

INSPECTION REPORT

BRISTNALL HALL TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Oldbury

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 104016

Headteacher: Mr Steve Venross

Lead inspector: Selwyn Ward

Dates of inspection: 1st – 5th November 2004

Inspection number: 268355

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 – 16
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	948
School address:	Bristnall Hall Lane Oldbury West Midlands
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Mary Geach
Date of previous inspection:	26 th April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Bristnall Hall Technology College is an average-size urban comprehensive school that caters for boys and girls aged 11 to 16. The school is popular and oversubscribed. Around four out of five students are of white British heritage, with the largest minority being Asian or Asian British of Indian origin. Around one in ten students are learning English other than as their mother tongue but only a very small number are at an early stage of learning English. Students come from a wide range of social backgrounds but, overall, they are socio-economically disadvantaged, as is reflected in the above average number known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with special educational needs is above average, and a large number (around one in twenty students) have statements of special educational needs. These cover a wide range of different needs but most are for moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural problems. Students currently joining the school at the start of Year 7 are of average ability, but in previous years, students have been of below and well below average ability, with particularly low language and numeracy skills. In September 2003, the school was awarded technology college status and it is part of the *Excellence in Cities* initiative.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	Design technology; vocational education
30814	Liz Coley	Team inspector	Music
27226	Richard Cribb	Team inspector	History, religious education, special educational needs
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32590	Roger Fenwick	Team inspector	Information and communication technology; art
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Bristnall Hall Technology College is a good school where students achieve well. The headteacher and leadership team have been successful in using the benefits of the school's new technology college status to boost students' learning. The teaching is good and the school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- Teachers use information and communications technology (ICT) effectively to make lessons interesting for the students
- Students behave well, get on very well with each other and with their teachers, and are keen to learn
- The school is well led so that the staff team have a shared commitment to improvement
- Although examination results are below average, students of all abilities are now achieving well because they are making good progress in most subjects
- There are not enough opportunities in lessons for students to practise their speaking skills
- Too many parents allow their children to miss school for avoidable reasons and there is too much lateness
- Marking and assessment are too inconsistent
- There are good arrangements for the care and welfare of students

There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The recent improvement in provision for most subjects has been good and, in some cases, very good. There has been good progress in tackling most of the issues raised in the last report. The school has not done enough, however, to tackle the weaknesses in assessment, cut down the number of authorised absences and meet its legal requirements for collective worship.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Students now achieve well. In 2003, the most recent year for which comprehensive national comparisons are available, results in Year 9 were well below average in English, mathematics and science. In 2004, they improved significantly. In work seen, standards in Year 9 are in line with national expectations in English and mathematics, as well as in ICT, art, geography and physical education. In religious education, standards are in line with those expected in the locally agreed syllabus. In other subjects, standards are below average. GCSE and other Year 11 test results were average in ICT. In art and music, results were above average, and they were well above average in religious education. They were well below average in mathematics, history and geography, and very low in science. In other subjects, they were below average, and they were below average overall. Results improved in 2004. Standards seen show a continuing improving trend. Students of all abilities, including able students and those with special educational needs, are now achieving well. It is only in citizenship that students are underachieving, and this is due to the lack of time currently given to the subject.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Students get on very well with one another and are keen to learn. They are polite and friendly and behave well in lessons and around the school. Although the school works hard to promote and reward good attendance, this remains unsatisfactory because too many parents take their children out of school in term-time. Punctuality is also unsatisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is good. The curriculum is satisfactory, despite the weakness in the provision for citizenship. Technology college status has had a significant effect and the use of ICT across the curriculum is now a notable strength. Numeracy and literacy are satisfactorily promoted, but opportunities are missed to develop students' speaking and listening skills through drama, debate, role-play and other similar activities in different subjects. A satisfactory range of clubs and other extracurricular activities are on offer. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Although many of the classrooms are cramped and the buildings and grounds have many shortcomings, the school copes well with these. It has not allowed them to adversely affect students' learning. Arrangements for the care and welfare of students are good and the school has developed a satisfactory partnership with parents and good links with other schools and with the wider community. These contribute to the good arrangements for work-related learning. **Teaching and learning are good.** Teachers get on very well with the students and this helps students build their self-esteem. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they plan lessons well, often making very effective use of ICT. The varied activities maintain students' interest and the students get a lot done. Teaching assistants are frequently, but not always, used well to support the learning of less able students and those with special educational needs. Teachers do not always ensure that work is appropriately matched to the different abilities in the class. Assessment is unsatisfactory because it is much too variable. There are examples of good and very good assessment arrangements in some subjects, such as design technology, but students are too often given insufficient guidance on what they need to do to do better. The school's assessment systems do not properly identify students learning English as an additional language nor do they track and compare the achievement of different groups of students, such as those with high rates of absence.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides good leadership, and staff with leadership responsibilities do an effective job, so that there is a shared commitment to raising standards. There has been success in improving the quality of education, for example through regular training sessions for staff. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have a sound understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for improvement but they have sometimes been too focused on trying to secure improvements to the buildings rather than more directly on raising standards.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students express positive views of the school. Several parents want more information about how well their children are doing. Although inspectors judged reports to be satisfactory, better assessment information would enable the school to improve its reporting to parents. Students raised concerns about the behaviour of others, but inspectors judge behaviour to be good.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Provide more opportunities in lessons to develop students' speaking and listening skills
- Ensure that assessment is consistently good across all subjects
- Reduce the amount of learning time lost through avoidable absence

and, to meet statutory requirements

- Ensure that sufficient time is given to teaching citizenship
- Provide a daily act of collective worship

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Although standards, as measured by examination results, have been below average, they are improving and students of all abilities are achieving well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have risen as a result of the innovations in teaching brought about through the move to technology college status
- Weaknesses in students' speaking and listening skills hold them back in some subjects
- Good use of teaching assistants in lessons helps students with special educational needs to achieve well
- Students do not achieve well enough in citizenship because not enough time is given to teaching this subject

Commentary

1. Students achieve well even though, in some subjects, standards are below the national average. There has been quite a wide variation in the students' standards when they join the school. The current Year 7 students were of average ability, overall, as measured by the test results they attained in Year 6 in their primary schools. Older year groups, including those who were assessed at the end of Year 9 and those who have taken GCSE and other examinations at the end of Year 11, have been below and, in some year groups, well below average, overall. In judging achievement, inspectors evaluate the progress that students make in lessons as well as the progress they make in relation to their starting point when they join the school and when they begin their examination courses. Where it has been possible to compare standards and achievement now with those at the time of the last inspection, these demonstrate satisfactory improvement.
2. Throughout this report, where comparisons are made with national results, inspectors have referred to the results from 2003 because, at the time of the inspection, a comprehensive set of national comparisons for 2004 were not yet available. The table below shows the average point scores attained by students in the national tests in 2003 in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 (with the previous year's results in brackets). Each point is roughly equivalent to one term's progress, so the table shows that, for example, in 2003, students at Bristnall Hall were, on average, nearly a year behind students nationally in English, mathematics and science. Results in 2004 were much better in all three subjects, with work seen during the inspection showing a continuing improving trend. Although below average in science, work seen was in line with national expectations in English and mathematics.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	30.6 (31.4)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	32.2 (32.4)	35.4 (34.7)
science	31.0 (29.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 186 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. In other subjects, assessments from 2003 indicated standards that were average in art and design, geography and religious education, and above average in information and communication technology (ICT). Standards were assessed as below average in design technology, history, music, physical education and French. Again, standards have risen in most subjects. Work seen was in line with national expectations in art and design, geography, history, religious education, physical education

and ICT. It was below average in design technology, music, French and citizenship. It is only citizenship where this represents underachievement, and this is because not enough time has been allocated to teaching this subject.

