of most absentees but there are still too many parents who do not ensure that their children attend regularly. Punctuality is satisfactory although during the inspection ongoing issues with local transport resulted in many late arrivals. Further refinement to lesson registration to enable immediate follow up is necessary to

improve attendance in lessons. The rewards scheme has a positive but limited impact and the link between attendance and achievement is not yet sufficiently emphasised.

14. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory overall. There are times when students have the opportunity to reflect upon spiritual issues, but few were seen during the inspection. These are not planned systematically through the curriculum.

15. Provision for moral development is good. In particular, good opportunities to explore contemporary issues were seen in art, dance, and drama; and in the sixth form, in performing arts, psychology, and the ASDAN course. Students' conduct around the college, and in many lessons, often demonstrated a developed awareness of their responsibility towards others.

16. Provision for social development is good. Throughout the inspection, inspectors noted students' capacity to work well, and co-operatively, with their fellow students. In particular, good examples were seen in music, dance and drama; and in the sixth form, in design and technology. Movement around the college is well ordered and free of incident.

17. There is a strong cultural influence within the college. Many students take advantage of the opportunities to develop their interests through the various performances that the college encourages and presents. There is, however, a lack of systematic planning across the college to encourage students' awareness of, and respect for, the diversity of contemporary British life.

### **Sixth Form**

18. Students enjoy being part of the sixth form and are very motivated to succeed. Attitudes to learning and to college are very good. Personal development is very good, students are mature and self disciplined. Students are keen to take responsibility for their own learning and development as well as seeking to improve their environment through the work of the sixth form committee. For example, they have painted the sixth form common room. Behaviour is very good and students provide good role models. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory with emphasis being placed on the importance of good attendance and well-managed private study time and their impact on achievement.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but provision for students in Years 10 and 11 who find college difficult is very good. The sixth form curriculum is good. There is a good range of out of college activities but these are supported by a relatively small number of students. The college has very good links with the local community and other schools and the partnership with parents is satisfactory.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good. The majority of the teaching across the college is good or very good and this helps students learn well. In the sixth form the proportion of very good teaching is higher and teaching here is very good overall.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The good teaching inspires the students to learn well.
- Relationships are good and encourage students to respect and listen to their teachers.
- Assessment practice is too variable from department to department although in some it is thorough and constructive.
- Marking is a weakness and does not guide the students and tell them what they do well and how they can improve.
- Teachers' knowledge of their subject, particularly in the sixth form, is good.

## Commentary

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in [number] lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5 (3%)	30 (15%)	99 (52%)	55 (29%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

### Main college

19. Relationships are very good: teachers treat students with respect, expecting conscientiousness and commitment to their studies in return. Students are very well motivated by the good teaching they receive and work productively whether by themselves or together in groups. These good relationships are particularly important with students who have special educational needs and with those students in Year 10 who sometimes have unenthusiastic attitudes to lessons. Some teachers have to work very hard to motivate and manage classes containing these students. However, teachers' consistent good-natured insistence on concentration and attention are effective over time and ensure that the majority of students get the most from lessons. On some occasions too much of the lesson is used to give students information rather than asking them to find it for themselves.

20. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and the examination syllabuses and use this well to ensure students understand all that is necessary to do well. Students respect this expertise and it reassures them that it is important to learn all they can from their teachers. The most effective teaching was observed where teachers had a passion for their subject and their enthusiasm was contagious. This captured the interest of students who not only worked hard in lessons but often became more motivated to take up individual and personal studies outside class.

21. There are weaknesses in how teachers use assessment to test out what students understand in order to plan their next piece of work and the next lessons. Too many teachers do not use assessment information to track students' progress and ensure they are doing the very best they can. There is also some confusion over the use of different types of grade such as target grades and projected grades.

22. Another weakness is that teachers sometimes set the same task for all students and this slows the progress of some and makes work too hard for others. This is particularly detrimental when there are students with special learning needs in the class: as a result these students do not learn as effectively as they should. There are, however, examples of good practice such as teachers working extremely well in partnership with special needs staff. Here, each teacher takes a different role within the lesson to help every student achieve.

23. There is an agreed college structure to lessons and to lesson planning (The prerequisites of a Rawlins lesson) and many teachers follow this effectively. The college has spent considerable time improving the quality of teaching and learning over recent years. This has been successful and has improved the standards students achieve. As the college has no Year 7, 8 or 9 pupils, it has not benefited as much as other schools from the advice and professional development linked to the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. What this has meant is the college has had to work hard, and with less support, to improve teaching and learning. In information and communication technology, for example, the strategy is starting to be used to plan lessons.

24. There are inconsistencies in marking: not all teachers mark in a way that guides their students' learning. In some departments there are very effective practices that give students a really clear understanding of how they are doing and how to improve their work. However, these good



methods are not shared throughout the college. As a result the good teaching observed during the inspection does not have as much impact on students' achievement as it should and explains why students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory rather than good.

25. Teaching of students with special educational needs is good overall. However, there is some extremely effective practice in other subject lessons. In an English lesson for example, students learnt very well because the subject teacher and support teacher worked as partners to run the lesson and to ensure every student made progress. Learning support assistants are very skilled and effectively work with subject teachers to adapt support and help students with special needs to focus and understand the work. The learning support department expects students to achieve well and takes care to help them take suitable accredited courses. Very good assessment and record keeping in the department ensure students' learning is tracked and built upon.

26. There is very good provision for students who find college difficult to follow alternative provision in partnership with local further education colleges. The legal requirements for teaching design and technology, the full citizenship programme, and reporting on information and communication technology are not being met but the plans to rectify this are sound.

## **Sixth Form**

27. Teaching in the sixth form is very good overall. In every sixth form subject inspected in full, teaching is at least good overall. Teachers have a particularly secure understanding of the examination syllabuses but also have a passion for, and a real depth of knowledge of, their subject. Students value this and believe that the teaching they get challenges and demands the most from them. This inspires them to carry out independent research and to complete coursework. These views were confirmed by the inspection: most of the teaching in the sixth form was at least good and motivated and engaged students in learning. As a result students made brisk progress in many lessons and this explains why they achieve well to reach standards that are above average overall.

## **The curriculum**

The overall provision is satisfactory for Years 10 and 11 and good for the sixth form. Opportunities in many subjects are at least good. Overall the provision of accommodation is satisfactory, and there is an appropriate match of the accommodation available to the range of general and specialist subjects and courses offered by the college. Resources, including staffing, are generally adequate for all students.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The range of subjects and courses available to sixth form students is very good.
- For Years 10 and 11 the provision for art, performing arts and music are very good and the range of vocational courses on offer is good.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
- Arrangements for sex education and drugs education are good.
- Statutory requirements are not fully met for citizenship and design and technology and for religious education in the sixth form.

## **Commentary**

### **Main college**

28. There are many strengths in the curriculum but provision is only satisfactory because some statutory requirements are not being met in some subjects. The provision for art, music and performing arts are very good, but there is insufficient time for English. Statutory requirements are not met for teaching design and technology and the full citizenship programme, and for reporting to

parents about students' progress in information and communication technology. There are plans to rectify most of these omissions in September which are appropriate.

29. In the previous inspection the provision for music and religious education were seen as weaknesses and whereas music is now a strength there has been unsatisfactory improvement for RE. The length of lessons has been reduced from 70 minutes (as at the time of the previous inspection) to 50 minutes now, which is difficult for practical subjects including art, design and technology (food technology), music and physical education.

30. The college has introduced some flexibility into the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 with a range of vocational courses that meet well the needs of the full range of students. The vocational courses include double GCSEs for art, health and social care, information and communication technology, leisure and tourism and NVQ courses in conjunction with local colleges. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and updated in order to respond to demands.

31. The school takes great care to provide an appropriate curriculum for the capabilities and needs of individual students who have special educational needs. There is a strong drive to include every student well so that they benefit appropriately from college life. The learning support department ensures that individuals get the greatest deal possible by giving good support and guidance to both students and teachers. Real efforts are made to identify courses that will give students the best chance of acquiring useful accreditation and the college tailors individual students' courses to match their needs where possible.

32. Arrangements for sex and relationships education are good and take place through religious education and biology with further support in PSHE. The college's drug policy is good and includes a section on drug education; teaching of the topic is carried out as a part of the physical education teaching programme. The students say that they receive satisfactory careers advice and for the transitions that they have to make at each stage of their education. The library has a good stock of careers resources available for students.

33. Several subjects including French, mathematics and information and communication technology provide good opportunities for enrichment at the end of the college day but the take-up for these sessions is disappointing. Art, performing arts and music provide good opportunities for students to take part in activities that complement and extend the work covered in normal lessons. The physical education department has established successful teams that include those that take part in basketball, badminton, soccer and netball. In geography students visit local areas as part of their field study work and in history students have an opportunity to visit Berlin. The experiences of English students are extended by visits to Stratford-upon-Avon and to London for theatre visits.

34. Since the last inspection, six science laboratories have been extensively refurbished, and the accommodation for food technology has improved significantly to the point to where it is generally appropriate. Library provision is now very good: it is well stocked, and used extensively by students. The location of the Stride unit adjacent to the sixth form areas has beneficial social gains for those post-16 students with special educational needs. Accommodation for the teaching of ICT remains cramped, but the spaces are used effectively. In music, whilst resources are good, the environment and accommodation are poor, with insufficient space for students and staff. Dance and drama subjects have little dedicated specialist space, and with access regularly disrupted by the demands of college examinations. This situation has been recognised fully within the college's development plan. The provision of textbooks for sixth form psychology courses is poor. Provision for physical education is good and includes a spacious playing field, although there are some problems with the quality of other external playing surfaces which the school is trying to address.

35. In general there are insufficient social areas for students to use at break and lunchtimes and this means that students often use stairways and corridors to eat their sandwiches and stay warm. Students behave well despite the lack of comfort which does have a significant impact on the quality of their experience at college.

36. In the humanities areas the available accommodation is used well, standards of display are good and teachers have worked hard to improve the learning environment. In design and technology, the department has high quality display materials throughout the area which inform, inspire and motivate students. Standards of display are generally good around the college.

37. Resources are generally adequate for all students, enabling them to achieve at least satisfactorily. The recent loss of specialist school status for the arts has had a significantly detrimental impact on budgets across the college. In general teachers and support staff are sufficient in number, are appropriately deployed and there is a good match of their range of skills, qualifications and experience to the teaching that is assigned to them. Supply teaching staff are rarely used. There are very good levels of support from technicians and other ancillary staff who effectively meet the needs of the students and staff they work with. This is particularly the case in the areas of media, music, science and design and technology.

### **Sixth Form**

38. The sixth form curriculum is inclusive and enables most students to do well in their subjects. The students have the opportunity to choose from a broad range of GCE A-Level, AVCE, intermediate and foundation level subjects which meet their ambitions well. The courses are popular with both students and parents. The college has developed an innovative approach to teaching key skills and general studies. All students study AS/A Level general studies and this is used to provide opportunities for them to develop their skills in essay writing or develop an argument as well helping them to extend their key skills in either language or information and communication technology. On the other hand, the college has still to persuade students of the value of this course and attendance is at best patchy. Nevertheless, improvements to the teaching of the course and better monitoring of students' attendance are beginning to make a difference and achievement is moving upwards. The college is not meeting the statutory requirement to teach religious education to Year 12 students or for a daily collective act of worship.

### **Care, guidance and support**

Overall provision for the care, support, and guidance is satisfactory. The procedures for child protection, welfare, and health and safety are good. The procedures for supporting and guiding students through monitoring are satisfactory as are the procedures for seeking and acting on students' views.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses:**

- Support on a day-to-day basis is good.
- Transfer and induction arrangements have been strengthened and are very good but are only just beginning to improve standards in Year 10.
- The college provides support and guidance as students progress through the college and makes good use of the additional assistance of a wide range of external professionals.
- Procedures for seeking students' views, although just satisfactory, are not as well developed as they might be because the student council is still new.

### **Commentary**

#### **Main college**

39. Child protection systems and procedures are in place and staff training in child protection matters has also taken place. The college teaching and support staff, well supported by a range of external agencies, provide welfare support to individual students when necessary.

40. Teachers and support staff know students well. Students are provided with individual learning targets which they are expected to meet. The range of behaviour management strategies is

reviewed regularly and this is one reason why discipline is good. The support given by the college on a day to day basis for students' personal needs is good. Students are clear who they can turn to should the need arise. Tutor groups provide a structure that assists in the recognition of problems experienced at home and tutors' help and advice enables students to continue with their studies. Students feel that the student council is not yet sufficiently developed as a recognised vehicle for consultation and change.