4. The table below shows the school's GCSE and equivalent examination results in comparison with results attained nationally in 2003. Again, the previous year's results are in brackets. In this table, the reference to *average point score* relates to points allocated to each grade at GCSE or equivalent. It does not, as it does in the Year 9 tests, equate to terms of progress. Although below the national average, the results represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' starting point. Students did particularly well in art and design, music and religious education. Results were better in 2004 and the standard of work seen indicates a trend of continuing improvement. Standards in Year 11 are average in English, mathematics, ICT, geography, music, physical education and vocational subjects, and above average in art and design and religious education. In science, French, design technology and history, standards are below average, and they are well below average in citizenship. This represents good achievement, overall, although achievement in citizenship is unsatisfactory because students are not being taught enough of this subject.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	37 (43)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	80 (86)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	91 (93)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	29.1 (30.6)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 188 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

5. Standards are rising because of improvements in teaching. Increased use by teachers of ICT in their teaching, as a result of the school's move to technology college status, has helped to make learning more interesting and exciting for students so that they are now learning and achieving more in lessons. There are too few opportunities, however, for students to develop their speaking and listening skills in lessons, for example through the use of drama, role-play and debate, and this slows progress and achievement in some subjects because students' do not always express themselves clearly.
6. Students with special educational needs achieve well. This is due to good identification of their learning needs and detailed individual education plans. The good level of support from teaching assistants and the caring, sensitive work of the whole special needs team motivates students very well and celebrates their successes. This underpins the significant achievement of many whose needs are considerable. The school has identified a number of students who are gifted and talented. It caters effectively for these and other able students so that they achieve well.
7. Students learning English as an additional language receive much less support. Students have been classified as learning English as an additional language merely on the basis of parents' signing of a form rather than as a result of any systematic assessment of needs. In practice, however, very few students are at an early stage of learning English and they achieve similarly to other students.
8. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls, nor between students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Students behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships throughout the school are very good
- Behaviour is good and students are keen to learn
- Too little is done to celebrate students' different cultures
- Too much schooling is missed through avoidable absence

Commentary

9. Relationships between students and with staff are very good. Students from different ethnic backgrounds mix and get on very well together and treat one another with respect. This contributes to the positive ethos of the college as a harmonious community where students are polite and helpful.
10. Although a number of students indicated in their questionnaire responses that others do not behave well, this indicates students' high expectations of good behaviour rather than any widespread misbehaviour. Inspectors found behaviour in lessons and around the school to be good. Students say that bullying is not an issue and are confident that when it occurs it is dealt with very quickly. They respond well to the school's systems for promoting good behaviour. There is a low rate of exclusions; the college works hard to ensure that students are excluded for only the most serious of offences and the two permanent exclusions were a result of repeated serious misconduct.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	768	49	2
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	39	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	70	3	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	15	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	20	4	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	8	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	7	0	0

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

11. Most students respond well in lessons. They listen to each other and work together sensibly when set collaborative tasks. They are often enthusiastic in lessons, responding well to the opportunities offered them to use ICT as a learning tool now that the school has won technology college status. The hard working team of teachers, teaching assistants, learning support staff and mentors focuses on building the self-esteem of students with special educational needs. Their positive approach enables students to participate fully when they are supported in lessons and their achievement is as good as that of their classmates.
12. Students say that the school council, to which all classes elect representatives, is beginning to give them a voice. As a result of its initiatives, there are now football teams for both boys and girls, and *bullying prefects*, who have received training, are effective trouble-shooters. The college provides a good framework for students' personal development and good opportunities for them to take responsibilities, for example, to help one another through the successful peer mentoring scheme. Moral and social development are strong features and help students to develop into mature young adults with good social skills. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is incorporated in the personal, social and health education programme as well as in

other lessons, but not enough is done to celebrate the full range of cultures represented in the school and in modern Britain.

13. Students are aware of others less fortunate and raise considerable funds for charities, such as the British Heart Foundation and a local radio initiative to support breast cancer research. At Christmas, hampers are provided for elderly people in the community.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	11.3
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.2
National data	1.1

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

14. Attendance in the last reporting year was well below the national average. This term, attendance levels have averaged 90 per cent because of rigorous monitoring and early intervention, and this is a good improvement, although attendance is still unsatisfactory, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Attendance figures are depressed because, despite the school’s pleas, too many parents take their children on holiday during term time. Although most students are punctual, there are still too many who arrive late for school. Although the school does not systematically compare students’ attendance with their attainment, inspectors identified several examples of students with poor attendance who had gaps in their coursework, due to absence, that were likely to adversely affect their examination results.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good. The curriculum is satisfactory, with some good features, including the good provision for work-related learning. There are good arrangements for students’ care and welfare. There is a satisfactory partnership with parents and good links with the community and other local schools. Assessment arrangements are unsatisfactory.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good. Assessment is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers make good use of the school’s ICT facilities to make learning more interesting and exciting
- Relationships are good and help to raise students’ confidence and self-esteem
- Lessons are well planned, with varied activities that maintain students’ interest
- Teachers explain clearly what students are expected to learn in lessons
- Marking and assessment are too variable, with much that gives too little guidance to students on what they need to do to do better
- Students are not given enough opportunities in lessons to develop their speaking and listening skills
- Work is not always well matched to students’ capabilities

Commentary

15. The table below shows the distribution of teaching grades for the 128 lessons seen. It represents a picture of good teaching, which is similar to the position described in the last inspection report. It is also in line with the positive views of teaching and learning expressed by both parents and students in their questionnaire responses. The quality of teaching is broadly similar across all year groups and in most subjects. Most subjects are taught by specialists, who have good knowledge and expertise. The college has, however, a policy of using non-specialists in Year 7 as part of students’ transition from primary to secondary school. This is popular with both parents and students and it is equally successful. Of the unsatisfactory lessons seen, some were taught by temporary teachers.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 128 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (2%)	25 (20%)	57 (45%)	38 (30%)	5 (4%)	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. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

16. Relationships in most lessons are good. Teachers know and get on well with their students and this helps to raise students' confidence and self-esteem, with most teachers acting as good role models. In a very small number of lessons, however, teachers are abrasive and their shouting at students is at odds with the otherwise positive ethos of the college.
17. Teachers plan activities in lessons well. The varied activities during lessons help to maintain students' interest and involvement. Good use is made, throughout the college, of guidance in the *National Strategy* for students in Years 7 to 9, so that lessons usually start with teachers setting out what it is that they expect the students to learn. In most cases, teachers return to these at the end of the lesson to confirm whether or not the lesson has been successful.
18. With the school's award of specialist status as a technology college, there has been a huge investment in ICT resources and training for staff. This has had a very positive impact on teaching and learning. ICT is used effectively by teachers across a wide range of subjects and is helping to make lessons more interesting, interactive and exciting for the students. Many of the classrooms now have data projectors or interactive whiteboards and the staff have learnt the skills to use these new tools effectively to enhance their lessons. Opportunities are missed in lessons, however, to develop students' confidence as speakers. Although students are routinely involved in question and answer sessions, there are relatively few opportunities taken to debate in lessons or to use techniques such as role-play. As a result, students have weak speaking and listening skills and this has an adverse impact on their standards of achievement.
19. In some lessons, work is not as well matched as it could be to the learning needs of the students. Because students are organised into ability sets in many subjects, it is evident from teachers' planning that they sometimes assume that all the students within a class are of similar ability when this is not always the case. Even within sets, there can be quite a wide range of ability, so that where work is not well matched to individual students' needs, it can be too easy for the brightest and too difficult for the least able.
20. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. In the learning support unit, students who may not have attended school for a long time are re-integrated very successfully and several have gone on to gain results above expectation in public examinations. In the best lessons, a range of good support strategies results in students being fully involved in their learning and making good progress. Teachers are generally well aware of the needs of individuals and adapt their teaching well to address a student's specific needs. This is done particularly well in English, mathematics, geography, religious education, vocational education and art. The skilled teaching in an excellent Year 7 English lesson focused the work on the individual needs of each student. This enabled the students to learn through the use of pictures, ICT and individual challenges. When support was needed, it was very successfully provided by the teaching assistants and enabled the students to quickly move on to the next task. Consequently, learning and achievement were excellent. Where students are given classroom support, their activities are usually well planned by the teaching assistants to meet their identified needs. However, the quality of planning of work to address the needs of students with special educational needs varies too much from subject to subject. This affects students' learning in several lessons, as work is not sufficiently adapted to address their individual education plans. This mainly happens when skilled teaching assistants are not supporting in the classroom. However, there are times when the teaching assistants do not have the opportunity to plan work with the teacher and this is unsatisfactory.

21. Marking and assessment are unsatisfactory and have not improved enough since the last inspection. Although there are examples of some good quality marking that provides clear guidance to students on what they need to do to improve their work, other marking is less rigorous and some does little more than acknowledge that work has been done. The college is piloting new systems for assessment and there are some potentially very effective systems in some departments, such as design technology, but there is currently too much inconsistent practice within the school. The school's assessment systems do not properly identify students learning English as an additional language nor do they systematically track and compare the achievement of different groups of students, such as those with high rates of absence.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory, despite shortcomings in the provision for citizenship. There is a satisfactory range of extracurricular activities on offer. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Technology college status is beginning to impact on standards
- Students are not taught all the requirements for citizenship
- There is a good range of vocational courses for students aged 14 to 16
- There are not enough opportunities for developing students' speaking and listening skills

Commentary

22. The curriculum is satisfactory, overall, but with some good features. For instance, in religious education, the syllabus has been customised to accommodate the particular demands of the students. The impact of the recently acquired technology college status is starting to become apparent in almost all subjects as it is being increasingly used in teaching. In Year 7, students are taught in their own base location. They have fewer different teachers because English, mathematics and humanities are taught by non-specialists. Parents like this as its stability contributes to the smooth transition from primary school. During the inspection this was found to be working well. The school recognises the need to further develop the use of numeracy and literacy across the curriculum. There are insufficient opportunities for the students to develop their speaking and listening skills. Provision for citizenship is unsatisfactory because insufficient time is allocated for teaching this subject. There are no opportunities available for students whose mother tongue is not English to take examinations in their home language. This aspect of the curriculum provision is not as good as the last inspection, when GCSE options in community languages were on offer.
23. The college has taken steps to provide enhanced activities for gifted and talented students by organising a series of clubs and events that extend the curriculum. A good example of this is the Dance Club which is held outside of the normal college day. Participants in this extracurricular activity all passed GCSE dance with grades B or C. The extension of more vocational courses is a good innovation that is helping students to improve their achievement. The school has made good links with the local further education college which provides access to some courses.
24. There is a good programme of extracurricular sport which takes place after school throughout the year and has good levels of student participation. The music provision is satisfactory but developing further. Students have the opportunity to take part in a range of musical activities, although the number participating is still low. The range spreads from the recorder group, offered to students in Years 7 and 8, the choral group, and finally the students' rock band. The library is available for research and study at lunchtimes and at the end of the day. Other opportunities for learning outside the school day include clubs for mathematics, English, science, technology, ICT and art. A breakfast club meets every day and provides students with an ordered start to the day. At break and lunch times children who feel insecure can attend the buddy club. At these meetings, exercises are provided to help resolve individual problems and increase self-confidence. This provision is good. The provision for enrichment, overall, is satisfactory.

25. Despite many shortcomings in the buildings and grounds, the college uses its accommodation effectively and does not allow it to adversely affect students' learning. The adequacy of resources is a very mixed picture. Technology college status has resulted in improved resources in many subject areas and the provision for ICT across the curriculum. For instance, access to ICT is very good in science and design technology. Subjects where the ICT provision is currently unsatisfactory include history, PE and English, although there are plans to roll out further ICT provision over the coming year. The library is satisfactory, overall, although there are not enough books for mathematics, ICT or modern foreign languages. In some subjects, resources are unsatisfactory. These include art, modern foreign languages, citizenship and personal social and health education. However, resources are satisfactory, overall. The school benefits from a very stable staff. Newly qualified teachers and graduates training to become teachers receive good support and guidance.

26. The weekly assemblies for each year group are well organised. Themes of each are well planned to interest the students who benefit well from the opportunity to consider social and moral issues. There is good encouragement given to students to support each other and to be aware of the feelings of those around them. However, students are generally reluctant to respond to questions by the assembly leaders. The inconsistent delivery of the 'thought for the day' in tutorial time means that there is often no opportunity for collective worship for a significant number of students during the day. Consequently, the school is not meeting the legal requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all its students.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes good care of its students. It provides satisfactory support, advice and guidance. There are satisfactory arrangements for consulting and taking account of students' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The management of health and safety is good but the school has only one staff member fully trained in first aid
- Learning mentors, funded through the *Excellence in Cities* initiative, provide effective support for students identified as at risk of underachieving
- The guidance given to students on how well they are doing is not always as helpful as it could be
- Arrangements for students entering school and for those transferring to further education are good

Commentary

27. Students' health, safety and welfare are assured by good routines and practices, which are carefully monitored. The school has made satisfactory provision for students who have disabilities but the nature of the building makes it impossible to comply fully with the latest requirements for wheelchair access. All the routine checking systems and risk assessments for health and safety are in place and the record-keeping is meticulous. The security arrangements, including those for internet use, are good. Staff are trained in child protection matters, and the procedures in place are effective. The arrangements for students in public care are good. Students are carefully looked after when they are unwell, but with only one adult fully trained in first aid, the school is unable to guarantee coverage at all times.
28. The college works hard to be fully inclusive. It does not give up on students, working with families and outside agencies to keep poorly behaved students in school. They are supervised well throughout the day and this makes a significant contribution to their safety as well as encouraging strong relationships between them and their teachers. Students praise their teachers, and the help and guidance which they are given effectively supports them in their learning. In discussion and on questionnaires most say that they know the staff well, are confident in approaching them, and know that they will be listened to. Teachers are generally alert to students' learning needs and do their best to support them. The assessment system which grades students' achievement by means of *higher than, as well as, or lower than, expected*, is understood by the students but they do not always know what their expected levels are, and so the grades are not as meaningful to them as they might otherwise be. The academic guidance that students are given is not always sufficiently focussed on what they need to do to improve. Very good use of the *Excellence in Cities* funding has provided a skilled team of mentors who work very well with individual students who are identified as being at risk of underachieving. The initial three-year programme has made a very significant impact on the school lives of the students who have been involved in the scheme. The trained student mentors and the buddies add significantly to the available support.
29. The very well designed support booklet for students with special educational needs and their individual education plans are available to all teaching and support staff. By encouraging a positive response from special needs students, the college builds their self-esteem very effectively and nearly all are able to integrate fully into the day-to-day activities of the college. The mentoring team provide good support for students transferring to and from the school. Positive working relationships

between the teachers, learning support staff and students enable those with behavioural difficulties to work effectively alongside their classmates.