41. Sixth form students have been recently recruited and trained as mentors to provide additional support for identified groups of students to raise achievement. Particular groups of students are targeted, for example those who with additional support could improve their performance at GCSE, those who are identified as Gifted and Talented, and those who are found to have challenging behaviour. Staff involved meet students regularly to advise on course work and study skills. Advice given on future careers supports students well in their choices for the future.

42. The college has a very good induction programme to welcome Year 10 students and this is well managed and effective. The programme is well-planned and includes visits to partner schools and bridging projects on agreed curriculum areas. High school pupils visit the college and report back to their peers. These initiatives involve close liaison with partner schools.

43. The college monitors students' academic performance and personal development both formally and informally. Not all college staff are making full use of the data collected to set and achieve challenging targets for all students or to monitor progress in a systematic and consistent manner. There is a wide variation in the quality of feedback students receive from teachers and, for example, marking is not consistently carried out and some is too brief to enable students to have a clear picture of how to improve their work.

44. The learning support department contributes considerably to the care students with special educational needs receive. Staff know the students well, assess their needs and abilities accurately and offer good quality support and guidance. This is carefully followed up so that the improvements they make are carefully tracked so that provision can be adjusted. Where students need support that is not available in college the very good links with specialist outside agencies are used well. Sometimes this leads to innovative practice; for example, where a student with autism needed to follow a particular programme, the local education authority Autism Service trained two learning assistants to carry out the work.

### **Sixth form**

45. Staff know their students well and the college is providing a good level of support, advice and guidance to students to assist them in making their choice for post-16 education. Students have access to impartial careers advice and make use of the Connexions personal adviser to support career choices. Programmes are set up for visits to raise awareness of Higher Education opportunities.

46. The college makes good use of external agencies to support students. This year 25 post-16 students volunteered to be trained as peer mentors by the Leicestershire Education Business Company and are supporting the Year 10 and 11 mentoring programme. Three local universities have also provided support and the college is planning to use undergraduate students as mentors for sixth form students.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Partnership arrangements with parents are satisfactory. Parents are generally positive and supportive. The college tries hard to involve parents and seek their views with limited success. The quality of the links with the community is very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The college is well regarded and oversubscribed.
- Staff work in close partnership with parents to resolve issues relating to their children. Parents are very happy to approach the college with concerns.
- Relationships with parents of students with special educational needs are very effective.
- Consultation evenings are fairly well attended but parents would welcome more information on how to support their children's learning.
- Termly progress checks do not meet statutory requirements and targets are not clearly focused on improvement. Parents find them brief but helpful.
- The adult and community programme, which is the largest in the county, is very good and the very comprehensive range of activities attracts 3,000 adults to the college.
- There are strong links between the college and its feeder high schools.

## **Commentary**

47. Parents are pleased with the induction arrangements but have some concerns about the reliability of information and the consistency of the role of form tutors. Student "organisers" have been given a higher profile this year, but their use as a means of dialogue between staff and parents is not yet well established. Where there are particular concerns, staff establish good contact and work effectively in partnership with parents to resolve issues.

48. The college provides satisfactory, clear information about the curriculum and daily routines. Termly Progress Checks are helpful, but parents find them brief. Progress is not clearly identified and ICT and PE are not reported. Targets are very general and do not provide sufficient detail for parents to support improvement. Sixth form students receive additional information relating to modular examinations which gives a clearer picture about progress. Consultation evenings are generally well attended. The college would like to improve its partnership with parents and is looking at ways to survey parental satisfaction. Recent meetings to canvass views using more local venues were not well attended. It continues to be a priority to seek ways of further involving parents in the life of the college.

49. The college identifies very closely with its local community. The college's image in the local community is strong and more parents than ever choose it, demonstrating confidence in the quality of the education provided.

50. The college's adult and community programme offers members of the local community a very comprehensive range of activities ranging from playgroups with a crèche to an elderly people's lunch club. Local residents of all ages and interests make full use of the college's facilities which gives them access both in and out of school hours. There are always adults on the college site. Students not only benefit from seeing education as an ongoing process, but also enrol for courses that enhance their learning. The college offers part-time employment to students of the college. Many of the courses on offer cater for members of the local community who have special educational needs. An outstanding example of such a course is the "Stepping Out" course which caters for adults with learning difficulties. Students on this course are full of praise for its quality. The adult and community programme, which is the largest in the county, is very good.

51. Following the government white paper, "Success for All", the Learning and Skills Council has initiated a scheme whose aim is to increase the flexibility of the curriculum on offer to young adults. As a result of this initiative, approximately 170 Years 10 and 11 students from the college attend Loughborough, Stephenson and Brooksby Colleges of Further Education one half day per week to take part in a range of vocationally-orientated courses which include hairdressing, auto-engineering, catering and building crafts. Inspection evidence indicates that the scheme is highly successful, very well administered and is of much benefit to students.

52. The college has very good links with its local feeder high schools. Many meetings are organised in order to ensure that the transfer of students from the high schools to the college at the end of Year 9 is as smooth as possible. Senior staff meet regularly, and there is a comprehensive three-day induction for Year 9 pupils before they begin their Year 10 courses.

53. The college has many other links with its local community, including those with local employers who take students for work experience. Many local adults are invited into the college to speak at college assemblies. Links with the local church are very strong, and the church is used for college musical concerts to which the local community are invited to attend. The students are very generous in their support of local and international charities, and at a recent "Red Nose Day" event over £4000 was raised.

54. Parents are very positive about the support their children with special educational needs receive. They are involved in setting targets and in working with the college to develop their children's progress. They are given very good information about how their child is getting on. Parents who were spoken to during the inspection felt that the college and in particular the special educational needs department had made an enormous difference to their child's learning and self esteem.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The college is led well by the principal and is based firmly on the drive for improvement. Other key staff carry out their leadership responsibilities appropriately often providing a clear vision for their subject or area. Management of the college is satisfactory. Governance is satisfactory overall but there are some weaknesses in the way they hold the college to account.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Senior managers have accurately concentrated the college's efforts on improving teaching and learning in order to raise standards effectively.
- Assessment was not included sufficiently during the focus on improving teaching and this has limited some of the impact of improvements in learning.
- There is some good subject leadership and management but subject departments do not always follow whole-college policies and procedures.
- There are inconsistencies in the way college policies and systems are followed and senior and middle managers do not monitor these rigorously enough: as a result areas needing improvement are not always identified and addressed clearly.
- Governors are committed to supporting the college but much of their attention in recent years has been directed towards stabilising the college budget and some legal requirements are not met in full.

### **Commentary**

#### **Main college**

55. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and there are some good features. The principal provides good leadership and has a clear view about the importance of raising standards and the need to improve teaching and learning. The strategies adopted have been effective because teaching and learning are now good and standards have consistently risen so that they are average at GCSE and above average in the sixth form. There is room for further improvement, however, particularly in teaching where there are still some unsatisfactory aspects. Not enough use is made, for example, of the assessment of students' understanding in lessons as a way of identifying what needs to be learnt next: as a result the progress made by some students is slower than it should be, especially in Years 10 and 11.

56. Other senior leaders and middle managers contribute to the effectiveness of the college but their contributions vary. Some leaders rely too much on trust to put college policies into operation, and do not check implementation through first hand evidence; others lead their subject department effectively but are not as rigorous in doing other things the college way. The outcome of this is that

college-wide policies are not consistently put into practice and there are weaknesses in the curriculum. For example, statutory requirements are not fully met and there is insufficient time for English. In addition, the enrichment sessions at the end of the college day in several subjects provide good experiences but too small a number of students attend. These issues have the effect of causing students' experiences to be inconsistent which explains why progress and achievement are not better than satisfactory during Years 10 and 11.

57. The college has a clear and shared aim of offering an education that fully includes all members of the college community. It is proud of its excellent provision for students with special needs and the Stride students and takes every care to give these students an appropriate and rich education. However, in too many lessons the same information or task is given to all students even though for some it is too easy and for some it is too hard. Teachers are very good at including everyone in the life of the college but are not as successful at meeting every student's needs in lessons. The learning support department is extremely effectively managed. Relationships are very good and all staff in the department share the aim of providing the highest support possible for students with special educational needs. Administrative procedures are efficient and make sure that students' needs are met. There is an ethos of persistence in the department and being prepared to try yet another tack with a student whose learning needs are difficult to meet.

58. Management is generally effective; the college operates smoothly and efficiently on a daily basis. Day to day matters run in an orderly and organised manner. The improvement plan covers the most important areas that have the major impact on students' achievement. Within this plan each subject department has an action plan and these vary considerably, some underlining the fact that not every department is committed to following college policies. Whilst the college plan has raising standards at its centre, many departments focus on peripheral or resource-led issues, that may or may not improve the progress students make. Some subject plans do not reflect the main aims and challenges identified by the college.

59. There is a weakness in the way the curriculum is managed for individual students. The curriculum for most students is broad and relevant and meets their needs and aspirations well. However, a small minority choose subjects which do not meet their needs as effectively. Some students choose to study similar subjects, for example, two design and technology subjects, while others have too many choices and taken on more subjects than they can manage. As a result some students get an uneven experience. The school plans to reduce the number of choices next year.

60. Overall governance is satisfactory. Relationships between the governing body and senior managers in the college are businesslike and professional. Together they successfully set the direction for the college. They place the community nature of the college and its inclusion of students with special educational needs at the forefront of their vision. They are very successful in these matters as these are strengths of the college.

61. In 1999 the college applied for and won specialist Arts College status which added considerably to college finances. Due to a variety of reasons, including not meeting some of the achievement targets, arts college status was revoked. The loss of arts college status and the subsequent loss in funding has been a challenge for governors and college staff; and parents are still very concerned about why this happened. Over the past few years the governing body has spent much of its time trying to manage a very difficult financial situation exacerbated by financial management difficulties. They have also taken time to select and appoint the current principal. Consequently, they have taken their eye off some of their statutory responsibilities and have not held the college sufficiently to account to ensure, for example, that the full programme for citizenship is being taught. They have a realistic view of the effectiveness of the college gained through analysis of performance data and other information offered by the senior management team but do not have a sufficiently precise view of all its strengths and weaknesses.

62. The college finances are now managed effectively although this has not been so in the recent past. A variety of circumstances led to the college ending the last financial year with a deficit, having carried forward a fairly large overspend from the previous year. However, the college has set

in place an appropriate plan for recovery, in consultation with the local education authority, and it predicts that it will be able to set a balanced budget within three years.

**Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4366878	Balance from previous year	- 158491
Total expenditure	4577418	Balance carried forward to the next	- 210540
Expenditure per pupil	3501		

**Sixth form**

63. Leadership of the sixth form is good. New systems and procedures have improved the experience offered to students. There is a clear vision for the sixth form which has a strong focus on raising students' achievement: as a result the college is successfully improving teaching and learning. This has been achieved partly by increasing the range of courses available but also by some robust systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. Stride, the sixth form provision for students with special educational needs, is extremely well managed so that these students receive a consistently high quality experience that meets their needs.

**The special educational unit in the sixth form (Stride)**

**What is the effectiveness of Stride?**

The provision offered by Stride is **excellent**.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well because teaching is excellent and consistently reinforces positive attitudes to learning.
- The experience students receive is well planned to meet their individual needs and prepare them well for the world beyond college.
- Students delight in their work and value the relationships they have with each other and all the staff who work with them.

**Commentary**

64. Stride is a specialist unit that offers the local education authority provision for post-16 students with moderate and other significant learning difficulties. Stride offers an excellent environment for learning. Relationships are excellent and the needs and personalities of individual students are well known to staff who tailor experiences to be most beneficial. Expectations of behaviour and work are really clear. Students know exactly what standards are demanded of them and are delighted to be part of Stride.

65. Students are eager to answer questions and to get their tasks completed correctly. Students take great pride in their work and because of the excellent teaching find the work challenging but achievable. The staff show great skill in pitching work and the support they give to match the capabilities of each individual student. Staff also always make the purpose of work clear to students so that they know why they are doing something and this helps them to try hard. This is why students achieve very well and often surpass early expectations for their progress. Relationships are excellent; staff act as very good role models showing the students how to communicate and respond to one another effectively. There are plenty of opportunities for students to earn praise and to feel good about themselves and their learning. This positive environment



encourages students to be supportive to one another; for example, one student said, "Don't worry, there are no right or wrong answers," to another student who was hesitating before answering a question.