30. The head of Year 7 forges good links with the feeder primary schools, which ensures that the transition to secondary education is smoothly managed. Students and parents are invited into school for meetings and to an open day. Students have an ongoing science project that they bring with them and good opportunities to meet their teachers ensure that they settle quickly. The heads of year and tutors offer a good range of support to those who need it and liaison with parents and outside agencies, such as social services, help resolve any personal difficulties. The *Connexions* service works with small groups as well as providing good career guidance to all older students. Students and their parents receive helpful advice and guidance as they move through the school, for example, when option choices are made and by way of careers education. Parents are confident that the college helps and cares for their children very well and students' views are positive. Good standards of care make a good contribution to the college's positive ethos.
31. There are satisfactory arrangements for consulting students and taking account of their views, particularly through the school council, through which students take up issues of concern to others in their class and have an influence on school policies, for example on deterring smoking.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The schools' links with parents are satisfactory. Good links with the community and with other schools and colleges make a significant contribution to the students' experience.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Technology college status is providing opportunities for wider community involvement which support and extend the work of the college
- The quality of information provided to parents is good, but reports could give parents more guidance on what students need to do to improve their work
- Information is not made available in other languages for parents in the many homes where English is not the first language
- Links with other schools and colleges are good, especially when students move from one phase of their education to the next and upon entry to the school
- The School Association provides good support

Commentary

32. The local community and Education Business Partnership give good support to school events and were very involved in the successful application for technology college status. This is already having a good impact on students' achievement with the emphasis on developing new and more exciting methods of learning and academic coaching being well supported by ICT. Improved community access to the college's computers and equipment has led to adult education courses being run on site. Year 9 students are involved in an annual two-day technology challenge which gives them an opportunity for team building, problem solving and an architectural workshop. Extensive links with the education arm of an engineering foundation are aimed at improving the image and uptake of engineering placement. Other links include assisting a local Baptist Church with ICT, visits from an architect, an artist in residence and students taking part in music in the community at Christmas time.
33. As part of its technology college status, the school has helped two of the primary schools from which pupils transfer at the end of Year 6 by providing ICT training. There are close links with businesses and with Birmingham University and local further education colleges, which provide good facilities for work experience and also improve access to vocational opportunities.
34. Most parents are pleased with what the college offers and support their children's learning well, but too many take their children out of school for holidays in term time. The School Association holds regular social and fundraising events and supports the work of the college very well. They raised £10,000 towards the technology college status bid. Money has also been raised for equipment for disabled students and to improve playground facilities. Parents receive generally good quality information and have opportunities to find out about the progress their children are making, but

some parents say they would like to know more. The college is building an interactive internet website to address this. Written annual reports to parents are satisfactory but vary in quality: not all give sufficient information about what students need to do to improve. The governors' annual report to parents celebrates successes and gives a good flavour of the school. By the college's own estimate, one in ten of the students come from homes where languages other than English are spoken, but none of the information sent to parents is translated into any other languages.

35. The school meets its statutory requirements well in respect of its students with special educational need, developing good links with their parents and the agencies that support them. In addition, there are very positive informal links when parents can come to meet the learning support team, discuss progress, benefit from talks by external speakers and enjoy a cup of tea with other parents.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good, overall. Leadership by the head and key staff is good. Management and governance are satisfactory, although not all statutory requirements are fully met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides good leadership which is promoting higher standards
- Technology college status is having a significant impact on teaching and learning
- Strategic planning for the school is good
- Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is not sufficiently rigorous
- Governors are supportive of the school but recognise the need to take a more active role
- The college does not fully meet its statutory requirements

Commentary

36. The headteacher was appointed this term, although he is not new to the school, being previously the deputy headteacher. His leadership is good and he has been successful in engendering a shared commitment among staff to school improvement and raised standards by introducing more innovation into teaching and learning. This is a clear whole-school priority and is reflected in the significant emphasis being placed on teachers' further professional development. A weekly after-school training session has been introduced this term for all staff. Leadership of other key staff is good. There is a clear commitment to ensuring that the college provides well for all of its students. Technology college status is having a significant impact, not only in ICT, design technology, science and mathematics but also increasingly in other subjects such as religious education, geography and for students with special educational needs. Funding through the *Excellence in Cities* initiative is being used effectively in the learning support unit and in the provision of learning mentors to help raise standards.
37. The leadership of special educational needs is good and its management is satisfactory. The very good induction and externally provided training programmes are a significant factor that has greatly improved the provision for students with special educational needs. A booklet of information for staff and students' individual education plans are very well written to support students' progress. There are strong links with the primary schools from which students transfer. Good strategies for early identification of students' needs are backed up by good and regular assessment. However, there is insufficient analysis of how students with special educational needs have benefited as a result of the support they receive on their GCSE courses. This makes it difficult for the college to identify the effectiveness of its provision.
38. Overall, management is satisfactory. The school day runs smoothly. Finances are managed efficiently and the college provides good value for money. College self-evaluation procedures are insufficiently rigorous, however. There are examples of good monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in some subject areas, for example English, geography and physical education, where the process is used to promote higher standards of teaching. However, this is not generally a strength, and the college has itself identified the need to introduce more rigorous monitoring and evaluation by the senior management team.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,924,553	Balance from previous year	187,454
Total expenditure	3,971,052	Balance carried forward to the next	140,956
Expenditure per student	4,189		

39. Governors do a satisfactory job. They are supportive of the school and are kept well informed about progress against the targets in the school improvement plan and also about policy developments. At present, however, they do not play a sufficiently influential role in strategic planning nor in supportively challenging the college's performance, because their efforts have been directed at fighting for improvements to the buildings and grounds rather than focusing on standards and achievement. Governors bring skills to the supervision of the college's finances and financial planning is detailed. The governing body has not ensured that the college meets the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

Provision for work-related learning is good.

Main strengths

- Students benefit from good careers guidance
- Work experience in Year 10 is well organised and makes a good contribution to students leaning about the world of work
- The work-related courses that have been introduced are well matched to the needs of the students who take part

Commentary

40. The range of vocational opportunities now offered to students at the college is considerably extended through collaboration with other institutions and training providers. The range offered is particularly extensive for less able and more vulnerable students, including some who may be at risk of disaffection with school, who are given careful options guidance in Year 9 and are well supported to pursue their chosen courses. Currently, Year 10 students have the choice of following a GNVQ in hairdressing, construction, automotive skills, childcare, art or sport and leisure. A number of students from Years 10 and 11 attend the local further education college for part of the week and are taught alongside students from other institutions. Their *pathways group* programme caters well for the students' needs. All Year 11 students have the option of a GNVQ in ICT and all Year 10 students now have extended periods of ICT through which learning for work is taught.
41. All students in Year 10 take part in a two-week period of work experience. Students benefit from a carefully structured programme of preparation, placement, induction and activities, well matched to their needs and aspiration, as well as post work experience opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. Good links have been developed to follow up work experience in other subjects. Students' work experience diaries, for example, are used in English lessons. Careers education is good and steadily develops as the student progress through the college. The college is closely involved with *Connexions* service that provides advice to students about career opportunities. Students comment positively on the careers guidance that they are given. Work-related learning was not inspected in the last inspection.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The school has recently introduced a system of alternate modern foreign languages in Year 7, offering French and Spanish in alternate years. French is the main language at present and was the focus of the inspection. **Spanish** was not inspected.

English

Provision in English is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards are rising
- The teaching is good
- There are too few opportunities in English or other subjects for drama, role-play or debate
- Students do not have planned and systematic access to ICT

Commentary

42. In the 2003 tests in Year 9, results were well below the national average, although they were average when compared with the results of students in similar schools. In 2004, there was a significant improvement in results. In 2003, GCSE results in English language were below average, but they rose in 2004. English Literature results were also much better in 2004 than 2003. In line with the national pattern, girls' results have tended to be better than those of boys. Taking account of students' prior attainment, the test results represent good achievement.
43. Standards in work seen during the inspection continue the improving trend. Standards in reading and writing are broadly in line with national expectations. By the time they reach Year 11, more able students write accurately and at length on demanding literature, such as Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, showing insight into plot and character. The writing of less able students tends to be shorter, less accurate and descriptive rather than analytical. Students with special educational needs make good progress because the teaching takes full account of their individual needs and teachers are well supported by the work of teaching assistants.
44. The teaching is good and so students learn well. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan thoroughly and conduct lessons at a brisk pace. The best teaching incorporates a range of activities so that students can learn in a variety of ways. It also includes a high level of challenge. For example, a class of more able Year 11 students made very good progress in their understanding of Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* because the students were expected to relate the characters and theme of the novel to the social and economic conditions of the depression in the United States. Students also learn well because teachers make their objectives in lessons explicit. In some lessons, teachers also explain how students can achieve particular grades or levels, which is good, but this does not happen consistently. However, marking does make clear the standard of students' work and they are further encouraged to improve by having to assess their own performance and set targets for improvement at the end of each unit of work. Harmonious relationships in the classrooms give students the confidence to participate fully in lessons.
45. At present, students do not have sufficient access to ICT because the full benefits of the school's technology college status have not yet been rolled out to the English department. This limits students' ability to edit and present their work in a variety of ways or to undertake certain types of research. There is relatively little drama in school and this limits the development of students' speaking and listening skills, which are not as fully developed as they might be.

46. Leadership and management are good, providing clear direction for the work of teachers. Planning takes good account of a thorough analysis of the needs of the students. There is a strong sense of teamwork and good organisation. Careful attention is paid to developing the professional abilities of teachers. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

47. The school makes satisfactory provision for the development of students' literacy. During the inspection, standards of literacy observed in lessons and in the sample of work scrutinised were average. Across the range of subjects, practice varies. Some teachers pay careful attention to literacy, taking every opportunity to develop students' vocabulary, give them opportunities to explain their ideas and help them to improve their writing. In some subjects, however, teachers miss opportunities to encourage students to explore ideas orally so that they can clarify their thinking and become more confident speakers. Little use is made of role-play or opportunity taken for debate to develop students' speaking and listening skills.
48. The library is centrally located, but small. Its stock appropriately reflects the cultural diversity of the student population. There is a good induction programme for Year 7 students. The Reading Club is a good initiative that provides sympathetic support for younger students who find reading difficult and also helps older students to assume responsibility for helping Year 7 students.

French

Provision in French is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' conscientious and positive attitudes help them learn effectively
- Students have too few opportunities to develop their spoken French
- Marking does not give students enough guidance on how to improve

Commentary

49. Teacher assessments for students in Year 9 were below average in 2003, but rose in 2004. The latter were optimistic, especially at the higher levels. In the full course GCSE examinations in 2003, results were above average. In 2004 results were even better, but only 14 students sat this examination. The achievement of those students and their peers who sat short course and entry-level examinations was good.
50. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, teaching methods, assessment and curriculum time are not fully adapted to meet the new challenge posed by the significant rise in numbers of students following the full course syllabus. Standards are currently below average, although this represents satisfactory achievement. In all year groups, students' comprehension and writing skills are stronger as lessons are centred on these. Standards in oral work are considerably weaker because this is not given as much priority and students are not sufficiently challenged. This is having an effect in depressing achievement. Not enough use is made of ICT to support learning.
51. Students' attitudes are good. They are very responsive when fully involved in question and answer routines and take evident care in the presentation of their written work. They have a good rapport with their teachers. Lessons are generally well-organised, providing opportunities to practise most skills, and teachers explain things clearly. Marking is regular and often gives encouragement to students but it is inconsistent in quality and provides insufficient guidance as to how they can improve.
52. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leadership has established a good team spirit that has helped the department cope with recent staffing discontinuities. Developments in provision, although identified in planning, have only been implemented in part, and monitoring and evaluation are largely informal. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to plan well-structured lessons which facilitate good learning
- Good use of interactive whiteboards enhances the learning of mathematics
- Many students lack knowledge of their current level of performance and targets for the future

Commentary

53. Results in the 2003 national tests for students in Year 9 were well below average, although average in comparison with similar schools. Boys did less well than girls. Results improved markedly in 2004. This was also the case at GCSE. Results were well below average in 2003 but improved in 2004. Standards seen show a continuing improving trend. They were average, which shows good achievement in relation to the students' below average starting point. Students in all years, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, were seen to be making good progress. In an excellent Year 9 lesson, less able students capably computed outputs from function machines, and progressed to successfully tabulating a linear function and plotting it. More able students in a very good Year 11 lesson smoothly extended their knowledge of circles to compute arc length and area of sector, and carry out inverse calculations, with results reported correctly to specified degrees of accuracy.
54. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching seen in Years 7 to 9 ranged from satisfactory to excellent. In Years 10 and 11, all teaching seen was good or very good. Teachers have good subject expertise and plan effectively so that students build on what they have learnt before. Class management is good, and a brisk pace is maintained in most lessons. Teachers know their students well so that they target questions effectively. Working relationships between students and teachers are good, and students have a positive attitude to learning. The *National Strategy* for students in Years 7 to 9 has influenced mathematics teaching positively throughout the school. The emphasis on setting learning objectives and identifying key words, and the use of effective starting and closing activities foster good learning. Good, and sometimes very imaginative, use of interactive whiteboards ensures high quality display and encourages effective demonstrations. These have encouraged a style of teaching which engages students very well. Less able Year 10 students were able to develop an algebraic formula and plot the corresponding graph as the result of their very active involvement in using and extending a number pattern on the whiteboard. Teachers correct work very thoroughly, giving constructive comment. Reference by teachers to *National Curriculum* levels or GCSE grades was seen only infrequently in lessons or in exercise books, however, so that many students are not reminded enough of their current level of performance or what their targets are. Teachers do not always plan and discuss lessons with teaching assistants in advance, which sometimes limits the effectiveness of the support that they provide.
55. The subject is well led and satisfactorily managed. Recent staffing difficulties have been overcome and the teaching team is now complete, confident and effective. Leadership has clarity of vision and purpose, with high aspirations for the future. Good role models are provided for the teaching team. Challenging consultation documents have been produced, working towards the establishment of an updated set of mathematics practices and policies. A culture of sharing good practice and encouraging self-evaluation exists. More rigorous monitoring of student performance data is beginning. Good provision is made for gifted and talented students, sometimes in discussion with parents. Day-to-day, the department runs very smoothly. Resources are good, particularly ICT resources, including the well-used departmental computer room. Mathematical software for this room is under review to ensure that it remains up-to-date. Classrooms are enhanced by stimulating display materials that create a good learning environment. Improvement since the last inspection has been good because the widespread and effective use of ICT and the methodology of the *National Strategy* for students in Years 7 to 9 have raised standards.

Mathematics across the curriculum

56. The use of mathematics in other subjects is currently satisfactory and plans have been drawn up to carry out a new audit of the use of numeracy across the curriculum, and to further develop the profile of numeracy within the school. Students already show satisfactory competence in a range of uses of numeracy across the curriculum. In subjects including geography, physical education and science, graphs and charts are successfully constructed and interpreted. GNVQ students in manufacturing construct questionnaires and carry out and analyse surveys, and those in ICT use Boolean algebra searches in their project work. In design technology, students are competent in measurement, and are able to produce accurate scale drawings.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good ICT resources are having a positive impact on teaching and learning
- There is a significant core of good teaching, leading to good learning and achievement
- Assessment practices have improved but are not consistent
- There is insufficient open investigative work
- Although the subject is well led, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching to ensure consistently high standards

Commentary

57. Results at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average in 2003, but were above those in similar schools. Results rose in 2004. GCSE results in 2003 were very low but improved sharply in 2004. Standards seen in Year 9 are below average, for example in terms of students' understanding of concepts such as gravity and speed and the different reactions of metals. Students' progress and achievement are satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, standards are again below average, for example in terms of students' understanding of radioactive decay and exothermic and endothermic reactions. Students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their prior attainment as a result of good teaching and good curriculum provision. Progress and achievement by students with special educational needs and the gifted and talented are satisfactory.
58. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and are good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are increasingly using the three-part lesson structure suggested in the *National Strategy* for Years 7 to 9, with short starter activities for lessons to engage students' interest at the outset, followed by main activities and a plenary (whole-class summing up and evaluation of the lesson). Learning objectives are made clear to students at the beginning of lessons. These approaches are having a positive impact on the quality of lessons, but, at present, the *National Strategy* for science is neither fully nor consistently in place. The quality of teaching is variable, although there is an increasing core of good teaching where students learn and achieve well. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations in terms of both the level and pace of work. There is a suitable variety of activities to engage and sustain students' interest. Overall, there is an increasing range of teaching and learning activities in use. Coursework in Years 10 and 11 has been strengthened, but there is insufficient open, extended investigative work in the lower school. The department is now very well resourced with ICT facilities, including computers and interactive whiteboards. This is having an increasingly positive impact upon teaching and learning, but further training is required, as planned, in order to make the most effective use of these resources. Teacher-student relationships are generally good, and students' attitudes are good. Students respond well to the learning opportunities and work in groups and individually. In Years 10 and 11, students respond well to the context-led approaches and portfolio-based approach in the GNVQ course. Assessment procedures have been improved with thorough tracking of students' progress, together with regular feedback to students on their levels and frequent target-setting. Some peer assessment has been introduced and, recently, criteria sheets have been

shared with students. Work is marked regularly. In the best cases, there are detailed comments indicating how students can improve, although this effective approach is not used consistently.

59. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear focus on raising standards and a wide range of actions has been taken to bring this about. These include developing new schemes of work, and the introduction of new courses in Years 10 and 11. Standards have risen markedly, despite significant staffing difficulties, which are currently being resolved. There is regular scrutiny of samples of students' work, but there is insufficient direct monitoring and observation of lessons to give teachers regular professional development feedback and promote consistently high standards of teaching. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement are rapidly improving because of the good teaching and the modern, vastly enhanced ICT facilities
- ICT is used effectively in subjects that have good access to equipment
- Many more students now take an ICT qualification that can lead to further learning and skills for employment
- Not enough time is given to teaching the GCSE course

Commentary

60. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 indicated that students were below average. They were higher in 2004. The department has combined a range of Year 10 and 11 courses to meet the needs of students. In 2003, these results were average, although they declined slightly in 2004. Most students now follow and complete a GNVQ qualification, which is a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection.
61. Many students have weaker skills than usual at the start of Year 7. The good teaching and the interesting, appropriate curriculum in Years 7 and 8, ensure that students make good progress. A GNVQ course has been introduced in Year 9 to allow students to fast-track to national qualifications. Work seen in Year 9 showed standards to be average. This raising of standards and achievement can be directly attributed to the good use of new technology, good advice and guidance. In lessons students co-operate well and help each other. This further raises achievement.
62. Teaching and learning are good. Most teaching is sensitive to the needs of the students and provides a very good variety of modern technological experiences in Years 7 and 8. Although the department has very good assessment of students' starting point in Year 7, Year 9 students now following the GNVQ programme are not assessed using the national criteria; instead students are informed of their progress using the school system. Therefore, students do not know what *National Curriculum* level they are working at. Although the sample of work seen in Years 10 and 11 shows good quality, students are not evaluating their work enough.
63. Year 10 students learned well when constructing business stationery because teachers broke tasks down into manageable parts. Year 11 students demonstrated that they could work more independently applying the skills and understanding from earlier years when they used advanced researching techniques on the internet to produce travel plans for a business conference. Although, overall, all students achieve well, those with special educational needs in literacy and some of those learning English as an additional language struggle with examination text and written information.
64. Leadership and management are good, enabling rapid progress to be made with the school's specialist technology college status. There is good technical backup and the school has more computers than usual for students to use. This is benefiting learning throughout the college. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Nevertheless, students taking GCSE get half the normal time for the subject. This affects learning and results. The fast-track curriculum in Years 9 and 10 does not as yet have identified progression routes. ICT teaching is not monitored sufficiently.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

65. The overall competence of students in the use of ICT is good. Very good ICT work is done in design technology and in mathematics, where students have access to suites of computers. In design technology, students have very good opportunities to design and make products using good computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment. In mathematics, teachers use electronic whiteboards very effectively to make learning interesting and exciting. Students are also rapidly

getting to grips with new opportunities to use the interactive whiteboards in geography to enhance their own learning. New ICT facilities in science have given students opportunities to work on forensic science projects. English, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and art do not, as yet, have access to sufficient ICT resources. The college is now embarking on the next steps of *e-learning* by using online teaching resources and starting the development of home-school learning opportunities.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching
- Students' understanding is aided by high quality electronic presentation by teachers
- Teachers do not always match work closely enough to students' capabilities
- Students are made aware of their potential and how well they are doing

Commentary

66. Teachers' assessments of Year 9 students in 2003 showed that students' attainment was broadly average. Assessments were similar in 2004. The performance of Year 11 students in the GCSE examinations in 2003 was well below the national average. Students did not do as well as expected in 2004 and results declined further.
67. Standards seen in the inspection show an improved picture. Standards in Year 9 are in line with those expected nationally and this is good achievement in relation to students' starting point. Standards in Year 11 are also average. Students are particularly good at recording information on maps and diagrams. Lower ability students are successful in expressing ideas on changing land use patterns in inner city Birmingham.
68. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons have clear objectives so that students know what they have to do. All teachers have good subject knowledge. Teaching materials are generally matched appropriately to the ability of the students, although sometimes more opportunities could be given to more able, younger students to write at greater length. Work is not always as well matched as it could be to the different capabilities of students in the GCSE classes. Sometimes there is too much direction from the teacher and not enough scope for students to take responsibility for their own learning. Lessons are made more interesting by the use of high quality electronic visual aids that help to motivate students. Specialist geographical terms and unfamiliar words are highlighted and teachers explain the meanings carefully. This helps students to gain a better understanding of key ideas. Teacher-student relationships are good and younger students with learning difficulties are well supported by teaching assistants. The work of younger students is marked with detailed comments as to how they should improve, but this is not so evident in Years 10 and 11. All students are made aware, however, of the level they are working at and the level they should be working towards.
69. Leadership and management are good. Teaching is monitored regularly so that standards in lessons are maintained and improved. This monitoring has been effective in tackling the drop in standards evident from recent examinations. The curriculum is generally well planned, although many younger students do not have the opportunity to experience fieldwork. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The developmental work on historical skills in Year 7 is already having a good affect on these students' achievement and is raising standards
- Learning materials are not always adapted to match the levels of students' reading and understanding, leading to underachievement in some lessons
- Students work hard throughout their lessons because they have positive attitudes towards their studies
- A small but significant number of students do not complete tasks because they have insufficient understanding of the background to the period that they are studying

Commentary

70. Students join the school with knowledge, understanding and historical skills that are below those expected nationally. Standards by the end of Year 9 are below average because students do not have enough ability to select and combine information from a range of sources. Only the more able students can evaluate sources well by the end of Year 9. Seeing that students' achievement has only been satisfactory over a significant period, the department has developed a new skill based programme in Year 7. In an investigation comparing Harold and William's leadership at the Battle of Hastings, Year 7 students developed their history skills extremely well. They learnt very well, developing a clear understanding of bias and the reliability of evidence. Their knowledge of the sequence of events leading to the battle was very good and they made a very good assessment of the relative strengths of Harold and William. This work was well planned and the teachers made good use of ICT to develop the students' interest very well. As a consequence of this change of approach, students achieved well.
71. Teaching, however, is satisfactory, overall, because it is generally much less dynamic. Although satisfactory learning takes place, the planning of lessons does not always take account of the students' reading skills, their prior learning and their understanding of the background to the topics they are working on. Consequently, a small but significant number do not make enough progress.
72. GCSE results in 2003 were significantly below the national average. In the present Year 10, standards are average, but Year 11 GCSE students are below average. Given their levels when they started the course, these students too are achieving satisfactorily. In the most successful GCSE lessons, good planning provides students with a variety of well thought out challenges. Even when students have difficulties tackling work, because they have weak reading skills, they try hard. This positive approach enables students to make sound notes for their revision work. However, a significant number of students do not complete work because they have insufficient understanding of how to examine historical sources. Their knowledge and understanding of the context within which the sources were developed, particularly the post-war world of the 1940s, is insufficient for students to fully consider the events leading to the Cold War. Even though the most able students achieve very well in GCSE, several gaining top grades last year, a small but significant number of students each year underachieve as a result of this.
73. Assessment and marking are satisfactory. In GCSE lessons, the teaching of examination technique strengthens students' knowledge of how marks are awarded. Students are given clear targets and know what they must do to raise their grades, and assessment is now being used to appropriately identify the correct level of students' work in Year 9.
74. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The teaching team has a clear vision of how to raise standards. The Year 7 experiment has already had a positive effect on learning. The structured improvement of students' extended writing is particularly good. The improved marking and assessment methods are beginning to show students how they can do better. However, the termly check of marking is insufficient to ensure consistent marking in books so that all students benefit from it. Similarly, whilst the monitoring of how teaching affects students' learning in lessons is satisfactory, it is not sufficiently rigorous to significantly develop classroom practice along the lines of the Year 7 approach. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is very good.