66. One of the reasons for the success of Stride is the consistency in which policies and practices are followed by staff so that students always know where they stand. This has a very positive impact on behaviour; students feel secure and valued. Staff have excellent knowledge of how to modify the work, how to present it and how to offer support so that the students learn as much as they possibly can. They are patient and thoughtful giving individuals the time and the help they need to take the next step in their learning. A particular strength is the way staff work together, often in pairs, teaching and supporting in partnership.

67. The accommodation is relatively small for the number of students but is very well used and provides a warm and friendly learning environment. Stride is extremely well led and managed to ensure that it provides the best possible educational experience for the students. Whenever it is valuable for Stride students, provision is made for them to take part in the main life of the college so that they can have as rounded an experience as possible. Stride is situated on the main sixth form corridor: this enables the students to use the main college facilities and be part of the main student body when they wish. The students have specialist lessons such as art and music in the main school and these are very well taught by the mainstream subject specialist. Students are also in main school tutorial groups and attend assemblies with the rest of their year groups. The experience students have at lunchtime is also very good. They are well supported by staff at lunchtime and once a week use the youth club which gives them very good opportunities to socialise and interact with others in different environments. Students in the rest of the college have positive relationships with Stride students and take pleasure in helping and supporting them. Relationships with Stride students' parents are very positive and the unit keeps links with parents very active through the daily planner that goes home.

## **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Spanish and German were sampled. In **Spanish** teaching and learning were good, with good motivation and interest from students. Achievement is satisfactory. In **German** teaching and learning were satisfactory, again with good student participation in the lesson.

#### **English**

Provision in English is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The 'Pre-requisites of a Rawlins Lesson' framework is followed consistently within the department and underpins effective teaching practice.
- The limited amount of time allocated to English does not enable good teaching to have a sufficient impact on standards. However, an increase is planned from September 2004.
- Teaching is consistently good or better.
- Students are well managed in the department and relationships are good.
- The lack of a whole-college literacy policy means that skills are not reinforced consistently across the curriculum and remain underdeveloped for some students.
- Assessment is firmly established and effective.

#### **Commentary**

68. Attainment at GCSE in 2003 was in line with national averages for both English and English Literature. Overall girls outperformed boys, in line with the picture nationally. In English Literature boys performed particularly well at A\* and A grades. In 2002 overall attainment in English Language was below the national levels and above in English Literature. The number of students taking GCSE English Literature has increased since the last inspection from 40 per cent to 82 per cent.

69. Achievement is satisfactory overall across the year groups with some students, particularly in higher and lower attaining groups, making better than expected progress.

70. The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are structures to support further improvement. The quality of teaching seen ranged from excellent to satisfactory with the majority good or very good. Excellent teaching relates to strengths in strategies for classroom management, teachers' subject knowledge, response to individual needs and good planning. In good and very good lessons planning is detailed, approaches varied and pace and momentum sustained. Discussions are skilfully guided. Where teachers stretch both boys and girls to articulate their knowledge and understanding, progress is good.

71. Whilst students have good speaking and listening skills and an awareness of audience, they do not always seem to want to engage in discussion but are happy to listen and make notes unprompted. In two Year 10 classes teachers were observed working very hard to elicit discussion and engage students, particularly girls, in dialogue. By Year 11 independent learning is more evident and students recognise the part they have to play in their learning.

72. A review of the curriculum alongside an assessment of students' needs has led to the introduction of texts more likely to engage both boys and girls. For example, 'Lord of the Flies' has been replaced by 'Of Mice and Men.' A focus on boys' achievement has succeeded in improving their access to the curriculum and their results. Boys' writing particularly shows progress between Year 10 and Year 11 and there are opportunities for writing in a range of styles.

73. Assessment is firmly embedded in the department. Termly progress checks track students and enable identification of any slippage in individual progress both by the form tutor and the subject teacher. Verbal feedback to students was observed in some lessons, particularly related to speaking and listening and students were made aware of what they needed to do to improve. Teachers question skilfully but need to extend this to include more students during each lesson.

74. All students, particularly those identified through the progress checks, are encouraged to attend 'enhancement' sessions for specific areas of study. Ongoing assessment during lessons also highlights students who could benefit. Students described how helpful teachers were and how they would put themselves out to make sure students received support. They identified significant benefit from attending 'enhancement' and said that opportunities for getting extra help could not be faulted.

75. The use of drafting is introduced early in Year 10 and well used. Marking is generally consistent across the department with students receiving a mark or grade, a comment and a target on coursework. Marked and graded exemplar material, 'A Life in the Day of...', which includes comments and targets, is displayed within the department and is a useful resource for all students.

76. Students' targets on individual education plans are known and planned for by all teachers. Provision for lower ability students, in partnership with the Learning Support department, is very good and outstanding teaching was observed in one lesson.

**A Year 10 low ability boys' group was analysing Benedick's soliloquy on love and trying to understand the language used. The teacher was supported by a special needs teacher and a learning support assistant.**

Students come in ready for work and settle down to the starter activity virtually without being told, clearly looking forward to the lesson. The teacher's expectations are well understood and respected and the boys respond accordingly, talking comfortably and expressing views with confidence. Some make mistakes but no one minds; they feel secure and can take risks here. The teacher uses modern and original versions of text which the boys match up, helping one another to find key words and demonstrating their knowledge and understanding from the lessons before. Support staff work effectively, building on the discussions to challenge students and move them on. A support teacher works relentlessly, persistently asking probing questions to enable one pupil to match the texts successfully and he is clearly proud of his achievement. In paired work the boys play 'critical listener,' challenging and supporting one another, making suggestions and reading again until they think they have, 'got it right.' In the last activity, visual prompts enable all students to demonstrate and strengthen what they have learned during the lesson. The whole class and staff clearly enjoy their lesson, joining in purposefully and working collaboratively.

77. The quality of leadership and management is good. The head of department and his team have a shared vision of the direction of the department. There is a departmental action plan which reflects the aims of the college development plan. The head of department is actively working towards raising standards using the strengths of individuals within the team. For example, teachers have taken responsibility for the development of differentiated schemes of work and produced a document which formalises the current good practice of planning for individuals and groups of students. The department is well placed to use the proposed additional teaching time to good effect.

78. Since the last inspection progress has been satisfactory overall. Assessment procedures have been effectively implemented as has a programme of monitoring teaching and learning. More students now study English Literature. Literacy across the curriculum areas has not been formally addressed although some training sessions for teachers relating to the use of writing frames and asking challenging questions have taken place.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

79. Standards of speaking and listening, reading and writing are satisfactory in most curriculum areas. There is strong evidence of a literacy environment in the English and humanities

departments where there are word displays and definitions. The English department has its own literacy policy as do many other subject areas. Despite the existence of a cross-curricular working group, the college has yet to standardise essential elements of literacy. There has been a focus on the use of keywords, with cross-curricular technical terms included in students' planners, but a whole college policy is as yet unformed. Monitoring of literacy skills remains at the level of discussion in meetings and needs to be formalised. It is important that the college develops and publishes a cross-curricular literacy policy as a matter of some urgency.

## French

Provision in French is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment at GCSE is high in comparison with the national average: this represents good achievement because when students begin Year 10 their attainment in relation to the National Curriculum is below average.
- The quality of departmental leadership is good, although departmental data collection and analysis should be improved.
- Arrangements for grouping students by ability are based on data which does not relate directly to attainment in languages and means that students are not always in the right group.
- Schemes of work are detailed and appropriate; however, there is little evidence of ICT being integrated into normal classroom practice.

### Commentary

80. Results in GCSE examinations are well above average. Classroom observation confirms that achievement is below the expected national curriculum level for the beginning of Year 10. However, the high GCSE results show that students achieve well in relation to their starting point. As is the case nationally, girls perform overall much better than boys, although boys achieved a greater number of A\* grades in 2002 and 2003. This represents a significant improvement over results at the time of the last inspection. Despite the higher than average Year 9 SATs results, which relate to subjects other than foreign languages, students' basic linguistic structures and tenses are limited at the start of Year 10. As a result teachers have to work hard to overcome these weaknesses.

81. Teaching and learning are good overall. The arrangements to allocate students to different ability groups in Year 10 are based on Year 9 test results which do not relate directly to capability in modern languages. As a result not all students are in the right groups. This, together with the sometimes variable number of teaching groups, makes the teachers' task more demanding. However, teachers are knowledgeable and thorough in their approach, lessons are well structured and include a satisfactory range of activities to capture and retain interest. Homework is conscientiously set and marked. Some students are not required to exercise sufficient independence in learning. Thus small numbers of able students in some classes are not fully stretched. Assessment is satisfactory; but is not used to give accurate and useful information to tell teachers and students what should be taught next. Students' attitudes are good, with no reduction of interest or commitment in lower sets. Teachers are well informed about courses and examination requirements and tailor their lessons accordingly. The pace of teaching is brisk and the lesson objectives are stated and achieved. Students work co-operatively and well, with a real interest in their work. Students are not using computers as a planned element of their work.

82. Leadership and management are good but the department needs to analyse data more effectively. Good progress has been made since the last inspection; standards generally and examination success are significantly higher.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The system of entering some students for the GCSE examination earlier than is usual has resulted in increased motivation amongst that particular cohort and a raising of standards.
- The arrangement for tracking the progress of individual students against target grades needs strengthening.
- There are examples of excellent and very good practice in mathematics lessons which are not disseminated enough throughout the department.
- The departmental development plan needs to better reflect an emphasis on raising students' achievements.
- Teacher-student relationships are good and this enhances the learning process.
- The leadership and management of the department are good.

### **Commentary**

83. Standards in lessons are above national average. When students join the college, at the start of Year 10, standards are above the national average. By the end of Year 11 the number of students achieving A\*-C grades in the GCSE examinations is still above the national average. Over the last two years the degree to which the college exceeds the national average in mathematics has grown. Students' achievements in mathematics are therefore satisfactory overall.

84. The quality of teaching in mathematics is good overall and there are some examples of very good practices and excellent teaching within the department. These practices, such as the use of open-ended questioning and tasks which encourage mathematical exploration, are not shared sufficiently amongst all members of the mathematics team and, where appropriate, adopted in other classes.

85. A significant number of students are entered for the GCSE examinations earlier than is normal. For instance, this year almost 45 per cent of the present Year 11 took the examination in November rather than in the summer term as is customary. This practice has served to raise the number of students achieving grades A\*-C in the examinations and to provide a considerable amount of motivation to those students involved.

86. The department sets target grades for individual students and these are broadly based on prior attainment. Progress against these targets is not monitored often enough to inform students when their performance drops below the required level. Part of the reason is that the target setting system is not used as well as it could be. Similarly, the marking of the students' work is not rigorous enough or linked to the examination grades: this means that it is difficult for students to check how well they are doing in relation to their target.

87. The leadership and management of the department are good. The college has a committed and mutually supportive team of mathematics teachers. Classrooms are attractive environments for learning and reflect the emphasis of the area. The development plan sets out appropriate priorities for action over the academic year, although it does not consider developments over a longer time span. The impact of the plan on student achievement and the financial implications are not clear making it difficult to measure progress in terms of student achievement and value for money. However, the good leadership and management mean that progress in mathematics since the last inspection has been good.

## **Mathematics across the curriculum**

88. Students speak confidently and positively about their mathematical experiences in the college.

89. A statement relating to the college's position on numeracy across the curriculum appears in its learning and teaching policy although, as yet, the provision is not monitored.

90. At present, there are few examples of the students being asked to use their mathematical skills in the wider context; however, they are asked to use graphical representations in science, business studies and within the humanities area. Overall, provision is satisfactory.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is an inconsistent approach to teaching and some lessons lack sufficient challenge.
- Teachers have a good command of their subject.
- The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent.
- Technicians provide excellent support.

### **Commentary**

91. Students start Year 10 with broadly above average results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests. The standard of work seen during the inspection was, however, in line with expectations in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results at the end of Year 11 were close to the national average. Boys did better than girls in the 2003. Overall, students achieve satisfactorily.

92. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have a good command of their subject and respond quickly and accurately to students' queries. In the most effective lessons, teachers make effective use of stimulating resources and activities that quickly engage students' interest. They have high expectations of what their students can do and their delivery is lively. In response students rise to the challenge and work productively and at a good pace. Most students have a good attitude to their work and behave well. Teachers use time at the end of each lesson well to assess how much learning has gone on. Less effective lessons are characterised by uninspiring activities that go on for too long, such as answering questions from a textbook, and a lack of stimulus material, so that students become bored, work slowly and teachers have to work harder to manage behaviour.

93. Some lessons lack sufficient challenge for higher-attaining students and do not provide enough support material for the low-attaining ones so that these groups are not always working as productively as they might. Learning support assistants liaise well with teachers and enable students with special educational needs to gain full access to the lesson. There are few opportunities for students to develop their own ideas. Writing frames, to help guide students' responses, are not used regularly to improve literacy skills.

94. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum manager maintains a hard-working team of teachers and technicians who willingly share good practice. He is a good role model for teachers and students.

95. There is a lack of consistency in the application of some policies so that the best practice is not used across the whole department. Schemes of work are being developed further to provide good support for teachers in their planning but existing ones do not help ensure a consistent approach to teaching. Day-to-day marking is inconsistent in both quality and quantity. Students do

not know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. In contrast, coursework is well marked. Monitoring of the department lacks sufficient rigour to ensure that the team quickly develops a consistent approach. However, a recent self-review indicates that the curriculum manager has a clear picture of the department's current position. The review is a good basis from which to develop an action plan for improvement.

96. The curriculum offers a wide choice to students; for example, high-attaining students can do three separate sciences, whilst low-attaining ones can study for a certificate of achievement rather than a GCSE. Some teaching sets have a wide ability range which makes it more difficult for the learning needs of the higher- and lower-attaining students to be met. Technical support in science is excellent and teachers are supported well. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The management and leadership of the department are good.
- The department has good resources that improve learning opportunities.
- There is a lack of planned use of ICT in a number of subjects to enhance students' learning.
- A lack of emphasis on developing students' literacy has contributed to the lower standards.

### **Commentary**

97. By the end of Year 11, standards are below average and compare unfavourably with other subjects in the college. Examination results have improved slightly over the last three years and evidence indicates that they will improve further. For GCSE in 2003 boys did better than girls but in the previous two years the girls attained higher standards. Good progress has been made in improving the number of A\*-G grades and in meeting the needs of the wider range of students. The lack of emphasis in improving literacy has added to the difficulty many students have in interpreting examination work and undoubtedly has contributed to the low results.

98. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the good progress in improving GSCE results has had an impact on overall achievement which is now good. Most students have entered the college well below average in their ICT capability and have made far greater progress than would be expected. Students are confident with a range of tasks including the creation of a presentation on famous people and the use of graphics software to design the layout of a room. Students have an opportunity to follow vocational courses or GCSE but requirements for reporting the achievements in ICT of all students are not met.

99. Teaching and learning are consistently good. This is a result of good planning and good teacher knowledge of ICT that enables lessons to be presented in a way that ensures good learning opportunities. Lessons always start promptly and teachers are beginning to make use of ideas from the Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve students' interest and in developing a sharper focus for learning. The use of assessment to inform students of their progress on a day-to-day basis is good but the overall analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses is underdeveloped. The reporting of this and the reporting to all parents of students' progress in ICT does not meet statutory requirements in relation to reporting students' achievements.

100. The management and leadership are good. The analysis of examination results and planning are good. There are effective schemes of work for the GNVQ course but those for GCSE ICT require further development. There is an effective monitoring system that is contributing to an improvement in teaching and learning. Satisfactory progress has been made in resolving issues raised in the previous inspection.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

101. This is satisfactory. There is evidence of the good use of ICT in art, design and technology, media, music and science. However, for many subjects, including English and mathematics, there is insufficient planned use of computers to enhance students' learning. The library provides good out-of-lesson access to computers.

## HUMANITIES

102. Almost all students follow a GCSE humanities course in Years 10 and 11 and this was the focus for the inspection. Work in GCSE geography and history was also sampled.

103. Standards in **history** are average overall but there are students who achieve very high standards. GCSE results are close to the national average but there has been a recent sharp rise in the proportion of students achieving A\* and A grades.

104. Only a small sample of lessons was seen. Teaching observed was satisfactory overall, with examples of good teaching. Teachers are knowledgeable and so are able to respond readily to students' questions or misunderstandings. Relationships with students are generally good with teachers readily supporting individuals in their work and offering encouragement and advice. Some of the marking is too brief, providing limited feedback on what students should do to improve, but there are examples of good developmental marking. Strengths of the better teaching include clear learning intentions communicated well to students, good attention to the explanation of technical terms and vocabulary and effective explanation of tasks. Shortcomings include teaching that does not make sufficiently clear to students where the lesson is going so that the pace slows and the objectives are not fully achieved. This has an impact on the learning of less motivated students.

105. Leadership and management of history are satisfactory. A focus on individual achievement has improved results. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. There has been recent progress in the development of detailed schemes of work for GCSE, a clear improvement since the last inspection. A further improvement is that in recent GCSE examinations a number of students have achieved A\* grades.

106. Standards in **geography** are above average and students of all abilities achieve broadly in line with their capability. GCSE results are consistently well above the national average. Students respond well in geography lessons. The teaching enables students to develop their geography skills well.

107. A small sample of teaching was seen. Teaching is usually well planned and teachers explain effectively what they want students to achieve and have strong skills in managing classroom activities. Relationships are good and a range of interesting resources is well used to develop students' skills in working in groups, researching information and drawing conclusions. The good quality of the teaching and the clear route through the work encourages a positive response from students. Lessons move at a strong pace and students' exercise books testify to their good knowledge and understanding. Classroom environments support teaching well with examples of students' work, definitions of key words, maps and photographs.

108. Geography is led and managed effectively. The development plan charts a clear way forward but outcome success criteria should be sharper. There are detailed schemes of work which underpin the good quality of the teaching with additional projects for the most able students. Geography teachers make an important contribution to the development of materials for the core humanities course. As geography in Years 10 and 11 was not reported on at the last inspection it is not possible to evaluate progress since that time.



## Humanities

Provision in humanities is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The development of personal research skills is good, especially among higher-attaining students.
- Some students of average attainment do not achieve enough.
- A significant proportion of the teaching is good enabling many students to learn well.
- Some teachers' feedback to students does not make it clear enough what they need to do to improve their work.
- Teaching does not make enough use of students' speaking and listening skills to develop their ideas through questioning and discussion.

### Commentary

109. Overall, students' achievements are satisfactory. GCSE results are above the national average and large numbers of students achieve high grades, some achieving awards because their results are among the best in the country. Overall, however, students do a little less well in humanities than they do on average in other subjects and results achieved by some average attaining students should be higher. Standards seen in the inspection were a little above average and the achievement of some students, often higher attainers, is very good. Thoughtful, well-researched personal studies on controversial issues such as abortion, euthanasia or animal experimentation demonstrate these students' very good skills in finding and organising information, developing their understanding and writing analytically and at length. Lower-attaining students including some with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

110. Teaching is satisfactory overall, though a significant proportion is good. In most lessons teachers plan effectively, explain clearly, have good relationships with students and establish a well-organised learning environment: as a result students are able to progress satisfactorily. Teachers are aware of students with special needs and intervene to ensure that they can cope with the work. The best lessons foster an active approach to learning with resources that develop investigative skills and enable students to manipulate ideas. Interesting resources on gender roles in the home and the provocative focus question: "Should Steve become a house husband?" enable students to work effectively together, arrange information in several different ways and develop their thinking to a higher level. Students' learning is very effectively supported by the college library which is well resourced for the range of issues that students explore through their personal research. In some lessons teachers do not make their intentions for students' learning precise enough to ensure that they know exactly what is expected of them. Teachers ask questions of students and achieve a reasonable response but, given the controversial nature of many of the issues covered, there is a lack of sustained class discussion provoked through subtle and progressive questioning. The quality of marking and feedback to students varies from teacher to teacher. The best provides a clear analysis of what students need to do to work at higher levels but some is too brief and unfocused.

111. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum area is well organised and staff work together as a team, sharing the planning and preparation of resources. The leadership is reflective and a recent subject self-review is rigorous and honest. This now requires rapid and sustained follow through. The humanities curriculum makes a significant contribution to students' understanding of aspects of citizenship and to their moral, social and cultural development.

112. Compared with the last inspection there has been an improvement in the pace and variety of lessons and in the planning for the different learning needs of students. The response of students is better and consequently their learning has improved. Overall progress is satisfactory.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results and current standards are well below expectations.
- Work is not planned well enough to meet the needs of students all abilities.
- Marking and assessing are not carried out often enough to ensure students understand how to improve their performance.
- The teachers are experienced, knowledgeable and committed and as a result provision is improving.

### Commentary

113. Results in the GCSE short course examination for 2003 were well below national expectations. This represents a small rise over the previous year, the first year of entry for the short course GCSE. Overall, standards at the time of the inspection were well below expectations for students at the end of Year 11. In one lesson observed, higher attaining students were clear about the distinction to be made between prejudice and discrimination, and readily supplied examples to support this. However, while some good gains were made through the lesson activities, students' exercise books showed that over time many students had much unfinished work. There were few examples of developing and applying the knowledge and understanding they had shown in class. This was confirmed in department monitoring of their progress in their end of term tests. Given their starting points on entry to the college, students' achievement by the end of Year 11 is unsatisfactory.

114. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall and inconsistencies mean that it has too little impact on students' achievements. However, teaching seen in lessons during the inspection was satisfactory. One good lesson had well-planned activities that engaged all students in the class, and promoted their understanding of religious thought and practice. Reluctant and challenging students were well managed. In the satisfactory teaching seen, teachers planned lessons that provided opportunities for students to be actively employed in their learning. However, they did not always take into account the need to adapt materials for students less well able to read and select from long pieces of text. Students' work books showed that classroom activities were seldom completed by most students, or followed through with homework. This resulted in many students' work not reflecting the religious dimension of the topic they were studying. For example, in their work on the environment, too few students referred in their presentations to the beliefs of the two religions studied, Christianity and Islam. Work was not regularly marked to identify how well students had done, and how to improve.

115. Since the last inspection, there has been insufficient improvement in standards. Some priorities for development identified in the last inspection are yet to be implemented, namely recommendations about the use of marking and the setting of homework, and so management is unsatisfactory. The department has recently introduced a short course GCSE for all students, through which the requirements of the Leicestershire Agreed Syllabus are met. Teachers check students' progress at the end of teaching units, and have useful data that include students' targets and their prior attainment. Religious education now receives a regular weekly slot in the timetable. Accommodation is good. One of the two large, well-decorated and adjacent rooms is equipped with an interactive whiteboard, although it is yet to be put to use. The college is clear about how to develop and build upon the positive steps forward that have recently been taken.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are particularly good in GCSE graphic products although achievement is satisfactory overall.
- The quality and presentation of students' design work is very good. The use of ICT is particularly effective.
- Systems to monitor the attainment and progress of students should be enhanced across the department in order to reduce the variability in standards which currently exist.
- Not enough use is made of prior attainment data. This information needs to be reliable and should inform the matching of students to appropriate GCSE courses as they transfer from feeder high schools.

#### Commentary

116. Standards at GCSE are average overall, but vary within the individual subjects for design and technology. They are particularly good in graphic products for boys and girls, and for girls in textiles technology. However, standards are currently well below average for boys in resistant materials and food technology, and in both subjects rather too many students do not get a grade because their coursework is incomplete. The department has acknowledged this as a priority for improvement, and as a result now has appropriate systems in place to monitor the attainment and progress of all students.

117. Overall, girls' achievements are better than boys. Whilst this reflects the general national picture, the attainment of girls overall is slightly below that of the national average. Standards achieved are often adversely affected by the way students choose their courses at the start of Year 10. One of the difficulties is that there are groups with an unsuitably wide range of prior attainment or with an imbalance of boys and girls. There are also examples where students do more than one technology subjects and over-specialise. Whilst many students are working to their capacity, achievement overall is satisfactory by the end of Year 11.

118. Provision made for the subject in the curriculum fails to meet current statutory requirements as significant numbers of students in Years 10 and 11 do not study design and technology subjects. However, from September 2004 the college will meet the new arrangements for the curriculum.

119. Teaching is good across the department. Where it is most effective, teachers share what is expected to be learned with students, ensure that lessons have a brisk and purposeful pace; have good technical knowledge of their subject and use a range of teaching styles to ensure that students remain engaged and motivated. In a food technology lesson for example, students engaged enthusiastically in a quiz designed to teach the key principles of proteins in foods. This stimulated lively discussion and led to good learning.

120. Good provision is made for lower-attaining students through an entry level design craft course. In the design of a picture frame, pre-printed card and templates were used very effectively to assist the progress of students towards achieving a high quality outcome. Despite low levels of learning assistant support for these students, achievement overall is good.