Main strengths

- The energy and humour in the very well planned lessons make learning fun, encouraging all students to participate to the very best of their ability
- Students achieve very well because of high quality teaching that very effectively builds their self-esteem whilst encouraging them to think about the key questions affecting their lives
- Students' responses to the enthusiastic and committed approach of their teachers are very good and this helps them to learn very well

Commentary

75. When students enter lessons, they quickly realise that learning about religious beliefs and practices is fun. Teachers use their considerable knowledge to plan and teach lessons at a very good pace. There is no chance of being uninvolved by sitting quietly. Teachers welcome the students with considerable enthusiasm. All are quickly engaged in chanting catchy jingles that are very cleverly designed to raise their self-esteem. The teachers make it very clear that they value every student's views when they answer the challenging questions that are very skilfully designed to make them think about key issues. ICT is extremely well used to develop interest. The language of religion is very carefully introduced and this helps students develop their oral skills very well. The quality of discussions in lessons on the walled city in Hong Kong and on the sanctity of life show the very good improvement in students' ability to explain their views. As a result, even though students enter the school with knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs that are below average, this vibrant teaching approach, helps all students to learn very well. Consequently, students of all abilities in Years 7 to 9 achieve well. By the end of Year 9, the vast majority have a good knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs of the major world faiths. They are confident about expressing ideas and listen well to the views of others.
76. The skilful use of humour and the constant use of praise are very evident. As the students get older, their skills develop because they are completely drawn in by the excellent, caring approach that values their contributions and helps them develop ideas to the full. Spiritual moments of awe and wonder, such as those when they think about their own talents, help students explore the meaning of life very maturely, showing a good development in their thinking and debating skills. This is the main reason why GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and those of 2004 were similarly high. The standard of students' work in Years 10 and 11 at present is above average. Tasks are well suited to build on what students know and understand, helping the small number of students taking the GCSE to achieve very well. The specific work aimed at developing students' extended writing skills is very well structured and this too has led to the very good results. Those students who are gifted are pushed to develop their skills to a high level. Non-examination students in Years 10 and 11 achieve well.
77. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. Marking generally helps students to gain a good idea of their progress. Very good use is made of self-review in Years 10 and 11. This is helping to show students what they know and understand and how they can improve their work. However, the quality of marking varies. There is a lack of rigorous checking. A small but significant number of Year 7 to 9 students are not fully aware of how they can improve their work.
78. The leadership and management are very good. Schemes of work are very thorough and in line with the requirements of the Sandwell Agreed syllabus. The curriculum gives all students very good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The very innovative teaching approaches, based on students' learning styles, have led to very positive student response to religious education, and the number of candidates entering the GCSE course is rising. The use of ICT in lessons is an excellent development that is having a marked impact on students' achievement. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design technology

Provision in design technology is good.

Main strengths

- Some very good teaching stimulates students' interest and is raising standards
- Good assessment procedures have been established
- Students respond positively to teachers' high expectations of behaviour

Commentary

79. In 2003, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were below average. They nevertheless show an improving trend since the last inspection that has continued in 2004. GCSE results were also below average in 2003. Results in 2004 were similar, as were standards seen during the inspection. Given students low starting point, however, this represents good achievement.
80. Good assessment procedures have been introduced that are linked to *National Curriculum* levels and have a significant element of student self-assessment. This is good as it means that students are aware of what they need to do to improve. These assessment procedures are not yet raising standards, however, because they are not yet used consistently.
81. Teaching and learning are good. In the most effective lessons, teachers explain clearly to students what they expect them to learn. Teachers have good technical knowledge of their subject and use a range of teaching styles to ensure that students remain engaged and motivated and that lessons are challenging. In a design lesson, for example, the teacher explained the aims of the lesson, students discussed the work of a famous designer, worked in pairs to relate it to their own work, provided a critical analysis of an example design and then incorporated the different styles into their own design of a picture frame. This variety of approaches stimulated enthusiasm and led to very good learning.
82. The teachers have developed good working relationships with the students. This means that there is a pleasant atmosphere in the lessons and that the classrooms are pleasant places in which to learn. The students are aware of the high expectations of the teachers; they take an interest in the subject and behave well.
83. The focus of the department is clearly on raising standards. The teachers work well as a team and share expectations. This is good as it helps students transfer their learning across the different areas. For instance, they associate the process of designing a picture frame in resistant materials with designing a meal in food technology. This corporate identity is helping to raise standards of achievement. The leadership and management of technology are good and this has resulted in good improvement since the time of the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well matched to the needs of the students and provides good opportunities to explore and develop creative ideas
- Students who go onto study the subject at GCSE achieve well
- There is not enough access to ICT
- Research and sketchbooks are not evaluated sufficiently

Commentary

84. End of Year 9 teacher assessments in 2003 indicated that students were below average. In 2004, Year 9 results declined. GCSE results were above average in 2003 but declined in 2004. This decline in results can be attributed to staffing difficulties. Girls did better than usual in GCSE examinations in 2003. Boys did less well than usual. More students than usual followed the GCSE course and the

subject was the best performing in the school in 2003. Students join the school with varied experiences but their standards, overall, at the start of Year 7 are below average. The carefully planned curriculum makes up for any deficits in students' previous experiences and exposes them to interesting and imaginative units that develop their creativity and skills. Students respond well to this teaching in Year 7 and make good progress in gaining understanding of colour theory, applying different media, and printing. By Year 9, students have achieved satisfactorily, although standards are currently still below average. Students with special educational needs do well when additional support is available.

85. In Years 10 and 11, students achieve well and standards of practical work are above average because of the good foundation course and good teaching in these years. Year 10 students produce creative ideas combining media to form compositions that build into exciting and original new works of three-dimensional art. In Year 11, the final practical outcomes are very well finished and show a good mix of inspiration drawn from contemporary artists. In some cases, however, students' high rates of absence have left gaps in their coursework that are likely to adversely affect their GCSE grades.
86. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Throughout the college, the teaching is firmly rooted to the influences of traditional and contemporary artists. These combine to help students make new work based on interesting mixtures of cultural influences. Students, however, are not encouraged sufficiently to use their own diverse cultural backgrounds as resources for designing. Drawing and tonal skills are taught well because teachers are confident at demonstrating techniques. The contextual study of artists is done well with more able and gifted students in Years 10 and 11. All students benefit from good reinforcement of literacy in lessons and in the good studio displays. GCSE sketchbooks and background studies do not contain sufficient annotations of the students' evaluative thinking and reasons for their design decisions. Students do not as yet have the necessary access to ICT to enable them to research, make animations, and manipulate digital images.
87. Leadership and management are now good. The leadership has been disjointed since the last report due to staffing difficulties. The department has recently returned to a full complement of specialist teachers. The planning is good and is integrated into the very good assessment, monitoring, and target-setting system. The accommodation requires some updating. There are good opportunities for students to extend their interests and working after hours. Gifted and talented students benefit from special weekend courses. The department has vibrant and creative displays of students' work around the college. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Music

Provision in music is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is enabling students to achieve well
- Students are given good opportunities in lessons to develop their compositional skills, but the lack of available computers restricts students' learning, especially in Years 10 and 11
- Students enjoy their lessons and relationships are very good

Commentary

88. Results in music at GCSE in 2003 were above average but they fell in 2004. However, the numbers taking music as a GCSE course are small and national comparisons should be treated with caution. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were not fully completed in 2004 because of staffing difficulties, but in 2003 they were below national expectations. From observations of lessons, the musical attainment of students as they enter the school is well below average. Standards seen in the inspection at the end of Year 9 were below national expectations and at the end of Year 11 were average. This shows that students are achieving well as they progress through the school.

89. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers display very good subject knowledge and use good questioning skills to develop students' knowledge and understanding. Each briskly paced lesson consists of different activities that stimulate and motivate students in their learning. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, students listened to extracts of film music, and then watched the opening credits of a film, before discussing and identifying the musical features which had been used effectively. Clear planning and high expectations are evident across the department and very good use is made of the available resources to meet the needs of all students. In some lessons, however, there is a tendency for the teacher to intervene too early in question and answer sessions, thereby not encouraging the students to think for themselves and develop their language skills. Very good relationships exist between staff and students, and, together with effective use of praise and encouragement, create a good learning environment. Many of the practical tasks are deliberately structured so that work is suitably challenging for students of different abilities. The last section of each lesson is used to assess what the students have learned, and this is, in turn, used to plan future lessons.
90. The leadership and management of music are currently satisfactory. The new team are enthusiastic and effective, and share a clear vision for the future direction of the department and for raising standards. The good departmental development plan recognises the professional development needs required by the team, and the target to extend the extracurricular and enrichment opportunities provided for the students. Sound assessment procedures and target-setting have recently been introduced in Years 7, 8 and 9, and these students were clear about the levels they are achieving in their work. However, Year 10 and 11 students were not as clear about how well they were doing. As these new assessment procedures are further developed, staff will be enabled to track students' progress more rigorously. Marking of students' work is regular and thorough and gives helpful comments on how students can improve. The scheme of work is currently being rewritten. Nine peripatetic staff support the school well and give students opportunities to learn a range of musical instruments.
91. Resources and accommodation for music are satisfactory, but one music room is cramped without enough desks for all students to sit comfortably and write. With larger student numbers, this impacts on achievement. Not enough opportunity is given for students to use computers to develop their compositional techniques and this restricts their learning, being a disadvantage particularly for their GCSE work. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Whilst standards dropped, they are now steadily recovering, assessment is in place and efforts have been made to improve the standard of singing, although much of this is extracurricular.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is very good.

Main strengths

- Students make very good progress as a result of very good teaching
- Students are given frequent opportunities to judge their own performance and improve upon it
- The school has not allowed shortcomings in the facilities and grounds to adversely affect students' achievement

Commentary

92. In 2003, teacher assessment of Year 9 students showed that their attainment was average. Assessments were lower in 2004. GCSE results in 2003 were below average but rose in 2004. There has been an improving trend in results over the last four years. The newly introduced GCSE dance course has been very successful with all students achieving at least a C grade. From lessons observed, standards in Year 9 are average for boys and girls. Students make very good progress in lessons and achieve very well. They evaluate video evidence of their own performance in gymnastics so that they can improve. In volleyball lessons, students develop the skills of *setting and spiking* (attacking play) through an appropriate series of large group activities that is then applied with enthusiasm to a full game.
93. By Year 11, standards are average for girls and boys. Achievement is very good. In Year 10, students of low ability show a big improvement in trampoline skills and are able to assess their own levels of performance. They are also clear as to what they must do to move onto a higher level. In dance

lessons, students effectively analyse performances from video evidence. More able dancers work independently to improve their performance whilst teachers make planned provision for less confident students.

94. Teaching and learning are very good. All teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lesson objectives are clearly set out and are reviewed at the end to see what has been achieved. Lessons have pace and are well planned. Teachers often work in teams to provide extra support and coaching. Students are able to improve through evaluation of their performance and skills, although they do not currently have routine access to computers in the subject to record and analyse performance data. Students are aware of their level of ability in all activities and they know what they need to do to improve, although there is no rewards system to celebrate their very good achievements. The attitude of students and their behaviour is very good.
95. Leadership and management are very good. Despite the lack of space and poor quality outdoor facilities, the department has managed to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The new GCSE dance course is very successful and older students make use of local facilities that cannot be provided by the college's resources. A wide range of extracurricular activities is provided for all students. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Examination results have risen steadily and the range of experiences for all students has expanded.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

96. The focus of the inspection was manufacturing but a vocational course in business was also sampled. The work-related courses in **caring for children** and **construction**, taught at the local further education college, were visited but not inspected. The course in **leisure and tourism** was not sampled as, during the inspection, these students spent their lessons at Dudley Zoo. In the lesson seen, the **business** teaching was good and engaged students well in their studies. As a result, students made brisk progress with their learning. This is largely because the teacher had established a good rapport with the students and the lesson had clarity of purpose. Students are achieving well in a course that is matched to their needs. The link with the local further education college to deliver some vocational courses is good. The students benefit from the experience of working in a further education college environment and this is raising their aspirations for post-16 education.

Manufacturing

Provision in manufacturing is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Last year's change of course resulted in a huge drop in the pass rate
- Students enjoy the practical approaches and the relevance of the lessons to the real world
- The students have good teaching and resources that meet their needs well

Commentary

97. Four-fifths of students taking the course successfully passed in 2003. In 2004, students were entered for a different examination and only one in ten passed. The small number of students taking the course, coupled with the differing demands of the new examination, account for the wide fluctuations in the pass rate. Standards seen are in line with national expectations and demonstrate good achievement.
98. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and managed. There are good relationships between students and staff. Students are given well judged assistance from the teacher, teaching assistant and technician who meet their needs well through good individual support. The workshop environment in which the subject is delivered helps to inspire and motivate students. The students benefit from good technical facilities and resources including the use of ICT. Relating the lessons to the world of work has resulted in good achievement as students can see a connection with future careers. The student portfolios are well organised and focussed on the assessment criteria. The

lessons make a contribution to numeracy as students build the specification for their product after completing a statistical survey among their friends.

99. Notwithstanding the drop in results last year, the leadership and management of GNVQ manufacturing are good. The course is well structured to cater for the needs of the individual students and has developed well since the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is unsatisfactory.

Main weaknesses

- The school has not fully responded to the need to establish the subject as part of the *National Curriculum* and so students are not achieving well enough
- Teaching is not monitored to ensure effective learning
- Opportunities are missed to develop students' speaking skills

Commentary

100. Citizenship has been added to the *National Curriculum* since the last inspection so it was not reported on last time. There are no test results for this subject because teacher assessments have not been carried out for students at the end of Year 9 and no students follow a GCSE course in citizenship.
101. The programme for the subject, especially in Years 10 and 11, does not allow sufficient time to deal with citizenship topics in any detail or to revisit them in subsequent years to deepen students' learning. Curriculum planning provides no indication of what other subjects do to enable effective links to be made between them and citizenship. Students have few opportunities to build up their understanding of issues through extended writing. In Years 10 and 11, lessons are mainly devoted to careers education. Students' oral skills are undeveloped as insufficient use is made of opportunities for paired and group work. There are, however, some initiatives which develop the skills of participation and responsible action for the students concerned. These centre around the school council, the group of Year 11 peer mentors and the Year 10 girls who go into a primary school to teach the pupils about health and safety issues. There is no planning to involve larger numbers of students in similar worthwhile activities.
102. Almost all of the college's teaching staff are involved in teaching the subject for one period each week. Teachers do not have a handbook to support their teaching and not all are comfortable in teaching the subject. The quality of teaching varies considerably. In the lessons observed, students showed a reasonable appreciation of basic concepts of personal, social and health education, and answered individually in a sensible and often thoughtful manner. Lessons are teacher dominated as resources are limited to uninteresting worksheets that are not adapted to meet the different needs of all students. Questioning does not draw quieter students into discussion. Links between students' personal experiences and wider community issues are not effectively established. A few examples were seen where students considered issues, such as racism, from a different standpoint. Overall, however, students have too limited an awareness of citizenship concepts. Achievement is unsatisfactory.
103. Not enough attention has been paid to the statutory requirements for citizenship, which is now a *National Curriculum* subject. Monitoring is too informal and there is no system to co-ordinate and monitor teaching. Staff have received no training in the subject. Leadership and management of citizenship are, therefore, unsatisfactory.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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