121. There is a highly effective system in place in the GCSE graphics products course to monitor and assess students as they complete their coursework, and to provide them with clear guidance of what they need to do in order to improve. As a result the achievement of these students

is very good indeed. The marking of class and homework in other design and technology subjects is not sufficiently frequent, consistent and diagnostic.

122. Good provision is made for students to use ICT in their work. In particular this includes the use of graphics and other software in the development and presentation of design ideas. In graphic products lessons, for example, particularly effective use is made of a computer-operated cutter to produce highly complex shapes for cardboard packaging.

123. The head of department provides dynamic and effective leadership through his personal example. There is a drive for improvement and a strong sense of direction. However, not enough use is made of prior attainment data to arrange teaching groups or to monitor the progress of individual students. Good subject management for food technology and textiles, and in the areas of resistant materials and electronic products, ensures a strong focus on raising standards. Ancillary support for workshop and practical areas is very good. Technicians play a particularly effective role alongside teaching staff by providing enhanced levels of support and guidance for students as they design and make products.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

124. The focus for the inspection was art and music but dance and media studies were also sampled. In **dance** all the teaching observed was good. Students enjoy the practical aspects of the course more than the written work and this is reflected in the standards they achieve. Standards in movement and performance are at least satisfactory and on the whole better whilst course work lags behind, varying greatly according to students' literacy skills. Their work in books is neat and is marked positively to encourage them but does not always indicate what they need to do to improve. Students participate well in lessons and sustain concentration well in order to practise and improve movement sequences. Relationships are very good and students work hard in lessons because of the very positive atmosphere created by the teacher. Dance accommodation is restricted as the space is often used for examinations.

125. Four lessons of GCSE **media studies** were sampled, two in Year 10 and two in Year 11, and teaching and learning were broadly satisfactory. Students follow a carefully planned curriculum and this helps them to do well in their GCSE examinations. Most students gain good results despite the negative attitudes displayed by a small minority of students in some lessons. In most of the lessons learning is better and students make gains in their understanding of the key concepts and ideas involved in media studies.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards overall are above average, which is a good improvement since the previous inspection.
- There is very good teaching and learning supported by very good planning and assessment.
- The more able students achieve well, but boys do less well than girls.
- Very good improvement since the last inspection.

### **Commentary**

126. The standards of work in GCSE examinations in 2003 were above the national average, and 70 per cent of students entered gained grades from A\* to C. This is a great improvement since 2001, when only 37 per cent gained these grades, and a good improvement since the last inspection. The attainment of boys is not as good. This is the case nationally, but the difference between girls' and boys' grades of A\* to C is 37 percentage points, much higher than usual. Despite

this difference, both boys and girls achieve about as well in art and design GCSE as they do in other subjects. The achievement of all groups of students is good. The proportion of A\*/A grades in the GCSE examination is higher than the national average, indicating that the more able students are doing well, and the proportion of the lowest grades is very low.

127. The standards of students' work in progress, on display and in folders are good. Students are developing their sketchbooks very thoroughly, and the range of materials and techniques used in them is very extensive. They are used to investigate, explore and comment, bringing in the work of other artists who have influenced them, and their own evaluations of their ideas and images. ICT is used very well for research and for the collection of relevant images, although there is little manipulation or development of these images. This sketchbook work is of a very good standard, and the presentation is excellent. It develops from very teacher-directed exercises in Year 10 which are extended into personal and experimental projects in Year 11 and beyond. These standards are not always carried through to the final piece, which is often relatively uninspired, the enthusiasm and freshness being left in the sketchbooks. The work in textiles is remarkable; students use a wide variety of techniques and media to produce exciting and colourful designs. The work in drawing, painting and three-dimensional media is also large, vibrant and bold. Students are trained well in the basic skills of art, craft and design in Year 10, and are given clear advice on homework, research and self-assessment. This helps them greatly to realise their own ideas in later years.

128. Teaching is very good overall. This is much better than in the previous inspection report. It is now well planned, prepared and delivered, resulting in very good learning and progress by all the students. Students are becoming self-reliant and independent learners as a result of clear direction, a well-planned series of activities, and expert teaching by four specialists who work as a team to complement each other's strengths. There is a very brisk pace to the lessons, in part dictated by the fifty-minute period, which is very short for a practical activity. This always includes an introduction and evaluation, as well as clearing up time and the setting of homework. Effective time for the students to complete work is often no more than 25 minutes. Many boys seem to need more support and guidance than the girls, who are at the front of each demonstration and discussion. The schemes of work and assessment methods have been recently revised and link very well with the examination criteria, preparing the students very thoroughly to succeed. It also enabled the new supply teacher to pick up the work required very quickly, and students knew what to do and got on with it. There are high expectations of the quality and amount of work to be completed, and of the return of homework, which has a comments form attached.

129. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a clear focus on improving standards and raising the profile of the subject with the students and in the college. The revision of paperwork has been thorough and effective, supporting the teachers very well, and giving students a clear idea of what is expected. Assessment is thorough and accurate, and informs the next stages of planning. The curriculum has been extended to offer a vocational pathway through Applied Art GCSE to AVCE, and projects with local primary schools are being worked on. Individual education plans are used well to focus on students' needs, and gifted or talented students are invited to enhancement classes at the end of the day. Technical support and visiting artists are used very well to support teachers, and a recent artist in residence made a big impact in the college. Students' cultural development is encouraged through visits to museums and galleries, both abroad and locally, although work based on cultural diversity is limited.

## Music

Provision in music is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Committed specialist staff means that there are a high proportion of students who take part in music.
- Results are rising and are higher than the national average.
- There is good use of information communication technology to support learning.
- Relationships between students and teachers ensure a positive work atmosphere.
- Specialist accommodation is inadequate for curriculum needs and increased demands.

### Commentary

130. Standards are rising year on year and students are attaining high levels in the skills of performing and composing. Progress is good for students of all levels of ability and achievement in relation to their starting points is good. Compositions and performance demonstrate technical control and musical understanding. Students demonstrate confident use of music technology and this has been used to enrich the delivery of the music curriculum and widen access for students of all abilities. Relevant course materials have been developed and assessment procedures are common across the department. The college has worked hard to ensure all students have open access to a broad range of musical experiences and the work with students identified as having special educational needs and those identified as very able is very good. Course provision includes fast track GCSE for Year 10 and a GCSE course for students with special needs.

131. Teaching overall is good. Objectives are shared with students and the main points of the lesson summarised at the end to reinforce what students have learned, consolidate understanding of tasks and ensure good links are made between activities. Good use is made of available resources to demonstrate points of learning. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and student management is good demonstrating evidence of sound relationships. Students enjoy lessons, are keen to learn and willing to take an active part. Opportunities for students to reflect on pieces of music are frequently presented and this supports learning well.

132. Leadership and management are good and developing well. Areas for improvement have been identified and an action plan for development published. Curriculum planning ensures subject skills are systematically developed. Students have regular opportunities to link composition, performance and appraisal techniques, and are developing a good degree of self-confidence and independent learning skills. Accommodation is cramped and of poor quality and hinders teaching by making access to resources difficult. Extra curricular activities are developing but the difficulty of getting access to musical facilities is restricting development. The department is aware of the need to strengthen this and has planned improvements. Issues raised in the last inspection on restricted access to courses and low numbers of students on courses have been dealt with successfully.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Relationships with students are good.
- Results at GCSE are well below average but overall most students achieve satisfactorily.
- There are no reports to parents in Years 10 and 11.

## Commentary

133. Students enter the college with a range of different experiences. By the end of Year 11 standards vary but overall they are average. A minority of students take the GCSE examination and results in 2003 were well below average and have been so over the past two years. Some students that opt for the GCSE course lack interest and ability and are unable to cope with the academic content of the course, where standards in written work are below average. The students on alternative learning programmes show disaffection to their work and these groups also contain students studying the GCSE course. In volleyball, they make unsatisfactory progress because of poor attitudes and do not achieve well enough. This results in unsatisfactory achievement in the examinations and explains why results are low.

134. Where students have been introduced to new activities, such as basketball and badminton, they produce above average standards at GCSE and in core lessons. Standards of written work at GCSE are below average. Few students, apart from the more able, show pride in presentation or use the Internet or word processing sufficiently to enhance their work. Information and communication technology is not used in lessons but students have access to a room of six computers. Marking does not help students to improve their work or know the progress they are making. Students with a special educational need are integrated into all lessons and make at least satisfactory progress.

135. Teaching is good overall, maintaining that of the previous inspection. In the very good teaching, there is a high level of challenge and teachers have high expectations of students in these lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge of the activities they teach but need to refresh their knowledge of the National Curriculum. Lesson plans contain learning objectives but these, including assessment, are not always linked to the programme of study in the National Curriculum. Teachers form good relationships with their students, whose attitudes are good and have improved since the last inspection. Students' skills and techniques in most games have improved since the last inspection and some achieve well because of their positive attitudes and enthusiasm. There are very few non-participant students in lessons. There are still insufficient opportunities for students to evaluate each other's work.

136. Leadership and management are satisfactory. An enthusiastic curriculum leader is a good role model and leads a team of enthusiastic teachers. He is committed to raising standards despite the inappropriate groupings of some students. The college has obtained the Sportsmark Award for its commitment to sport. There is now a good gender balance of teachers, which is an improvement since the previous inspection. The amount of curriculum time for PE has increased since the last inspection but is still not sufficient.

137. There is a range of extra-curricular opportunities for students and a high number of students have achieved success at regional, county and national levels. College teams are successful in a range of sports with notable successes in basketball, netball, tennis, athletics and soccer. The recent introduction of the Junior Sports' Leaders Award is making a positive contribution to the personal development of students.

138. Accommodation is good and intensive use is made of it by the local community. The all-weather pitch is in a poor state of repair at present and during the inspection, the gymnasium was used for examinations, which affects the continuity and progression of learning.

## BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The focus of the inspection was business studies but vocational courses in health and social care and leisure and tourism were also sampled. In **health and social care** teaching is good and engages students very well in their studies: as a result students make brisk progress with their learning. This is largely because teachers have established very productive relationships with their students and set, and achieve, high standards of discipline. What all this means is students achieve well in a course which is matched to their needs successfully. In **leisure and tourism** teaching is

very good because it is brisk and purposeful giving students all the strategies necessary to carry out their work. This enables the students to work independently, extend their understanding and achieve well.

## **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Recent staffing problems have been overcome and a knowledgeable and committed team of subject specialists now teach the subject.
- Leadership and management of business studies are good with a clear vision for developing the subject.
- Current teaching is good overall, although the least able students need further reinforcement of the understanding of basic business terminology.
- Students are managed very well, including many challenging students, with the majority having a positive attitude to the subject.
- GCSE performance in 2003 was below the national average with a significant number of students under-achieving.
- Assessment of current students' work is thorough and accurate although assessment used for curriculum and lesson planning and overall evaluation is not fully developed.

139. 42 per cent of GCSE students achieved A\*-C grades in 2003, a similar outcome from previous years, this being well below the national average of 57 per cent. This represented a significant amount of under-achievement with just over a quarter of students gaining a D grade. Current students are, however, generally working at the level of national expectations but with a very wide range of ability from the most able who can define and apply business terminology such as 'unlimited liability' and 'net profit margin' to those who are still unsure of the meaning of such concepts.

140. Several years of staffing problems have disrupted students' learning but the current staff stability in the department is making a significant positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning and as a consequence the achievement of current students is good.

141. Teaching is stimulating, classroom management is effective and students are repeatedly praised for their contributions and as a consequence they make good, often very good, progress in lessons. The teacher's clear, enthusiastic and authoritative delivery in a very good Year 11 lesson on 'trigger' words in examinations reinforced understanding of public and private limited companies. Similarly, the teacher's very well prepared and stimulating activities on the profit and loss account ensured students of all abilities were able to grasp the fundamentals of the topic. There is, however, a need for teachers to ensure that the least able are constantly challenged and stimulated to maintain interest and their understanding of basic business terminology reinforced and checked. The majority of students have a positive attitude to the subject. Students with special educational needs achieve at least as well as their peers.

142. Student work is assessed thoroughly with positive and relevant feedback, although this is not always specific about how they can improve. The department has access to a vast range of data on student attainment and progress but this is not yet used effectively to inform curriculum and lesson planning and to measure the overall effectiveness of teaching and business studies provision. In addition, the very good work begun this year needs to be further developed with appropriate business specific policies, for example to contribute to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills and the use of more external business contacts for visits and speakers.

143. Leadership and management of the subject is good with the new head of department providing a clear vision for developing business studies at the college and making significant



improvements to the overall provision of the subject. Schemes of work have been completely redrafted, teaching is carefully planned and monitored and a collaborative and effective team spirit has been engendered, all of which has ensured that current students are well served with consistent, appropriate and enthusiastically delivered programmes of study. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

144. **PSHE** was sampled as lessons take place within tutorials. Teaching is generally satisfactory but varies considerably according to individual teacher and their understanding of the lesson in hand. **Citizenship** is planned as part of other subjects and is taught mainly through humanities, English and physical education. During the week of the inspection it was not possible to pick out from all these subjects the aspects that related to citizenship. The humanities curriculum, however, makes a significant contribution to students' understanding of aspects of citizenship. Overall, the planning of citizenship is in its early stages and as a result provision does not meet the legal requirement to teach citizenship in Years 10 and 11.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 15 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. Figures for 2003 are not yet available.

### Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	38	76.3	81.6	23.7	33.2	28.4	33.2
Business Education	36	69.4	89.1	8.3	31.7	23.3	35.4
English	55	87.3	92.0	23.6	29.9	30.7	35.7
English Literature	31	90.3	94.4	32.3	37.9	33.5	38.9
French	15	86.7	85.4	13.3	35.2	30.7	34.9
Design and technology	11	72.7	89.2	27.3	32.0	28.2	35.7
Information and communication technology	22	72.7	78.2	31.8	20.6	30.9	28.5
Mathematics	99	76.8	74.2	30.3	34.3	29.6	31.3
Music	9	77.8	93.6	0.0	39.4	23.3	39.0
Physics	22	95.5	82.0	27.3	36.2	35.0	34.3
Sociology	42	88.1	83.7	52.4	33.6	39.0	33.8

### Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	96.1	50.0	48.7	86.7	85.1
Biology	23	100	91.6	56.5	36.3	85.2	74.1
Business Education	21	100	96.4	19.0	32.8	68.6	76.5
English	24	100	98.3	20.8	36.5	75.0	80.1
English Literature	21	100	98.5	52.4	43.7	89.5	84.3
French	7	100	96.2	71.4	46.1	88.6	83.0
Design and technology	6	100	95.3	33.3	35.5	83.3	76.5
Information and communication technology	12	100	89.1	16.7	22.4	65.0	64.1
Mathematics	52	98.1	93.3	65.4	52.2	96.5	84.7
Music	5	100	97.7	0.0	41.8	64.0	82.2
Physics	13	100	92.8	38.5	42.8	76.9	78.6
Sociology	28	100	95.4	53.6	39.6	89.3	79.1



## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Provision in English is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good.
- A large proportion of students gain higher grades in GCE A-level English language and literature.
- The subject is strongly led and well managed.
- The department is providing effective training in revision and examination techniques to improve students' performance.
- Students' capacity to work independently needs to be developed.

#### Commentary

145. In 2002 the performance of students in GCE A-level English language and English literature examinations was in line with national expectations. The results for 2003 show that one out of four students gained the higher grades of A and B in the GCE A-level English Language examinations. In English Literature half of all the students entered gained grades A and B. This represents good achievement by more able students. It is the result of good teaching, the positive attitudes shown by students and their exemplary behaviour.

146. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Overall, achievement is satisfactory. The achievement of more able students is good. Students are very co-operative. Their behaviour is exceptional. This leads to satisfactory achievement for all students and good achievement for more able students. Classwork shows higher standards than those found in examinations. Teachers are giving further guidance for revision and examination technique to help reduce this gap. Students enjoy speaking and listening. Most make significant contributions to oral work. They express their viewpoints and ideas clearly, explaining and illustrating them with evidence. They appreciate and criticise alternative interpretations put forward by other students constructively. Teachers extend students' communication skills effectively to encourage them to adopt a critical approach. They also develop students' skills of intellectual enquiry through research and effective questioning.

147. Students' attainment in all areas of the curriculum is above national expectations, especially in reading and interpreting literary texts. Students explain their views clearly and illustrate them with evidence during discussion.

148. Overall teaching is good. In some lessons teaching and learning are very good or excellent. Teachers know their subject very well and adopt a scholarly approach to provide intellectually challenging lessons. They also provide a wealth of information on the background of the literature that students study and use this information to assist students in interpreting texts. Teachers' expectations are very high. Marking is thorough; it assesses the strengths of students' work and indicates areas for improvement.

149. The subject is led and managed well. The department is well established and its members have a shared commitment to teach students a love of literature and language as serious critics. Teachers aim for high standards. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work and careful deliberation takes place before action is taken. The department monitors students' achievement and provides appropriate advice about how to improve and succeed. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## Language and literacy across the curriculum

150. Overall standards are in line with national expectations. The key skills course contributes to the improvement of literacy across the curriculum. Students learn how to plan, research and write accurate assignments. Staff responsible for leading, managing and delivering the key skills course are knowledgeable and innovative.

151. Standards are better at speaking and listening than reading and writing because most departments plan frequent activities involving group work, evaluations and the sharing of ideas. Less able students make many mistakes in spelling and grammar when writing and some do not express themselves well because of their limited vocabulary and awareness of Standard English. All teachers contribute to eliminating these weaknesses.

152. Many students who download information from the Internet are uncritical of its quality. They are adept at saving, cutting and pasting text, but do not always acknowledge sources.

## French

Provision in French is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well above the national average at A-level, owing to the quality of teaching, high motivation and the sense of enjoyment that they bring to their work.
- Work seen was of average quality, in relation to standards nationally. No students achieved Grade A in AS Level in 2003, although the 2002 A Level results were good in comparison with schools nationally.
- Students are very positive about their study of French. Lessons are often characterised by a sense of fun and humour, which make a very positive contribution to progress and serve to enlist the willing co-operation of students.
- The range of materials used is generally satisfactory or better, with evidence of authentic materials and demanding listening activities.
- Students in the sixth form claim that listening is the most difficult of the language skills for them.
- As is the case nationally, fewer boys than girls study languages at A Level. There are no boys in Year 13.

### Commentary

153. Results are now good in relation to other schools, nationally. Even though AS results are average, A Level achievement in Year 13 demonstrates considerable progress over the course of the sixth form. Students achieve well in relation to prior attainment, although standards of work seen in lessons are generally only at or slightly above average. Year 13 students could produce questions in French on a short English language article related to one of the examination themes and were often able to manipulate language to meet their individual needs.

154. Students show exceptionally positive attitudes to French, thanks to committed and interesting teaching and to excellent staff-student relationships. High expectations and an impressive volume of work in lessons combine to capitalise on these attitudes which translate into very good progress. In the case of listening, identified by Year 12 students as a cause of difficulty, the department should consider the possibility of identifying and teaching the study skills involved. This is done incidentally in some lessons, when the opportunity arises, but could be systematically extended to address the skill of listening, as well as other skills as appropriate. This would improve further on an already very good overall standard of teaching and learning.

155. Leadership and management are good and contribute to the strong sense of direction evident in lessons. Students respond well to this and individuals have a reasonably accurate view of

their progress to date. As at Key Stage 4, it is now important for the department as a whole to consider how to enhance the quality of student feedback in the sixth form, by undertaking more sophisticated data collection and analysis. This would help to substantiate teaching decisions and would provide a better awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses for students and parents. In discussion with Year 12 students, they showed little appreciation of having individual targets for future progress, although the marking of their work does provide evidence of detailed advice on aspects of their learning. Progress overall since the last inspection has been satisfactory, with a high proportion of students gaining A-B grades at A Level.

## **MATHEMATICS**

The focus for the inspection was mathematics and statistics which are taught as separate courses. The college offers these subjects at AS and A-level.

### **Mathematics**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A high proportion of students studying for A-level mathematics pass the examination.
- Good working relationships between students and teachers contribute to a productive atmosphere within the classrooms.
- Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge.
- There is a lack of mathematical discussion and debate within the lessons which restricts the opportunity for students' to develop their own thoughts.
- There is a need for teaching strategies which ensure that no students become marginalised within the lessons.

#### **Commentary**

156. Students have the opportunity to study A-level mathematics and further mathematics including modules appertaining to pure mathematics, applied mathematics and statistics. A key skills numeracy course is in place for those students wishing to enhance their GCSE grade and for those who are following purely vocational courses.

157. In the 2003 examinations all of the students studying the subject passed A-level mathematics with a grade E or better. This pass rate was an improvement on the 91 per cent of students who achieved such grades in 2002 and 87 per cent in 2001.

158. Standards seen in lessons were above average and the students' achievements were equally good. For example in one lesson a Year 13 group confidently sketched complex equations and determined the key features of their graphs. Where achievement is good the teachers have planned the work to take account of prior attainment and to systematically build upon previous learning.

159. The standard of teaching is good overall and is founded on the teachers' good subject knowledge, careful planning, and the good working relationships which exist between the students and the teachers. These factors combine to provide a pleasant and productive atmosphere within the classrooms, a group dynamism from the shared understanding of a new topic and lessons which have a brisk pace and high expectations.

160. The students are keen and willing learners and they respond well to work which is challenging but within their grasp. They answer questions confidently but rarely respond by asking questions of the teacher which extend the topic into new realms such as that beyond the syllabus. It is unfortunate that even in good lessons students are presented with few opportunities to discuss

their mathematical thinking and philosophy. Occasions when the students can become engaged in such activities need to be carefully built into the schemes of work.

161. At the time of the last inspection mathematics in the sixth form was not reported on as a separate subject and therefore it is not possible to evaluate progress since that time. Responsibility for the management of mathematics in the sixth form is delegated to one of the mathematics team. The leadership and management of mathematics are both good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

162. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. Students in Years 12 and 13 speak confidently and positively about their mathematical experiences within the college and how these have prepared them for their present courses and for entry into higher education. The college library has a good range of material to support independent study of the subject.

163. Although evidence of students using their mathematical knowledge outside of subject specific lessons was limited, a good example was found in Art where students were engaged in costing a project.

### **Statistics**

Provision in statistics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' achievement is above average.
- The subject is led effectively, with enthusiasm, and staff seek continuous improvement.
- The teaching is good and the learning flows well from topic to topic.
- Teachers make very good use of day-to-day assessment to plan the lessons.
- Students' attitudes are very positive; nearly all who start the courses finish them.
- Students are highly competent using calculators for advanced work but some lack confidence and capability with mental arithmetic and some common numerical methods.
- The department does not make use of ICT to enhance learning and investigation work.

### **Commentary**

164. Examination results in recent years have been good. Students generally have achieved grades at or above what might be expected, given their previous GCSE results, and often do better in statistics than in their other subjects. Current students' work and achievement is also good. Many students who have chosen to study statistics began with a grade B or C at GCSE, often having taken the intermediate GCSE mathematics papers rather than the higher papers. That they gain average and above average A-level grades is therefore evidence of better than normal progress. Very few students drop out of the course mid-year.

165. Year 12 students have learned to make insightful comparisons of sets of data using a good range of analytical and diagrammatic methods. They have come to terms rapidly with the characteristics of different probability distributions and the criteria for when they apply. They have learned the basics of correlation and are beginning to show competence in sampling methods. Year 13 students are working at a good standard. They are accurate in evaluating probabilities and in using correct methods for finding the mean and variance of probability density functions, including transformations of those functions. They are able to take this to a further level by deriving binomial probabilities and sampling distributions from the original function. Whilst many students are competent with numerical work at this level, a significant number are not sufficiently fluent with some key skills. For example, they often do not cancel down fractions to their simplest form, turn too easily to a calculator for relatively straightforward additions, multiplications and subtractions and several are not familiar with quick methods, such as a fast way of finding something like  $1 - 0.9573$ .

166. Students have a very good attitude to the subject and in lessons. They concentrate, apply themselves and are keen to succeed. They give well-considered reasons for their choice of this course, recognising its value for their career plans or its contribution to their other studies. Others were positive they wanted to continue to learn some mathematics without the prospect of studying pure mathematics. Most had also heard from previous students that the teaching was good and the course enjoyable.

167. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and are continually developing ways to improve the teaching process. They have established a lively three-part structure to lessons, with an initial activity that usually covers previous learning related to the main topic for the lesson, but sometimes, equally usefully, a pertinent piece of revision to sustain students' grasp of the whole subject. Students obviously value this because they remarked how "the subject flows well from topic to topic" and "the way it develops has built up my confidence. I never thought I could achieve what I have done". Another good aspect of teaching is the very clear way teachers use questions displayed on an overhead projector and over-write the image on the whiteboard with the working-out, engaging students very well in dialogue in the process. Teachers are very well aware of the learning of each student because they assess by observation and discussion in class, set and mark homework every week giving good feedback and adapt the next lessons in the light of their assessments. This is very good practice. A point for improvement is to engage a minority of students who, whilst being attentive and hard-working, rarely participate in the class discussions. Students are highly appreciative of the teachers and their willingness to provide extra help beyond lessons.

168. Leadership in statistics is very good. The subject leader radiates enthusiasm and the department focuses its work strongly on teaching, learning and achievement. The staff are adapting well to a reduction from six lessons a week to five, so the change does not appear to have affected students at this point. There is little evidence of using ICT to enhance students' understanding in the subject or to support statistical investigations. Although students are achieving well in examinations despite this, a statistics course without the use of contemporary technology is incomplete.

169. At the previous inspection statistics was judged to be good. Since then there has been steady and effective evolution to make current provision for this sixth form very good.

## **SCIENCE**

The focus of the inspection was on biology and physics. **Chemistry** was also sampled. In chemistry, examination results in 2003 were above national averages. Over 80 per cent obtained grades A-C with two thirds obtaining grades A-B. Results in 2001 were in line with national averages but they were below averages in 2002. One Year 13 lesson was observed in which students showed good understanding.

### **Biology**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A-level results in 2003 were above the national average.
- Teaching is good and its impact on learning is good.
- Relationships are very good.
- Monitoring of progress using test data is good.
- AS-level results are below average and need to be improved.
- There is not enough regular and frequent feedback to students on how to improve.
- More opportunities for students to engage in discussing how and why biological activities and phenomena happen.



## Commentary

170. Students did very well in the summer 2003 A-level examinations with 71 per cent obtaining A-C grades and 25 per cent D-E grades. These are above national averages. Students' attainment at A-level in the previous two years has been variable, falling well below the national average in 2002. The standards of work seen in A-level classes in the last inspection, when biology was not inspected separately, were found to be broadly average. .

171. Students' performance in AS-level was in line with the national average in 2002. In the summer 2003 examinations, performance fell below the national average.

172. The standard of work seen during the inspection is in line with national averages. Most students in this year group are motivated and show enthusiasm for the subject and learn well. Overall achievement is good. In Year 12 the higher-attaining students are well motivated. The lower-attaining students are less so. The standard of work seen in Year 12 is generally sound. There is a lack of independent writing and students' ability to analyse experimental data is less well developed.

173. Overall, teaching is good and its impact on learning is also good. Teachers have good knowledge of biology and the A-level syllabus. They use this effectively to prepare students for examinations. Lessons in Year 13 are planned well and learning objectives are made clear. Good use is made of ICT for presenting lessons and engaging students in discussion. These features were seen in a Year 13 class where learning objectives were shared with students. Effective use was made of an interactive white board to explain how a pregnancy test works. One student used the graphics and visual images generated on the board to explain her understanding of how the test works. Students enjoyed this style of learning and engaged well with the lesson. The biology field course in Year 13 provides very good teaching and learning opportunities. Students enjoy the course and are able to engage in deeper study of biological themes and concepts.

174. Marking of students' work is a weakness. Very few constructive comments or corrections are made on students' work to help them improve. Day-to-day assessment is weak and feedback to students on how to improve is infrequent and unsystematic. As a consequence, although students know the grades they have achieved in periodic tests and examinations, most do not have a clear enough idea of how to improve. This inhibits progress in general and that of middle- and lower-attaining students in particular.

175. The subject is led and managed well. The monitoring of students' progress through the use of summative assessment is good. This enables teachers to inform students of their progress in relation to targets and also to inform teachers' own lesson planning. It also helps Year 13 students to manage their time and study well in order to achieve their target.

## Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results in summer 2003 were above national averages but have fluctuated in the past three years.
- Students have very good attitudes and relationships which contribute effectively to their learning and personal development.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the subject.
- There is not enough regular feedback to students on areas of strengths and weaknesses and explicit guidance on how to improve.
- There is not always enough emphasis on the analysis and interpretation of graphical data.
- The limited opportunity for students to discuss and express their learning orally hinders learning.

## Commentary

176. The attainment of students in the 2003 A-level examinations was above national averages. This was a significant improvement over 2002 when students' attainment had fallen below national averages from being in line with the averages in 2001. Physics was not inspected separately at the last inspection when the standards of work seen in A-level classes were found to be broadly average.

177. AS-level performance was high in 2001. The results in 2002 and 2003 fell but were in line with the national average.

178. The students' work seen during this inspection shows that standards are in line with national averages. Students in Year 12 have sound understanding of the forces involved in the Earth's movement around the sun but are unable to explain or speculate why the Earth maintains its orbit and does not get drawn into the sun. Year 13 students manipulate formulae and carry out calculations. Their skills of interpretation of results, particularly of graphical data, are less well developed. As a consequence their conclusions lack precision and clarity.

179. Achievement of students is generally sound. Some students with grade C at GCSE have made very good progress and are on course to achieve a C in their A-levels. The higher- and the middle-attaining students make less progress than they should. Students work hard and apply themselves to the tasks and are well motivated. They are generally satisfied with the progress they are making and feel that teachers are helpful. Students know that they can ask teachers for help and advice both in and outside the lesson.

180. Teaching is generally good. Overall, learning is good. Students' own efforts and application contribute to this. Teachers have good knowledge of physics and use it effectively to explain ideas and to model calculations. They provide good guidance for examination preparation. As a result students carry out calculations and tackle numerical examination questions with confidence. Day-to-day formative assessment and feedback to students are weak. Marking is routine and does not provide sufficient constructive commentary on students' work. As a consequence some incorrect responses and misconceptions remain. Teachers are not fully aware of what students can do and understand. This limits their capacity to help, support and challenge students and inhibits their progress. Students are generally quiet in lessons but are able to articulate their thoughts well when given the opportunity to do so. Opportunities for students to explain how they have arrived at answers, and to justify them, are not always available and this limits learning a little. Similarly opportunities for students to interpret data and discuss ideas are not always as frequent as they could be. Relationships are very good and teachers manage their lessons very well. This encourages students to concentrate and work hard.

181. The subject is well led and managed. Monitoring of students' progress needs to be strengthened further. There is some evidence of the effective use of ICT by students in preparing their course work.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information technology is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving and GCE AS-level results for 2003 are above average.
- The management and leadership of the department are good.
- There is a very good range of courses that meet the needs of all students.
- There is a lack of planning by most subjects to enhance students' learning using ICT.

## Commentary

182. There has been a steady improvement in GCE AS-level results and those for 2003 are above average. The Year 13, GCE A-level results are now average but those for AVCE students remain below average. Few girls take ICT and generally do less well than boys. Results for ICT are not as good as those for most subjects although they are much better than at the end of Year 11. The reason for this is that students enter Year 10 with much lower standards in the use of computers than would be expected, but mostly this has been made up for by the end of Year 13.

183. Overall achievement is good. GCE A-level students are competent in evaluating positive and negative numbers from binary using twos complement, mantissa and exponent. Students following the GNVQ foundation course make much better progress than would be expected in creating presentations, because of the good teaching. As recognised in the previous inspection, the needs of a wide range of students are met with a good opportunity to follow courses at GNVQ foundation and intermediate, AVCE and GCE A-level.

184. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good with all teachers using digital projectors well. Some teachers use the interactive whiteboards and this, too, results in improved learning. Both teachers, and support staff for the GNVQ course, have good subject knowledge and high expectations that result in students making good gains in understanding and working hard. Students are very positive about their courses and show independence and co-operate well with one another and with their teachers. Day-to-day assessment is good and includes precise marking that informs students well about the quality of their work and what they need to do to improve.

185. Management of the ICT in the sixth form is good. Courses are well organised and the teachers work well together as a team. There has been a careful analysis of students' performances in previous examinations and action taken to improve on this. There is a shared commitment to improve and a capacity to do so. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection but more emphasis is required on further improving teaching strategies and the overall assessment of students so that more attain the higher grades in examinations.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

186. This is satisfactory. The use of ICT is good in art, design and technology, media, music and science. For most subjects there is insufficient planned use of computers to enhance students' learning and the range of software available to support these subjects is limited. The computers in the library are used well by the sixth form.

## HUMANITIES

Sociology and psychology were the focus of the inspection but **history and geography** were also sampled. Standards in geography are similar to national standards. Students respond well to challenging and topical approaches. The teaching is well organised and effective, enabling students to achieve appropriate standards. Standards in history have been rising and the most recent A-level results are good in terms of 'A' grades. Teaching is knowledgeable, encourages discussion and analysis and is supportive in helping individual students to progress.

## Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good subject knowledge and support from enthusiastic teachers.
- Good results in public examinations.
- Very good relationships with well-motivated students.

## Commentary

187. Results in the GCE examination for 2002 were above the national average. 2003 results are similar. Students make good progress in sociology.

188. Standards are above average. In their research projects, higher-attaining students have a strong grasp of theory and of significant case studies, and this helps them choose their areas for investigation. They are able to bring this firm grounding to their research proposals, informing their rationales and adopted methodologies. Research findings are appropriately presented, analysed, and evaluated. Higher- and middle-attaining students have the potential to embark upon successful undergraduate study in sociology. All students have a familiarity with key areas of their course.

189. Year 12 students demonstrated that after their first term they have a good understanding of the issues that attract sociologists to study education. They readily identify significant studies, and are able to refer to the important perspectives which inform research. They talk convincingly about their early steps towards research of their own, for example text analysis, and observation of education settings.

190. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is apparent, and matched by the students. Lessons are appropriately planned. Teachers confidently and skilfully emphasise the outcomes expected from A-level examiners. Teachers' care for their students' work is evident in the detailed marking of their mock examination work. Teachers' strong knowledge and understanding of their subject means that lessons are challenging and ensure that students achieve well. In many lessons, students' self evaluation of their own and others' work helps them to higher understanding of how to structure and apply the knowledge and understanding they have acquired through the previous four terms of their course. Students make good use of their basic text in Year 13, and the library's texts, periodicals, and online facilities. Some students have been sufficiently engaged to declare their intentions of applying to read sociology at university.

191. The department is very well led. Students' progress is carefully monitored, results thoughtfully analysed, and appropriate strategies developed as a result. For example, one priority is to improve the chances of those whose basic skills might prevent them succeeding as well as they could in examination conditions. Resources and accommodation are good, although students would benefit from more direct contact with the world outside of the college during their two-year course. Sociology was not reported in the last inspection in 1998 but the above average standards have been maintained effectively.

## Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are very good and achievement is good overall.
- Teaching and learning are very good and as a result students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- There is very good communication of assessment criteria to the students.
- There are not enough resources, particularly textbooks, and ICT is not used sufficiently to support teaching.

## Commentary

192. A-level results in 2003 were well above average. The group was the largest in the college and the retention rate was high. Value added information indicates that achievement is very good, with students attaining above expectations. Standards at AS-level were not so good; results were

below average and given their previous attainment this represents satisfactory achievement at best. However, work observed at the college indicates that the A Level results are more typical. Year 13 investigatory coursework, short essays marked against examination criteria and oral knowledge and understanding, for example on the Piagetian concepts of assimilation, accommodation and equilibration, all indicate that students achieve well. Achievement is overall good, with very good aspects in some classes and groups, including the achievement of above average students, and of boys.

193. Teaching and learning are very good. The quality of revision classes observed in Year 13 was good. Students are given very good information about assessment, such that they are well aware of the need to balance the skills of description and evaluation in their essays, and progress in lessons is almost tangible. Students are very appreciative of the personal level of teaching, the support available, the quality of explanation and the freedom and responsibility that they are given. This is evident, for example, in the investigatory coursework, where more able students are given the opportunity to research in more depth and to use more sophisticated techniques. It is also clear from student comment that the head of psychology provides a very strong teaching role model.

194. Leadership and management in psychology are at an early stage of development since the subject has been separated from sociology only since September 2003. Since that time satisfactory progress has been made with the development of schemes of work and the department is conscious of the need to develop training and curriculum enrichment. Staff are experienced and well qualified. However, there is a shortage of student textbooks. Good use of the library partly overcomes the shortage, but there are still not enough materials for parts of the A-level course. In addition, the department has some way to go to develop the use of ICT as an aid to teaching and learning. The previous report made no mention of psychology, but results have improved since 1998, and the subject remains the most popular option at both AS and A2-level, so that improvement may be described as good.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

The focus for the inspection was product design at A/AS Level and textiles technology at AS Level which is in its first year.

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards of design work are good and examination results are above average.
- There are excellent systems to establish targets for individual students and to monitor their progress. Students are clear about what they need to do in order to improve.
- Students enjoy working in design and technology, showing high levels of motivation. They are confident, articulate and analytical when discussing their design proposals.
- Levels of recruitment to sixth form courses in design and technology are modest given the number of potential students in Year 11.

#### **Commentary**

195. Achievement is good and although standards have varied over the past few years they are now above average. Standards are good when compared to similar schools, although the numbers of students studying the subject are small.

196. Recruitment to A-level design and technology subjects is increasing, although this remains low given the size of the pool of potential students in Year 11. The majority of students have backgrounds in graphic products at GCSE, and few have studied food technology or resistant

materials. This profile of recruitment reflects directly the variability in standards at GCSE in the various aspects of the subject.

197. Design portfolios reflect high standards overall in the areas of graphical presentation, in the selection and aesthetic development of design ideas and the use of three-dimensional models and prototypes. Students also benefit from using an electronic design folio developed by the head of department. This provides a clear, appropriate and effective structure for the selection, development and presentation of design ideas and is cross-referenced to the assessment demands of the examination specification. As a result students achieve above-average standards and make good progress.

198. Students in Year 12 are not always clear about the basic technical aspects of the subject. This includes their understanding of the properties of materials, and basic principles in the area of the interfaces between products and their users. These gaps in understanding explain why some students in Year 12 underachieve, and why in lessons the quality of completed work in this year group is broadly average rather than of a higher standard.

199. The quality of teaching is very good and is characterised by careful planning, high expectations, good subject knowledge and excellent resources which were developed largely by the head of department. There are strong relationships amongst students who provide one another with good levels of support. This ethos has been actively developed within the department to reflect the importance given to team working in the commercial worlds of designing and making.

200. Teaching sets clear objectives which underpin each aspect of advanced level work in design and technology. These are understood clearly by students, and form the basis of detailed and effective monitoring and tracking of their progress in all aspects of examinations taken in Years 12 and 13. This includes detailed and analytical feedback to students on what they need to do in order to improve. As a result students are well motivated, and standards are rising.

201. Good provision is made in the department for computer-aided design (CAD) and manufacture (CAM). This includes focused access to the Internet for research purposes, the use of an electronic design folio, and through developing skills with industry-standard design software. Very effective use is made of computer-operated plotters and cutters to manufacture complex products to high standards. Students and teachers alike benefit from good levels of support and expertise provided by technicians. Overall, the provision made for accommodation and resources is good.

202. The head of department alone currently teaches the subject at advanced level, and provides creative and dynamic leadership to students and staff alike by setting and maintaining high standards.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

The focus of the inspection was art, performing arts and music. **Media studies** was also sampled. One lesson of film studies and one of media production were seen and teaching and learning were good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to motivate the students who become absorbed in the subject and work hard. Teachers are keen to help individuals students use their own talents and interests and develop these whilst still covering the syllabus. This is why students produce interesting and individual work and why standards are high.

### **Art**

Provision in art is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.

- Results in examinations have improved significantly over the last two years.
- Students' progress is supported by their very positive attitudes to their work and their high level of interest.
- Continuity of student progress is restricted by the relatively short length of teaching periods.

## Commentary

203. Results in examinations at A/AS-level and the AVCE vocational course have improved significantly and are now average overall. In each case, results compare very favourably with those of the previous year, representing good achievement and progress, and the proportion of very high grades is a particularly strong feature.

204. In work seen during the inspection, above-average attainment is evident in all courses in Years 12 and 13. Students' work is supported by the extensive use of sketchbooks and notebooks. These provide good evidence of serious research and of high commitment. Students show a mature and responsible attitude to their work and make the maximum use of time available. Students opting for applied art or vocational studies, focus their practical work on a specified objective, designing murals for a primary school, for example.

205. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. The high level of commitment in student work is a reflection of a similar high level of commitment in the teaching. There is a high level of subject expertise in the teaching and an idealistic approach to the educational value of work in art. This translates into projects planned to involve students from different year groups working together and having differing roles. An additional aspect of this concern for the wider educational role of art is the importance attached to sensitive individual help and tuition. This has a particularly strong influence upon the very good progress made by students with special educational needs.

206. Good use is made of assessment in tracking students' progress from earlier stages. By this means, progress is kept within continuous review. Students respond very well to the efforts of their teachers and display a very positive attitude to their work alongside a high level of interest and enjoyment. A pleasant working atmosphere is evident in lessons. This is an important factor in promoting the very good quality of learning. The relative shortness of teaching periods, however, is a limitation on progress.

207. The fine art and vocational courses offered in the sixth form provide a good range of opportunities for the consolidation and further development of knowledge, skill and understanding gained earlier in the college. Opportunity has been increased by the addition of textiles at A/AS Level. Student take-up of sixth form art courses has increased over recent years.

208. The quality of both management and leadership is very good. The work of the department is led by a head of subject area, who plays a full part in the teaching. Relationships between staff are very good with a shared ambition for the development of the subject. Visits to London galleries are organised on a regular basis and educational visits to Paris take place when feasible. The vocational course requires staff to organise sessions involving practising artists, designers and craftsmen, and good links have been forged with higher education. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

## Music

The provision of music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Standards are rising and reflect good teaching and organisation.
- Excellent opportunities exist for working with music technology.
- Positive student attitudes promote very good achievement.
- Improved resources provide a broad and diverse music curriculum which provides for students of all levels of attainment.
- The provision for learning instruments and opportunities for student participation in choir, orchestra and other ensembles needs to be reviewed.

### Commentary

209. In the sixth form a number of music-related courses are offered to students. Music technology and music AS/A-level programmes are being followed by students from Years 12 and 13. A small group of Years 12 and 13 students from Stride are just beginning to follow a general music course. Provision has improved considerably since the previous inspection and numbers on the course are rising steadily.

210. Standards are rising year on year and progress is very good for students of all abilities. Work seen during the inspection indicates that these high standards are being maintained. Students enjoy their work and are enthusiastic to improve their skills. Higher performance skills are being developed and students are acquiring a sound knowledge of musical structures. This enables them to listen, perform and compose music with greater understanding and musical awareness. They use music terminology accurately in appraisals of their own work and can distinguish subtle changes in arrangements. Students are extremely well motivated and enjoy their music studies, which leads to a good atmosphere for learning. Whilst the recent achievement of students is good in both courses, the college should review provision for learning instruments and create more opportunities for student participation in choir, orchestra and other ensembles.

211. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned, have challenge and pace, and are supported by good use of resources in lessons to demonstrate teaching points. Teachers have worked hard to develop the courses and share their enthusiasm with the students who in turn are excited by their achievements. The teaching materials and resources used stimulate interest and engage students well. Assessment is sound and use of e-learning systems provides a curriculum that is easily and freely available. The teachers know what students are capable of and adapt the level of challenge appropriately. They give very good individual support using well-planned arrangements of compositions that meet the needs of all. Teachers have an excellent command of the subject matter and subject skills, which they use well to support student performances. They plan well, have high expectations and students respond well.

212. Leadership and management of the subject reflect the vision and strategy to increase opportunities and access. The music technology course reflects the desire of the college to raise the profile of the subject. As in Years 10 and 11, accommodation is cramped and of poor quality and hinders teaching. Improvements since the last inspection have been good and the subject has excellent capacity for further improvements which will build on the current high standards.



## Performing Arts

Provision in performing arts is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high and students achieve well.
- Teaching is very good and helps students develop as confident and thoughtful practitioners.
- The attitudes of students in Years 12 and 13 are extremely good so that they get the very most from their courses.
- Leadership and management are very good ensuring that students have a very good performing arts experience that includes opportunities to see and take part in high quality performances.
- Students work very effectively together, sharing and recording their ideas as they devise their own pieces.
- Moral and cultural issues are explored and students develop a mature attitude to tackling challenging concerns through drama.

### Commentary

213. Students do well in performing arts and make good progress in developing their understanding and skills in the subject. Students achieve well in their examinations.

214. The very good teaching is the reason why students develop the confidence to evaluate ideas and use their own creativity well both in practical and theoretical situations. Teaching is lively, insightful and well-informed and pushes the students' learning so they make good progress. Students develop a good subject knowledge base and are aware of different theatrical conventions and performance skills. Relationships in the department between staff, teaching and non-teaching, and students are excellent and this fosters the very positive attitudes to performing arts. Students work together very well, in pairs and groups, always taking care to involve everyone. They have developed very good skills in improvisation, learning to jot down ideas and prompts as they go along so that nothing is wasted. Students are taken to see outside performance of set pieces so that they can develop their knowledge of different interpretations of plays. They use the insight and information this gives them well to inform their own work.

215. The department is very well led and ensures that students receive a very well-rounded performing arts education that prepares them well for examination and develops a love of theatre arts. The work students are asked to tackle is challenging and asks them to explore important moral, ethical, cultural and spiritual issues which they do very well.

## BUSINESS STUDIES

The effectiveness of provision in business studies is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS-level results for 2003 were well below the national average with a significant number of students under-achieving.
- Current students have a positive attitude to the subject and appreciate the access to and commitment of staff.
- Recent staffing problems have been overcome and a knowledgeable and committed team of subject specialists now deliver the subject.
- Leadership and management of business studies are good with a clear vision in place for developing the subject.
- Current teaching is good overall with excellent teacher-student relationships.
- Assessment of current students' work is thorough and accurate although student portfolios are not always organised well enough to assist with revision.

## Commentary

216. All but one of the 22 students entered for the A-level achieved at least a pass in 2003 but less than half gained a pass grade at AS level, a disappointing amount of under-achievement for the latter qualification where staffing problems had had a significant effect on students' learning. Current students are generally performing at the level of national expectations with a stable number of appropriately qualified and knowledgeable teaching staff now teaching the subject.

217. As in the main school, leadership and management of the subject is good with the new head of department providing a clear vision for developing business studies at the college and making significant improvements to the overall provision of the subject. Well-structured programmes of study, linked to lesson plans, are now in place with appropriate elements of assessment to monitor student progress. Staff are effectively deployed to deliver the subject although the allocation and the length of lessons can inhibit teaching. Careful planning and monitoring of teaching and an effective team spirit ensure current sixth form students are well served.

218. Teaching overall is good with many excellent features. Students appreciate the access to, and co-operation and commitment of staff and the pleasant but productive working environment. As a consequence they are always willing to contribute and play a full part in lessons. Teachers use challenging, open questions to stimulate debate. Lessons, however, do not always focus on how well students are learning and checking fully that all have grasped the fundamentals of the topic being studied.

219. A good, well-prepared Year 13 lesson on the effects of employment law was presented enthusiastically and authoritatively by the teacher with many excellent contributions from students, for example on how businesses which provide services to workers leads to a more productive workforce. A stimulating lesson using work cards reinforced understanding of types of strategic planning in another good year 13 lesson. Similarly, students responded correctly to the teacher's challenging questions on the difficult topic of the use and interpretation of financial ratios. Teachers assess students' work on a regular basis and provide thorough feedback to students on the quality of their work. However, some students' portfolios are not always organised in a structured way to help with revision of the topics covered in lessons. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

### General studies

Provision in general studies is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The general studies course is wide-ranging and meets students' needs well, particularly the development of their communication and examination skills.
- Students' attitudes are not always positive and for some it results in absence and lower than expected achievement.

## Commentary

220. Taking everything together, achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are a little below the expectations of the course. There are two reasons for this and both are related to the relative newness of the course:

- some topics covered by the course are still being developed because monitoring has revealed that they are not challenging enough;
- students' attitudes to general studies are not always positive and some do not attend regularly enough.

229. The teacher responsible for the course and the head of sixth form are tackling these two areas well. Procedures for monitoring attendance in the sixth form have been improved significantly since September 2003 and this is having a positive impact. Teachers and tutors now have better information about patterns of absence and use this well to improve students' attendance, particularly on the general studies course. In relation to the course, teachers are working effectively to develop those units of work that are not working as well as they should. For example, a unit on helping students develop their skills in making an argument is now related closely to examination skills. Overall, the course is well organised and structured and is led effectively. The difficulties with students' attitudes and their attendance explain why provision is satisfactory.

230. Teaching is good overall but some of the lessons seen were satisfactory. Teachers have very good relationships with their students and know them well. As a result they support individual students well, matching the demands to their needs. Often this is done by asking different questions of different students in order to develop their individual understanding. Teachers use a range of different methods that are effective in promoting learning. In a number of lessons, for example, students worked in groups to share ideas or work so that the whole class benefited. These methods engage students well: as a result students contribute effectively to discussions and take their learning seriously.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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